

C. Who Controlled the Camp?

In searching for data on the internal administration in the camp, I was often surprised to hear the answer, "We had nothing like that!" Could it be? After all, the Germans would establish an internal administration (*Lagerverwaltung*) in every camp with clerks, card indexing management, etc. So why not in Apparatebau?

However, from what has been said before, it is known that, when the camp was established in June 1943, the Jews in the camp were represented by Bernard Kurland, whose duties included assigning prisoners to work (*Arbeitseinsatz*), conducting the censuses, presenting written reports on the status of prisoners at each census, liaising with the factory management and supervising the Jewish police (until its liquidation in July 1943) and internal services.

Following Kurland's death, his deputy, Dawid Zylberszac, took over his position, and two people were busy in his office - Maciej Krauze, who was responsible for managing the prisoner card system, and his assistant, Tadek Fisz.¹ Zylberszac, himself, is mentioned very little in the prisoners' testimonies. He behaved politely, was not accused of corruption, and was well-liked by the people.

As for the roles of the various functionaries, they were those who supervised the distribution of food supplies and the kitchen during lunchtime.

As for the foremen (*Vorarbeiter*), it is difficult to define their role precisely. Some witnesses claim that there were no foremen at all and that, after the liquidation of the police, the camp was guarded by **Jewish firefighters**, who were selected by the Germans.² It is not clear when they were selected, and what their number was. They wore blue overalls and hats. Almost every day, they conducted firefighting exercises, both in the camp and in industrial buildings. Their commander was Adam Rotaub, a pre-war firefighter instructor. Among the firefighters were also several foremen, such as Kadzidło, Pieprz and Gajda, who were considered underworld figures.³

It seems that one thing was beyond doubt - the firefighters guarded the camp, and the supervisors were in the factory, where their official role was to supervise the group of workers working in that department.

There were also departments without supervisors. They came to the position in one of two ways:

1. There were veteran workers, who had acquired knowledge in production matters and were appointed by the German manager to oversee that department.
2. They came to the position through unsanctioned means and became intermediaries between the foremen and the workers in all kinds of dubious "businesses".

¹ *Churban Czenstochow*, p. 257

² Testimony of Benjamin Zweig, YVA, 0-33/2826; oral testimony of Ajzyk Berkensztadt.

³ Testimony of Pola Zygiel, YVA, 0.3/6838

There are extreme opinions about the behaviour and attitude of the overseers towards the prisoners. According to Jurek Ajnhorn and Benjamin Orenstein, barring some exceptions, they treated them decently. Sara Edelist takes a more balanced position - they behaved differently, but for the most part they did not gain sympathy. Kromołowski claims that, although there were few of them, when they became the "aristocracy" of the camp, they were unbearable.

The source of their money was the ransom, which they received from the prisoners in exchange for being released from a *Meister's* beatings. They were illiterate, came from the margins of society and found the opportunity of a lifetime in the camp.

When the "boss" had a birthday or a holiday, they would collect "donations" from members of their group in order to buy a gift for the director.⁴

To this description, Rina Sztul adds a very extreme conclusion:

"The slave trade reached its peak of development in the camp - the rich went to light work and the poor were sent to the most difficult departments. And the overseers arranged this in cooperation with the German managers because, for them, it was a side income and actually a main source of income."⁵

Henia Lustiger, once again, reveals a sense of reality - there were overseers, who took bribes and urged people to work faster at the factory, but in general they had to take into account the public opinion of the prisoners.⁶

The most serious problem was the registration for transport - department managers were occasionally ordered to register "superfluous" people and they assigned the terrible task to the overseers. Chaim Babiacki testifies,

"I know that there were whole wars to be not included in the list. I also know that it was a source of income for the Jewish foremen, as everywhere else".

It was not known where the "superfluous" were sent. They only knew that they would not return.

Due to the multitude of versions, the Kapo issue is not completely clear. Despite the same name, there was no connection between the Kapos, who were the terrorizers of the concentration camps, and the stewards of Apparatebau. Some witnesses confuse them with the overseers.

It seems that Frida Herszlikowicz's explanation is the most logical:

⁴ Kromołowski, *Wspomnienia*, p. 746-748

⁵ Testimony of Rina Sztul, YVA, M-49/E/1126

⁶ Lustiger, *Pamiętnik*, ch. 20, p. 5

Following the absorption of hundreds of Jews from the “Small Ghetto”, the commander of the *Werkschutz* wanted to make the counting easier and ordered the establishment of permanent groups of thirty people with a responsible steward at the head. The steward had to know the members of his group to prevent substitution, illegal joining of others and escape. In the latter case, he would pay with his head. Every morning, at the headcount, each steward would give the number of his men and present medical certificates of the sick.

Orenstein (and also Liber Brener) calls these supervisors “Kapos” and adds that their duties also included providing accommodation, escorting the group to the bathhouse, collecting and delivering laundry and helping with the distribution of meals. It should be noted that all the “prominent ones”, of all ranks, did not have external signs of authority, such as armbands, hats or batons.

So, who finally ruled the camp?

The external power was, of course, in the hands of the commander of the *Werkschutz* and his savages. But inside, who did they turn to in order to arrange easier work, reunite families, or find a Polish mediator? In short, who would they turn to if urgent help was needed on a personal level?

The answer to this question can be found in Kromołowski’s adventurous journey in search of a new job. He lost his previous one due to illness. This time, he was helped by the “favour” of old acquaintances and the intervention of Dawid Zylberszac himself. Alfred was assigned to the “cleaning group”, which was controlled by three overseers - Szymon Gostyński, Kaufman, and Tadek Fis. He awarded all three of them a “certificate of integrity” - they were very modest in their demands and treated their workers fairly.⁷

It seems, therefore, that the general picture that emerges from the descriptions, so far, is still very far from the definition of “the hot springs of HASAG”.

The average prisoner is portrayed as a miserable and humiliated creature, suffering from hunger and cold. Although his hope has not died, he is now helpless in the face of persecutors of all kinds.

It is no wonder that the poet, Benjamin Orenstein, describes him this way*:

⁷ Kromołowski, *Wspomnienia*, p. 743

* [TN: *The poem appears twice here: once in the original Yiddish and the second time translated to modern Hebrew. We hereby present both versions, with their differences.*]

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HASAG

(poem)

*You wear clogs, not boots – you are no Moreinu;
A cabbage soup, a chunk of bread – that is enough, dayeinu.
Nothing good to enjoy;
They've locked me up in HASAG.
From hunger, suffering and terrible pain –
What can already become of a person?
They've burnt Dad and Mum –
I ask, WHY? TILL WHEN?
A HASAG Jew has no way out;
Like a dog, he wears a number on his shoulder.
He is treated just like an animal;
But he still fights for a new world.*

HASAG

(poem)

*You wear clogs and not boots, as a human should;
Cabbage soup and a crust of bread is more than enough.
One cannot enjoy a hint of goodness.
In HASAG they caged me behind the fences.
Suffering extreme hunger,
And what can a person already be?
Dad and Mum were burnt alive,
I ask why, what are they guilty of?
A Jew in HASAG has no hope in his heart.
Like a dog he carries a number on his back.
He is being treated like an actual animal,
But he is willing to fight – for a new world.⁸*

(Translation to Hebrew: Ruth Stern)

⁸ Churban Czenstochow, p. 216