

## B. In the “Idlers” Quarters

Were there idlers in the “Apparatebau”? No, and no.

Every Jew bought the right to exist in exchange for his work and, in principle, this rule encompassed everyone. But those, who had the opportunity, fled the factory.

Among the “idlers,” groups or individuals, several types could be distinguished.

In the first group, there were those who took advantage of “*protekcja*” [viz. preferential treatment] and, despite their formal “job”, actually did nothing. Among them were a few “cousins”<sup>1</sup> of prominent people. They were the ones Miryam Zalberg was referring to in her description of a *Rekalibrierung* warehouse, where about thirty “idlers and parasites” hung about.<sup>2</sup>

The second group included all those who exploited the label of “work” to advance their own interests, for example, the workers of the main warehouse (*Zentral Magazin*). About thirty Jews worked here, the youngest of whom was Symcha Moneta. When trucks, carrying the victims’ clothes, arrived at the warehouse, they constituted a great temptation, and the fellows had duplicated the keys.

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<sup>1</sup> “Kuzyn”, “Kuzynka” (Polish for cousin); this is how unmarried couples were called in labour camps.

<sup>2</sup> Salsberg, *Moje przeżycia*, IV, pp. 82, 104



The plumbers also learned to take advantage of opportunities. Once, while installing pipes, they accidentally discovered a huge warehouse full of old clothes. Of course, the clothes were taken straight to Polish middlemen. The extra income strengthened the group's spirit. Chaim Babiacki confesses:

“We had a social gathering in the warehouse. We could meet and talk after work hours. Once we found a hidden access to a potato warehouse. Steaming a bucket of potatoes took ten minutes. It was excellent food!”

Among the other workplaces, which benefited their workers, was the kitchen, where German, Polish and few Jewish women with “*protekcja*” worked. Seven workers were employed in the large vegetable garden, including the Dziubas sisters – Malka and Sonia. The gardener was an old Pole, Madaj, and the head overseer was Pirkosz.

The Poles treated them fairly and there was a chance to “win” a few vegetables. When winter began, the girls received warm clothes from the warehouse.<sup>3</sup> Taking care of livestock was also considered a sought-after job. One Jew, together with his wife, managed to sneak their three children into the camp. He built several chicken coops in one corner of the factory yard, where all his children were busy.<sup>4</sup>

As mentioned, a similar poultry farm, which belonged to several *Meisters*, was run by Zygmunt Rozenblat. Sometimes, he would meet with his uncle, Leon Zylbersztajn, and his aunt, who worked in the warehouses on ul. Garibaldię, where his uncle supervised a group of craftsmen.

Several times, his aunt managed to bribe one of the *Werkschutz*, who brought Zygmunt from HASAG to the warehouse, and she made sure to provide him with food and money.<sup>5</sup>

Actually, the Garibaldię workers were the third group of “idlers”, among whom were several employees of the “White House” - the shoemaker Dorfgang, the furrier Brener, the men's tailor Katz, the two electricians Beigelman and Szczupak, and others. The affairs of the office were handled by Zalman Bromberg and his wife.<sup>6</sup>

Pinkus Ajnhorn, the artist in men's tailoring, was transferred, with his wife and young son Romak, to Mrs Mosiwick's [?] workshop. The eldest son, Jurek, landed in the camp and was assigned to the “machine building” department. It was not long before the overseer, Heniek Hofman, suggested to him to move to the construction department: “This is work outside and our Polish overseer, Adam Wawrzyniak, is a good man”. Truthfully, there was nothing to do here either. That is how Jurek was added to the “gang of unemployed”.

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<sup>3</sup> Malka Gliksberg, oral testimony.

<sup>4</sup> Testimony of Aleksander Galster, YVA, 0.3/7965.

<sup>5</sup> Oral testimony of Zygmund Rolat.

<sup>6</sup> Testimony of Zalman Bromberg, YVA, 0-33/7150.

Once, an unknown worker came there and secretly handed him a parcel saying, "This is from your father". Inside was a small loaf of white bread. Jurek was happy - a sign of life from his parents! And, for three days, he ate the bread with reverence.

The Germans well knew how to exploit modern slaves.

*Meister* Wirbatz brought his wife and daughter from Germany and they all lived in their house in the "Colony". The woman opened a sewing salon in the attic of her house. When Wirbatz learned that the well-known seamstress Mrs Schnitzer had arrived in the camp from the "White House", he used his connections and Mrs Schnitzer, together with her two daughters, moved into the attic of his house. The arrangement was perfect - the mother and the youngest daughter sewed day and night, and Miryam, twelve, tidied up the entire house. The father stayed to live in the camp. Every day, one member of the family would go to the camp at noon, accompanied by the *Werkschutz*, and bring soup, bread, and porridge for the whole group.

And Miryam Rotfeld *née* Sznycer adds:

"I cannot recall how long we were there. Wirbatz was known for his cruelty. He beat the Jews at work, but he took care of us, because, thanks to us, his wife and daughter could live here in peace and wealth. But, in the end, the *Gestapo* arrived and threw our whole family back into the camp."<sup>7</sup>

If we are talking about individual "idlers", it is difficult to ignore the extraordinary figure of Alfred Kromołowski.

As mentioned, he was accepted into the "cleaning company", whose job it was to maintain cleanliness in the camp yard, in the latrines and in the bathing huts. It was a safe and not difficult job, with nearly twenty people working there. When Alfred was ordered to paint, on each bunk, its serial number, he was faced with experiences from the "dormitories" of the residents:

"I walked around the men's and women's barracks, climbed my little ladder and saw the sad sight of the tragic daily existence of the slaves of HASAG.

"Sometimes, I saw unfortunates who, after being beaten, healed themselves with cold compresses, and sick people lay there, who were afraid to go to the hospital. I saw pregnant women, who hid in bunks for the fear of selection. There were also cases of secret births.

"On these bunks, the prisoners had clandestine sexual relations. It often happened that, on the top bunk, a pair of lovers lay, who were so absorbed in their experience, that they did not pay any attention to their surroundings. Yes, even in the terrible conditions of slave existence, nature demanded its share."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Rotfeld, YVA, 0-33/6844.

<sup>8</sup> Kromołowski, *Wspomnienia*, pp. 745, 762

As mentioned, all the “idlers”, who appear in these descriptions, have one thing in common - avoiding hard labour in the factory in every possible way. “Let the fools work.” And there were, among them, those who tried to enjoy life in another way, why not?