

## C. Old Games and New Players

Towards the summer of 1944, a calm was felt in the camp and there were people who wanted to take advantage of it to entertain themselves and others. Sometimes the HASAG administration went along with the prisoners and agreed to strange ideas. In the Skarżysko camp, in the formidable Werk C, the camp commander decided to set up a dance floor.<sup>1</sup>

In the Apparatebau camp, the initiative came from below and from a different direction - it was from a group of young men, football fans, among them being Tadek Zilberszac, Chaim Birenholz and others. After receiving permission from the *Werkschutz* commander, several squads were established, according to workplaces (infantry, farm, transport, *Rekalibrierung*, etc.). The square on the camp grounds was designated as the playing field. The players were sewn appropriate uniforms and the shoemakers fitted them with shoes. Of course, referees were also chosen – actually ones with experience.

One day in April 1944, the first competition took place, between the “Transportation” and “Machinery Production” teams. A large crowd gathered on the field. Jurek Ajnhorn was also in the front row, after all his friends were playing on the “*Maschinenbau*” team! The weather is beautiful and the sun is warming. Although the goals are too small and the field is uncomfortable, that does not bother anyone - the audience is enthusiastic and cheers on the players with shouts. Those present forget where they are. Jurek is already becoming hoarse from shouting, but it turns out that it helped. “His” team won! What a feeling! Just like before the War!<sup>2</sup>

Kromołowski saw the athletes from a different perspective:

“Apparently, in order to calm suspicions about the future, football matches were held - the teams of local prominent people, almost exclusively the wardens and the “fire brigade”, played against each other.

“It was truly an unusual sight - against the background of poverty and misery of barefoot prisoners dressed in rags, several fat men played football.

“But, after a while, the *Werkschutz* banned gatherings in the camp square and thus the illusion of freedom faded.”

But football could not satisfy the prisoner’s spiritual needs. Sometimes, he would try to find solace in prayer.

A group of ultra-Orthodox Jews was organised in the camp, led by Nojeh Edelist and Jechiel Landau. Several pairs of *tefillin* were found, and the ultra-Orthodox would find a free moment at work to put them on and pray.

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<sup>1</sup> Testimony of Maria Lewinger, YVA, 03/18023.

<sup>2</sup> Einhorn, *Wybrany aby żyć*, p. 153

And there were also those who, through the intercession of the overseers, paid the *Meister* in exchange for release from work on *Shabbes* and holidays. After work, they would gather in the barrack to discuss Torah matters.

A miracle also happened.

Nojeh Edelist managed to sneak a small Torah scroll into the camp. As luck would have it, right during the Torah reading, Stieglitz entered the barrack and confiscated the scroll. But, as is well known, Stieglitz could be bribed and, in exchange for a pair of shoes, he returned the scroll.<sup>3</sup>

The other twenty-two tried to organise a *minyán* [Heb., prayer quorum] in the “Circus” or in one of the barracks. Before the terrible days of 1943, a delegation of ultra-Orthodox Jews turned to the director Lütt with a request to allow them to pray in a *minyán*, but Lütt refused.

There was a problem with dietary laws - the majority of the people ate what was given, but the ultra-Orthodox avoided eating soup for fear of it not being kosher. Mutual aid, which will be discussed later, saved them from dying of hunger. They tried to find an expression for the Jewish holidays. Back in Chanukah 1943, someone brave was found, who secretly whispered to Naomi Zohar, “Come and see how to light a Hanukkah candle”.

Ruben Munowicz says:

“Towards Peisach, people took risks, stole flour from the kitchen and baked matzah on heating stoves, in order to give each person a piece of matzah upon which to make the blessing.”

Rut Zajdman (and she was not the only one) replaced the bread portions with beans, which she cooked on a radiator for the seven days of the holiday.

But despair and prayer alone could not give the prisoner the strength to fight for his existence. He longed for a word of hope and a spark of humour, which would somewhat dispel the everyday gloom. Hence the popularity of the shows and concerts that took place at that time.<sup>4</sup>

The new spirit was brought by the artists, who came from Łódź, with Dawid Zysman at the head. With their arrival, **a new phase in cultural activity began in the camp**. Dawid Zysman, a poet and director, planned to establish a drama club, but the idea was not initially received with sympathy.

Nevertheless, the club was established. Local singers and actors also gathered around Zysman - Szaje Borensztajn, Zelig Jakubowicz, Zalman Żółtowski, Tiger, Neumiller and others.

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<sup>3</sup> Nojeh Edelist, “Ultra-Orthodox Judaism in the Holocaust”, *Sefer Częstochowa*, p. 129.

<sup>4</sup> Testimonies from YVA: Ruben Waingarten, 1557/M-49/E; Motl Berkowicz, 0-17/20.

Thanks to the former actors of the “Łódźer Bande” (a famous pre-war satirical troupe operating in Łódź), the character of the performances changed. They became more diverse and humorous and satirical pieces were added.

Their first performance was in an electrical technician’s hut. The performance was entitled “*Nisht Gezorgt*” (“Don’t Worry”) and included songs, monologues and sketches.

Among other items, Szaje Borensztajn delivered the monologue “The Obituary after *Meister Herr*”, who had committed suicide at the time. The sketch “*A Bild in Lager*” (“A Picture from the Camp”) was presented. Zelig Jakubowicz recited the poem “Revenge” written by Dawid Zysman:

*Already long months since we have seen any world,  
Both summer and winter only in the camp tent.  
All sorts of events happen outside;  
After our gloomy day comes the cruel night.  
Like robots, robbed of life and soul,  
We stand at our work and think of revenge.  
May the day of liberation come already for us,  
To take REVENGE, REVENGE, REVENGE!!!*<sup>5</sup>

(Excerpt, [Hebrew] translation: F. Karai)

[TN: We have rendered this poem as previously translated to English in our version of “*Churban Czenstochow*”.]

The band ended the show with a song by Mordechaj Gebirtig: “*S’brent, Briderlech, s’brent*” [It’s Burning, Brothers, It’s Burning]<sup>6</sup>. Not everyone could see and enjoy the concerts, because the organisers charged an entrance fee.<sup>7</sup>

But the popular songs spread quickly and often one prisoner or another would hum the beloved chorus to himself: “*Es vet kimen noch a mul, in frei vet zain Yisrul!*” [Yid., A time is yet to come, when (the people of) Israel will be free].

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<sup>5</sup> *Churban Czenstochow*, p. 212

<sup>6</sup> There, P.207.

<sup>7</sup> Sara Edelist, YVA, 0-33/6848.

It seems that quite a bit of competition developed amongst the artists.

Hints of this can be found with Roma Nadelberg, who had a regular audience of fans in hut No. 4, her hut. Here is one of her choruses (to the tune of the popular *schlager* "First Love Letter"), in which she announces that neither the actors from Łódź nor the well-known singer Oberman will perform at her barrack:

Barak numer cztery to królestwo me,  
Gdzie prócz mnie tu nie śpiewa nikt,  
Ani łódzka banda – ni Oberman, ten bas  
Bo dziś w tym baraku, z kolei trzeci raz  
Oklaski zbiorę właśnie ja  
Maleńka Roma Hasagowa,  
Tak beztrosko śpiewam i uśmiech wam swój ślę!

*Barrack number four is my kingdom,  
Where no one sings here but me,  
Neither the "Łódźer Bande" – nor Oberman, that bass;  
Because today in this barrack, for the third time,  
I will receive the applause.  
Little Roma Hasagowa,  
So carefree I sing and send you my smile!<sup>8</sup>*

(Translation [to Hebrew]: F. Karai)

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<sup>8</sup> YVA, 0.76/155, p.48.