

B. The Disintegration Continues

“The Red Army was advancing. Despite the intensification of terror and the severing of contact with the outside world, news would reach us in some way. The planes above our heads gave us hope. We saw that the Germans were struck with fear. But we did not know what to do.”¹

Meanwhile, work in the factory still continued, as did also the transport of prisoners. In each and every department, the *Meisters* and overseers made lists of who would go and who would stay.

The workshops were working feverishly. The various managers wanted to take advantage of the craftsmen’s work until the last minute, asking when the suits, shoes, coats and other things they had ordered would be ready.

The managers had already started packing long before. They were taking everything. They had accumulated, especially among the veterans, quite a bit of property. Why leave the furniture, pictures, carpets, curtains and utensils, all of which were of pure Jewish origin, to “those damned Poles”?

For each *Meister* large crates were prepared in the carpentry shop. Every now and then, a few prisoners were taken to help with packing and loading. Did this hurt production? Who cared about production then?



HASAG – A notorious labour camp and weapons factory in Częstochowa.

¹ Testimony of Mordche Sliedzyk, YVA, 0.3/1135.

Sure enough, production was of great interest to the prisoners, because only those who worked, received food. The others did not receive any.

The supply situation worsened day by day. Trade with the Poles was greatly reduced, because they were afraid to bring supplies due to the tightening of controls at the factory gates. Of course, prices rose accordingly. A loaf of bread cost fifty to sixty złoty, and who had money? The underground's financial assistance ceased, and only in cases of emergency did the needy receive something from the excess money. The underground kitchen stopped operating. Communication with the other HASAG camps was almost severed.

There were days when the camp's kitchen did not operate, due to the sirens, and thousands of prisoners were left without a serving of soup. And if they did receive it, they ate it while working, because the lunch break had been cancelled at the factory. There were those who escaped from the transport and found themselves a hiding place on the factory grounds, but they did not receive food rations. For several days, Bela Sandler and Rut Sztern were also left without food and were saved by Sara Besserglik, who gave them a large loaf of bread.

If the situation was difficult for the Jews of Częstochowa, it was ten times as difficult for those from other cities, who lacked "connections". Among the Jews of Kraków, there were also those who were starving for bread. Maryla Liberman recounts:

"Three weeks before the liberation, my mother and I were fired from work and, as an unproductive element, we did not receive food rations. The hunger was terrible and the people were swelling. We were saved by my husband, who worked until the last minute and shared the food with us. Our father was no longer with us. He was registered by our overseer, Rosie Krantz, for transport to Buchenwald."

The hunger intensified. The soup became thinner and the side-dishes were cancelled. The winter hit hard, because there was a lack of warm clothes and there was nothing with which to light the ovens. The number of sick people increased, and more and more workers appeared to be in a near death state of being.

Until people's patience ran out. And Maryla Liberman continues:

"It was already January. We stood for hours at the rollcall, hungry and frozen. Suddenly, a group of men stepped out of line and stormed the *Verwaltung* (food warehouse). My friends and I didn't even try to get close to the warehouse. Our friend Felek Zellner returned with a loaf of bread. So, we all sat down in the corner and Felek handed the bread to my mother, asking her to divide it among us all. There were seven of us altogether. But my mother didn't want to divide the bread, because Felek had fought for it for his family, but Felek insisted that 'the bread was divided into seven slices and everyone ate.'"

The friendship between those young people from Kraków helped them overcome hunger and hardship, and they tried to maintain their morale. Friends and acquaintances – Irena Bruner, Busiek Waksman, and others – would occasionally meet in the evenings, on Maryla's bunk.

[245]

“We sang everyone’s favourite hits, recited poems, and Busiek composed satirical choruses such as: ‘They can kiss our.... And even then, we won’t give in!’ (*W dupie ich tak się nie damy*). But we also attempted to maintain a certain intellectual level and had debates on various topics.”²

At one of the meetings, Irena Bruner said that several Jews had arrived from Płaszów and, among them, the husband of her friend Marysia Wilenko. They were brought by a SS man who, in return, asked these Jews to give him a letter attesting to his decent treatment of the prisoners and the help he had provided them.³ In the listeners’ opinion, this was proof, that the Germans were aware of the coming end.

² Maryla Liberman, YVA, 0-33/7184.

³ Irena Bruner, YVA, 0-33/1656.