

# Introduction

The Association of the Częstochowa Region Descendants and Next Generation in Israel (formerly the Częstochowa and Vicinity Organisation in Israel) is publishing the third book on the Jews of Częstochowa and the destruction of this magnificent community. The first book, *Sefer Częstochowa*, appeared in 1967 in two volumes, and was edited by the Book Committee and Editorial Committee. In 2000, the organisation published a second book, *History of the Jews of Częstochowa*, written by historian Willa Auerbach.

The Germans concentrated the remains of our city's Jews in four "HASAG" (Hugo Schneider A.G.) labour camps in Częstochowa, as a final step in the extermination of the community, after they had liquidated the "Big Ghetto" and the "Small Ghetto".

The largest of the four camps was the "HASAG-Apparatebau" camp, also known as HASAG-Pelcery, the subject of this book.

Dr. Felicja Karay is a historian specialising in the study of the HASAG camps. This time, she is presenting a book in which she immortalises the history of the HASAG-Apparatebau camp, the suffering and miserable lives of its prisoners.

The importance of the book is twofold:

Historical research on the episode of the massacre of Jewish Czeŝtochowa - in the history of the HASAG-Apparatebau camp, it is especially important to indicate the chapters describing the last period of its existence, in which the HASAG-Apparatebau became a concentration camp subject to the brutal rule of the SS.

Another important reason to publish the book is to commemorate and raise an eternal monument to the last Jews in Czeŝtochowa, who remained after the *akcje* and the liquidation of the "Small Ghetto" and who were saved from death in the Holocaust thanks to the existence of the camp (and the other HASAG camps).

Today, no trace or sign of the camp remain. Except for the people who were in the camp and their relatives, no one knows of its existence.

The current population of Czeŝtochowa knows nothing about the existence of the camp or the other HASAG camps in the city. There is no permission to enter the factory where the camp was located, and the factory owners jealously guard the "privacy" of the camp site.

It is true that, thanks to the existence of the HASAG camp, some 5,000 Jews were saved. However, it should not be forgotten that the HASAG company was integrated into and part of the mechanism for solving the "Jewish problem". In addition to the destruction and plundering of Jewish property by the Germans, the HASAG management found another way to extort the handful of Jews, who remained alive (out of about 40,000 who lived in Czeŝtochowa during the time of the *akcje*).

These were the young and capable of hard work. The HASAG management came to the German authorities with a “brilliant” idea: most of the Jews had already been exterminated, Jewish property had already been plundered – so why not use the remaining refugees for a shameful exploitation in the production of weapons and ammunition for the German war machine and, at the same time, get rich from the cheap labour of the starving Jews?

Why should the HASAG company and its shareholders (the largest of which were the Dresdner Bank and Allgemeine Deutsche Credit-Anstalt) not both get rich? In addition, this would enable them to arrange jobs for “close associates”, in order to prevent them from being sent to the battlefield.

The camp’s inmates were overwhelmingly Częstochowa residents. However, there were also residents of nearby towns and other cities. Some of them had fled to Częstochowa even before the camp was established, in order to be among a large community of Jews. Some were brought to Częstochowa by the Germans, with the aim of being included in the transports to Treblinka. Those who survived the *akcje* were transferred to HASAG together with the Jews of Częstochowa and, during the camp’s existence, groups of Jews from other towns and camps were brought to it.

However, the “atmosphere” and behaviour in the camp were typical to the Jews of Częstochowa, as Dr Karay beautifully describes in her book. Fair relations prevailed amongst the prisoners. There were mutual aid and cultural activity. The *Vorarbeiter* [Ger., foremen] were not cruel either, and there were some among them who lightened the heavy burden laid upon the prisoners.

Our association, especially the former HASAG-Pelcery prisoners, are grateful to Dr Felicja Karay for her efforts in writing this book, which encompasses all aspects of life in the camp. Alongside the description of a miserable and hard life of slave labour and the fear of beatings and being sent to death, points of light and hope in life also shine forth.

While the reader will shed a tear reading this book, it will sometimes also make a smile appear.

**Arye Edelist z”l, (1924 – 2011),**

**Chairman,**

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