

## What is a Kapo?

To the cultural world, the term “kapo” was unknown. The expression does not appear in the lexicons of Brockhaus and Meyer<sup>1</sup>. Some say that “kapo” is an abbreviation of “concentration camp police”. In the Italian language, “*capo*” denotes a chief of police or person in charge, as well as a headman.

The Częstochowa Jews heard the term “kapo” for the first time on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1943, when the HASAG-Pelcery munitions factory’s political director, Lüth, barracked them there. He then gave a speech, during which he explained, “In the camp, there is a system of ‘kapos’, meaning that, at the head of each work group, will stand a person who will not work, but see to the rations and clothing of his group.”

In an entire array of ghettos, the term “kapo” had already been known for a long time. It was used in reference to the leaders of the groups or colonies [?], who led the labourers to their workplaces and were tasked with their supervision.

In the ghettos, and also in the Częstochowa HASAG and other labour camps, the *kapos* played no significant role. The true meaning of the word “kapo” only became clear in the concentration camps.

In the concentration camp, a *kapo* was a trusted agent of the SS and, in order, to ensure his own life and be given a little more food, he endeavoured to display more cruelty and carry out sadistic deeds. A *kapo*’s “work” consisted in beating and tormenting the labourers. Most of those recruited were of German descent, and they had been sent to the concentration camps on account of criminal offenses.

The criminal offenders were split up into two categories - who wore green “corners” (triangles) as marks, inscribed with BV or SV. Those, who wore green corners bearing the inscription “BV”, were career criminals who had engaged in thefts all their lives and had been sentenced many times by the courts to imprisonment.

Those, who wore the corners with the letters “SV”, were serious criminals - murderers and robbers. These dark and villainous individuals were the *kapos* – the unlimited rulers over the lives and deaths of the other inmates. For these *kapos*, robbery and murder were natural phenomena - part of the job in which they had engaged all their lives. In the women’s concentration camps, the *kapos* were women, and they played the same disgraceful role.

In special Jewish concentration camps, there were Jewish *kapos*, whose deeds and traits of character were not much different from those of the other [kapos]. The SS leaders in the concentration camps sought out the most suitable helpers to torture and murder their victims.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: Two major German-language encyclopaedias, which eventually merged in 1984.]

It is a proven fact that a son - a *kapo* - hanged his own father and mother in the Majdanek death camp near Lublin. Jewish society fights against the former *kapos* in general - and against the Jewish ones in particular. The first congress of the liberated Jews in the American Zone, which was held in Munich on 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> January 1946, resolved that *kapos* will not be permitted to hold any communal positions.

The convention of the partisans and frontline combatants' "Pachach"<sup>2</sup> movement, which took place in Leipheim on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> May 1946, in clause 9 of their political resolution, resolved the following: "We request the relevant bodies to clean the ranks and remove all the *kapos* from the communal life."

Along with the bankruptcy of National Socialism and fascism, the general Nazi criminals and their former servants have to disappear from the horizon.

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<sup>2</sup> [TN: Heb. abbreviation of "Partizanim, Chayalim, Chalutzim" (Partisans, Soldiers, Pioneers).]