

Life in HASAG-Pelcery and Its Organisational System

Once the “Small Ghetto” had been liquidated, Częstochowa was declared “*Judenrein*” [clean of Jews]. Jews were only there as prisoners (arrestees) in the four HASAG factories: Pelcery, Raków, Warta and Częstochowianka.

A few dozen Jews also remained in the “Enro” factory, a couple of dozen professional workmen on ul. Garibaldiego and those who were clearing out the “Small Ghetto”, as well as some of the Jewish policemen. A part of the Jewish police force, with their wives and children, as well as Bernard Kurland, were transferred to HASAG-Pelcery, when the “Small Ghetto” was liquidated.

Besides the general HASAG administration, there was a special internal Jewish management, which consisted of:

- 1) Labour Deployment, headed by Bernard Kurland, his deputy Zylberszac and the officials M. Krauze and Fisz,
- 2) the Jewish police,
- 3) the internal service,
- 4) the sanitary service, headed by the surgeon Dr Szperling,
- 5) the foremen, and
- 6) the *kapos*.

The Labour Deployment was the highest institution, to which all the [other] organs listed were subordinate. The Labour Deployment’s duties were to conduct the rollcalls, in the presence of the chief of the *Werkschutz* or one of his deputies, in order to present written reports of the rollcalls every day, to supervise all its subordinate organs and the contact with the HASAG directors.

Bernard Kurland represented the Labour Deployment and was always the one who spoke with the political director Lüth and *Werkschutz* chief Klemm.

The police, after the trumpet was blown, would drive everyone out to the rollcall, guarding that the groups stood in an orderly manner. They also resolved the internal conflicts between inmates. Each shift had two rollcalls every day, before and after work.

The internal service doled out the food rations and supervised the distribution of lunch in the kitchen.

Dr Szperling, who was in charge of the sanitary service, ran the hospital and the dispensary and supervised his subordinates, the barbershop, the bathing facility, the disinfection employees, and the hygiene in the barracks and the camp area.

The foremen supervised the work, and the *kapos* gave out the bread in their groups, served the lunches, led the groups to the baths, handed the laundry in for washing and saw to the beddings.

In the beginning, life in HASAG was very bad. The work was hard and the rations, for the entire day, consisted of 20 *deka* [200g] bread and a soup. They slept on concrete in unfinished halls and in the “*cyrk*” [circus?]. Afterwards, they were given wood wool¹ to put underneath themselves upon which to sleep.

The Jews began to sell, to the Polish workers, everything that they had on them in exchange for bread and other food products. The Polish workers, for the most part, were people of the underworld and they took advantage of the Jews’ lack of any right to make money. They paid next to nothing for the Jews’ possessions whereas, for bread, they took about six or seven times as much as it cost in town. (In the city, a loaf of black bread cost 12 złoty, and they took 80 złoty.)

Bernard Kurland found a means to alleviate the need and put an end to the outrageous speculation of the Poles in relation to the persecuted, enslaved Jews, who had been deprived of their rights. He convinced Director Lüth to open a canteen, where Jews could purchase bread. Director Lüth made good money from that. The result was that the price fell to 18 złoty for a two-kilo loaf of black bread. The significance of Bernard Kurland’s achievement regarding the bread was, for those times, of fantastic proportions. He gained everyone’s esteem and affection.

The factory was called the “HASAG-Apparatebau” [equipment construction]. Before the War, it had belonged to the French Pelcery company, and wool of the highest quality had been produced there. When the Germans occupied Poland, the HASAG firm turned the factory into a munitions enterprise. The working hours for the day-shift were from seven in the morning to seven in the evening, and the night-shift from seven in the evening to seven in the morning. There were two breaks - for breakfast at nine in the morning, which lasted fifteen minutes, and for lunch from twelve to one. The night-shift had the same breaks.

The factory had an entire array of departments. At first, they produced generators, which were ovens that were built into the motor-vehicles, replacing the petrol with a special type of wood². These generators were sent off to Italy. A short time afterwards, when several tens of thousands of ovens/generators had [already] been manufactured, the Italian firms cancelled their orders, because it turned out that the ovens rusted and were no good. After this department was liquidated, infantry bullets and *Panzerfäuste* [RPGs] were produced, and the old 20mm anti-aircraft shells were also reworked.

There were the following departments: recalibration, infantry, toolmaking, mechanical engineering, electro-technical and an entire array of others. In recalibration, the old, used shells were reworked, which were then sent off to Skarżysko to be filled with explosives.

The production process in the recalibration [department] was as follows. The shells were collected in large warehouses, from where they were taken to the large washing machines in the cleaning room. From the washing machines, the shells were put in *kwasy* ([Pol.,] acid) and,

¹ [TN: A mass of fine, soft wood shavings, typically used as a packing material.]

² [TN: A wood gas generator is a gasification unit which converts timber or charcoal into wood gas, a gas that can be used to power an internal combustion engine, among other things. In motor vehicles, the generator is mounted on the vehicle itself – on the back of a pickup truck, for instance.]

from the *kwas*, to *bębny* [Pol., drums] (these were moving washing machines, which rotate in a circle of 360 points [viz. degrees] and polish the shells). From the *bębny*, [they were taken] to be dried and then to the recalibrating machines, which formed the projectile and igniter. During this process, the shells were smeared with oil, so that they had to be washed and dried once again. After that, the shells were polished with machines and then checked and lacquered, after which they were checked once more. It was only then that the military department took over the production, where it was checked once again, packed into crates and stored in the warehouse.

The acids and lacquer were badly made wartime products, which caused the finished shells to start rusting after lying for some time in the warehouse. The military office, which received them, always sent back thousands of crates to be redone, which entailed going through the entire production process once again. This was a never-ending, back-and-forth cycle. The [German] foremen, on their part, ran about upset and embittered, while the [Jewish] workers, on the other hand, were glad, and hoped that, by the time production was improved and they did not rust, the War would already be over.

In the infantry department, there was an entire array of sections similar to the recalibration department, as well as a laboratory for explosive materials. There, the shells were manufactured from beginning to start and filled with explosive material. Here, too, the same phenomenon happened - railway carriages filled with scrap metal. And the military authorities, upon the receiving the end [product], often refused to accept the production because it was useless, and what they did accept was later sent back, because it had rusted.

The *Panzerfäuste*, regarding whose invention the German radio and press loudly clamoured and wrote, were assembled in the pressing department. After assembling them for several months, it turned out that the *Panzerfaust* was utterly useless. The entire department was liquidated and all the parts were sent to [HASAG] Central in Leipzig.

The toolmaking department manufactured different parts for the machines. The mechanical engineering department did not make any new machines - it only finished parts. The mechanical and electro-technical departments served the [factory's] own power station and carried out different installations. There was one central depot, and each department [also] had its own warehouse, office and metalworking shop.

There was an entire array of smaller workshops to serve the large enterprise, such as carpentry, tinsmithing, saddlery, repair of crates, smithing and others. The factory had a home economics department for its own necessities – for the directors: fields to work, vegetable gardens, horses, cows, different types of rabbits, hens and geese, pigs and other livestock. There were also the following workshops: tailoring, shoemaking, washroom, cap-making and others.

The factory's political directorship lay in the hands of Director Lüth and the political operations manager. Their apparatus consisted of the chief of the *Werkschutz*, Klemm, his deputy Stieglitz, and a large number of *Werkschutz* guards.

The factory's technical directorship lay in the hands of Dr Brechtschneider, followed by the operations manager, the superintendent, the head foreman and the foremen. Besides the German management, there were also Polish foremen. The Jews had Jewish foremen and *kapos*.

The leadership of the recalibrations department was made up of the following: Operations Manager – Eng. Franzke; Superintendent – Mathias; Head Foreman – Niziołek; foremen – Körner, Schultz and others, as well as two women known by the nicknames “Marchewka” and “Pietrucha”³. These were two German women, who supervised the women's hall. They were evil, heartless excrescences, who victimised and terrorised the female workers. Their countenances matched their nicknames.

The Polish foremen were Sobieraj, Czarny, Tadek and Irena. There was a large number of Jewish foremen - the head foreman was Józek Lisek and the foremen were Cudek Fajner, Mrs Tenenbaum, Józek Dawidowicz in the workshop, Heniek Hofman, Zygmunt and others.

There were countless *kapos*. Each group of thirty men or women had a - the men a man, and the women a woman. More than a thousand labourers worked in the recalibration department. In the group to which the writer of this lines belonged, the *kapo* was Pinek Rozental.

The Jewish foremen and *kapos*, with a few exceptions, treated the workers decently. The few exceptions can also be enumerated - the head foreman, Józek Lisek, by force, levied money from the Jews to buy gifts for the German foreman Willi Niziołek and, with that money, he purchased schnapps and drank and ate together with him. The foreman of the workshop, Józek Dawidowicz, who was known as “*Meshigener Józek*” [J. the Madman], was always hoarse from shouting, “*Robić, robić!*” (*Work, work!*). He later contracted typhus. When his condition was hopeless, he was taken away to the cemetery by the deputy of the *Werkschutz* chief to be shot. That was the reward which he received for urging on the Jews to work. Among the transport workers, the foremen Kadzidło and Milek Szperling stood out for their indelicacy.

³ [TN: Pol., “Carrot” and “Parsley”, respectively.]