

Selections

The word “selection” is derived from the Latin “*selecta*”. In the world of culture, the term is used in [reference to] the scholastic system. In a *gimnazjum*, the best pupils had special seats and they were prepared for studies in university. These pupils were called “*Selektaner*”. The word “selection” denotes choosing out. The concept of selection was also used by the creator [viz. foreshadower] of the Theory of Evolution, Erasmus Darwin¹ (b. 12th December 1731, d. 18th April 1802) to denote choice exemplars in botany, zoology and anatomy.

The Nazi regime, which is the manifestation of the profanation of science, demoralisation and criminality, also mutilated all cultural values, expressions and concepts. With the Nazis, the term “selection” received another meaning. To “carry out a selection” meant to pick people to be sent away to be murdered in the gas chambers or to be directly shot on the spot.

The selections in Częstochowa were conducted by the murderers of Jews - Degenhardt, Ibscher [Überschär], Rohn, Sapport and many others, as well as by the managers and foremen of HASAG.

The first selection in Częstochowa began together with the first resettlement *akcja* of sending away the Jews to Treblinka on 22nd September 1942. The selections lasted from the day after *Yom Kippur*, with small hiatuses, until and including the day after *Simchas Torah*, 4th October. About 95% of Częstochowa Jewry was exterminated via these selections. Most of them [perished] in the Treblinka gas chambers - some 10% died in the transports, in the railway wagons, due to the crowded conditions, lack of air, thirst and utter exhaustion - and about 5% were shot in the city on their way to the transport, including those in hiding who were caught. Those shot were buried in the Jewish cemetery, on ul. Kawia and in other known and unknown locations.

With the establishment of the “Small Ghetto”, a new series of selections ensued. On 4th January 1943, Rohn and Sapport, in the presence of a large number of SS men, conducted a selection of 500 Jews to be sent away to Radomsko. On that day, a bloody *akcja* took place in Radomsko, in which the 500 Częstochowa Jews were sent away, along with the local Jews, to Treblinka. During the selection, at the square of the *Stary Rynek* [Old Market Square], a fight took place between the members of the underground movement, Izio Fajner and [Mendel] Fiszlewicz, and the Jew-murderers. Following the scuffle, a new selection took place, in which another twenty-five victims fell, along with the two heroic combatants. The twenty-seven Jews were directly shot on the spot. On the following day, they were interred in the “Small Ghetto”, on ul. Nadrzeczna. Among the twenty-seven executed were the following victims: [Mendel] Fiszlewicz, Izio Fajner, Lejzor Trembacki (a manufacturer by profession), Mojsze [Maurycy] Rodal (chocolate factory owner), Jojne Kurcbard (a shoe-stitcher), Wiernik (a mechanic) and Cymerman.

In March, there was yet another selection - [that] of the Jewish intelligentsia. This selection was called the “Purim *akcja*”, because it took place on Purim. Then, 157 lawyers, physicians

¹ [TN: The grandfather of Charles Darwin.]

and engineers, with the *Judenrat* at the front, were taken in freight trucks to the Jewish cemetery, where they were shot and buried in a mass grave.

The selection of the intelligentsia began through some perfidious propaganda, on the part of the German authorities, to the effect that the International Red Cross in Switzerland had been given authorisation, from Berlin, to relocate the Jewish intelligentsia to the Land of Israel. The intellectuals and the other inhabitants of the “Small Ghetto” were convinced that this rumour was true, even if only due to the fact that the *prezes* Leon Kopiński and all the members of the *Judenrat* had signed up for the journey.

Along the way, those selected became aware that they were being taken to the cemetery. A fight with the overseers instantaneously flared up. In the great commotion and chaos, a few people managed to escape, among them were Bernard Kurland, Moryc Kopiński, his son and the dentist Konarska, Dr Bresler’s wife.

During the liquidation of the “Small Ghetto”, on 25th, 26th and 27th June 1943, the largest selection took place. All the inhabitants of the buildings at ul. Nadrzeczna 86, 88 and 90 were taken away in freight trucks to the cemetery, where they were shot and buried in mass graves. These houses on ul. Nadrzeczna were the nests of the underground movement. The selection was carried out by Degenhardt and his deputies. During the liquidation of the “Small Ghetto”, the Polish *Volksdeutsch* Laszynski stood out for his cruelty and sadism.

On 20th July 1943 (17th Tamuz²), an unexpected selection was conducted at ten in the night in HASAG-Pelcery. Firstly, the Jewish police with their wives and children were taken out to the colony³ for a supposed “rollcall” - but they never returned.

Inside the factory grounds, to the length of the recalibration department, all the groups were made to stand according to departments, after which they marched down the small alleyway leading to the infantry department. There, the managers, foremen, the political director Lüth and *Werkschutz* men stood.

The selection of the recalibration department was conducted by the manager, Engineer Francke, head foreman Mathias and foreman Niziolek. In that same manner, selections of all the departments were conducted by the managers and foremen.

Thus, in the selection of 20th July, the German civilians - the managers, head foremen and foremen - also stained their hands with Jewish blood, abetting the Nazi policies of murder, robbery and bloodshed.

A few individual incidents occurred, when German foremen reclaimed certain qualified workers after the selections. One such case happened following the selection of 20th July 1943 - a German foreman, who had not participated in the selection, reclaimed the engineer Szwarc. When the foreman took Szwarc out of the bunker [viz. jail], he refused to go [with

² [TN: Jewish fast day commemorating the breach of the walls of Jerusalem before the destruction of the Second Temple.]

³ [TN: From subsequent mentions of this “colony”, it is evident that it was part of the HASAG-Pelcery complex, but not inside the camp itself. It was most likely the temporary quarters (thus the name “colony”) of the factory’s non-Jewish operators and/or labourers.]

him]. The foreman's statement, to the effect that all those who were in the bunker would be shot, was to no avail. Szwarc declared, "I shall never work for the Germans again!"

On the following day, 21st July, under the pretext of sending them over to HA-[SAG]⁴ to the cemetery, where they were shot. Among the victims was Szwarc, who sacrificed his life in the struggle by passively resisting against the Nazi regime.

On the following day, 23rd July, under the pretext of sending them over to HASAG, a selection of 100 people was carried out on ul. Garibaldiego, including the entire police force, with Parasol at the forefront. The 100 Jews were taken from Garibaldiego to HASAG-Pelcery. They were not allowed inside the factory, but were left in the colony. Bernard Kurland was summoned from the factory grounds to the director. As soon as he came out to the colony, he was detained and added to the group.

Degenhardt appeared with his rogues, as well as *Werkschutz* men and the HASAG factory foremen. Degenhardt gave a speech, [in which] he declared that, due to the villainies of the Jews in the "Small Ghetto" with its underground movement, all the Jews assembled there would be going to the "*Himmelskommando*"⁵ (by this, he meant death). It became clear to everyone that they had been lured away from ul. Garibaldiego [under false pretences] and that their minutes of life were numbered.

Bernard Kurland began addressing Degenhardt and his aides. Among other things, he declared, "You German sadists and murderers have attained your goal - but it is five minutes to twelve. Our death is at five minutes to twelve but, at twelve, you will suffer a crushing defeat."

Freight trucks were already waiting to take the victims away to the cemetery. Shouts ring out against Degenhardt, Hitler's regime and predicting the German downfall. Then the gruesome, murderous acts against the victims ensue, led by the chief of the *Werkschutz*, Klemm. Each one is bound with barbed wire - beginning with the ghetto policemen. One of the constables by the name of Korenbrod, who had no particular ethical virtues over the course of his activity as a ghetto policeman, puts up a fierce resistance. He does not let himself be bound, screaming and pummeling anyone who nears him. As he was physically well-developed and the gendarmerie could not overpower him, he was shot on the spot.

All the others, after having been bound, were knocked senseless. The sadist Opel, who was known by the nickname "Morsz"⁶ - a *Reichsdeutsch*, the foreman of the construction department— gave everyone a blow with full force on the head with a heavy hammer, making them lose consciousness. Afterwards, they tore the clothes off all those bound and stunned. Unconscious, naked and half-dead, everyone was thrown onto the freight vehicles. In this

⁴ [TN: As the reader will notice, the wording of this line ("On the following day etc."), barring the date itself, is the exact same as the opening sentence of the forthcoming paragraph. As its ending ("over to HA-") does not connect with the words that follow it ("to the cemetery"), it is obviously a misprint and does not belong here. We may assume that the author originally wrote "On the following day, 21st July, they were taken over to the cemetery, where they were shot."]

⁵ [TN: Ger., "heavenly task force/squad".]

⁶ [TN: In his article "Częstochowa Folklore During the Nazi Period" in the book "Czenstochow" (1958), the author explains: "Opel was called 'Morsz', because every morning after rollcall, he would take his group of labourers, make them stand in one file, and give them the order to 'morch' [instead of 'march']. He also had the nickname 'Hemerl', [Little Hammer] for beating to death, those selected out, with a hammer."]

manner, they were taken across town to the cemetery, where gendarmes and *Werkschutz* were already waiting with machine-guns. All of them were shot and buried in mass graves.

This selection of 400 Jews, the tragic victims of the Nazi regime, was the penultimate and cruellest one.

The HASAG factories in Częstochowa were in constant need of more and more working hands. As a result, their managers brought to Częstochowa the few remaining Jews from all the cities from which the Germans were forced to retreat.

In July 1944, a transport of 200 Jews, who had worked at the airfield in Dęblin, was brought. All of them were put to work in the HASAG-Warta factory. The *Werkschutz* chief, Bartenschlager, took over this transport of Jews. He immediately carried out a selection of the children. Fifteen children, aged up to thirteen, were sent by Bartenschlager to the cemetery, where they were directly shot and interred. That was the last selection in Częstochowa.

The spectre of the selections tortured Częstochowa Jewry from 22nd September 1942 to the end of July 1944, claiming the lives of 50,000 souls as martyrs.