

RG-31.01.10: Die Nation, Swiss Newspaper, 9 May 1945: “Theresienstadt-a Propaganda Trick” Translation from German:

### **Theresienstadt – a Propaganda Trick**

The fate of Jews in Czechoslovakia lay in the hands of the Central Committee for the Solution of the Jewish Question in Bohemia-Moravia under the leadership of SS Obersturmbannführer Guenther, who was under the command of the Super-Gestapo (Special Forces). The bank accounts, pieces of real estate, and furniture were secured from this position and administered. From little necklaces of children to the silver Sabbath candles of the grandmother, every object of gold and silver was carried off in their hands. In order to make their seizures of these items legal – and the Nazis placed a great of emphasis on making things legal – the lawful owners had to die. Millions of men, women, and children from all of middle Europe were sent to Poland, their end has since become known.

The deportations to Poland began in October 1941, immediately after the appointment of Heydrich as Reich protector in Bohemia-Moravia. One month later came the first Jewish transports to Theresienstadt, a second, more well-thought-out plan was beginning.

Theresienstadt is an old fortress at the convergence of the Eger and Elbe, 60 km to the north of Prague. Between high fortress walls and graves lay the houses and barracks of the old garrison, a small town with a pretty church and some park grounds.

The Christian population was moved out and the Jews from west Poland were brought into the empty barracks. A mattress and a few nails hammered into the bare walls are the only pieces of furniture. The leader of the camp behooved the camp commander to accept 120 Czech constables. The city administration was in Jewish hands, though of course under the leadership of the German SS, whose Commander Obersturmführer Burger, from Vienna, was ruthless. Failure to obey the laws of the camp was punished by hanging.

Prisoners were brought in by train. On the arrival of the trains, many older people were already dead. Others lay exhausted on the dusty country roads which led to Theresienstadt. Between 68,000 to 70,000 people lived on a piece of land only half a square kilometer. In a room there “lived”, slept, and ate 13-14 people crammed against each other of tables and mattresses. Every room was occupied, from the top stories which were close to the roof and the glaring sun, to the humid cellars.

Theresienstadt was not a concentration camp, like it falsely, and sometimes from those who were there, will be named. It was a “model ghetto” and later received the name of “Jewish Settlement area” An abomination, produced from hate between neighbors and lies from propaganda, of which humanity should be ashamed.

Nourishment was by Spring 1942 completely insufficient. There was 250 grams of black bread, most of which was bad, 200 grams of potatoes with turnips, rotten liver paste, no fat and no salt all week. Thousands upon thousands of elderly people succumbed to diseases and were sent to the ground without having received any medical attention. There was almost no medicine. The corpses of the dead were just skeletons surrounded by a layer of skin and weighed no more than 38-40 kilos. The death rate rose

to almost 250 people per day. Burials were taken care of in mass graves, with 25 dead per hole. At the beginning of September 1942, a new crematorium was put into operation.

To control the death rate, the SS ordered a simple rule. The oldest people, who were the first to die, would be deported to the East: Thus in October 1942, the majority of those over 65 years of age were put in cattle cars from Bohusovice to Poland at a rate of roughly 100 per day.

But the “model ghetto” should be even more improved. Still more East-transportations were set up; the number of inhabitants fell and the settlement became smaller. One day there were only about 38,000 souls present. In order to shield the Czech environment from such grisly matters, Jewish workers had to create a special railway from Theresienstadt to Bohusovice. The street which went through the [german] town was moved.

In order to minimize the risk of contagion in the [german] town – real German people lived there! – the water supply was removed and a sewage treatment plant was put in. Money played no role. The central command was now entirely at the service of the Jews’ wellbeing. In the summer of 1943, everything was improved. The word “model ghetto” was abolished and replaced by “Jewish settlement area.” The food supply was raised somewhat, the receiving of postage allowed. Ghetto money with the picture of Moses was passed out so that the inhabitants of the camp could go shopping and to the coffee house. Shoes and clothes, which the SS delivered from the dead, were sold, as well as fake tea, flower, mustard, paprika, thyme, and other such things.

Concessions were also made to cultural activities. A costume-less production of the “Sold Wife” was put by members of the Czech national theater. The orchestra consisted of a piano and wooden instrument [boecken?] which had been found in a cellar. In order that the “free-time arrangements” belong in the program for the “model ghetto”, at the beginning of 1944, musical instruments were actually brought in with the order: “Amuse yourselves!” Saalen [?] theater was also organized in Czech and in German and musicians played in a coffee house. The guests, almost exclusively people who could no longer work, sat with a tea or coffee-substitute, price of two ghetto crowns.

In order to make room for the theatres and coffee houses, more people had to be transported. The camp commander ordered new transports to the East of the oldest among the Jewish population. Previously-convicted people, the terminally ill, the very old, and orphans were rounded up. In the selection of its victims, the Jewish “transport section” had a free hand. Where they went, no one knew. Only the direction was fixed: Poland. News was not available but it was clear from what was smuggled in that nothing good would come to pass.

As soon as the “Transport section” had written up the names of those who were to be deported, the named were delivered pieces of paper with their name and transport number. From this instant, their perception of Theresienstadt was completely changed. Everyone trembled, fearing they would receive the dreaded slip of paper and when a door opened, all the men instantly were terror-struck. The chosen reacted very differently. The elderly and all of those who had never tried to take their destinies into their own hands began to place their possessions in their suitcases and lost their minds. The fighting souls nevertheless attempted to save them. They protested against the orders. Grounds for exception were high fever, high honors from the first World War, war-time injury, and last but not least, relationships. The Magdeburg barracks, the seat of the Jewish offices,

was thronged by petitioners. Flailing, crying, threatening men fought for their lives here without truly knowing it. Certain people were never called up for transport, such as people who, due to great service, were protected.

Those who were called up for deportation had only a few hours to assemble in a cordoned-off building. Most poignant were the small children who did not know why they had their backpacks and hugged their little dolls. Between 60 and 70 people were stuffed into each car. The SS helped with cane hits and kicks. The Viennese SS leader Heindl and the Czech 'quisling' constable Janecek showed special cruelty. In every sealed car there was one toilet for the bodily needs of 70 people, one can with 20 liters of water, one bread, one little piece of margarine, and one small end of a sausage for the entire day-long trip.

Hundreds of thousands were in Theresienstadt and tens of thousands died there. The Nazis had their spies everywhere, unfortunately also the Reichsdeutsche and Viennese Jews (die Jupo = the Jewish police), who gave their reports through gestures. The suspects or convicted were brutally interrogated. Especially brutal were the questionings by the afore-mentioned Janecek and by SS. Obersturmfuehrer Bergl. They sent some to councils of their peers [?] They pressed their naked bodies against the hot ovens and branded them with the glowing spits in order to make them talk. But the prisoner simply became quite and died. Those of weaker nature barely stood after the first blows and were then beaten until they were about half dead, thrown into the bunker and sent along with their relatives.

The "model ghetto" was one of the uncountable propaganda lies of the Third Reich. In June 1944, the Red Cross Commission inspected the camp and prior to their arrival, the city "beautification" began. The streets were washed, the facades of the houses were white washed, flower pots appeared on the windowsills and almost 5000 people were quickly sent to be gassed in Birkenau in order to make more living room. The inhabitants of the ground floors were stuffed in the attics of the barracks. The freed room was filled with furniture and drapery and populated by the favored prisoners. On the market square were little lawns with roses, a sports park was laid in, a music pavilion constructed, the parks were spruced up, a kids park with a child pavilion made entirely out of glass was constructed. Play rooms for children were also built.

The German minister for Bohemia-Moravia made an inspection of a child-care facility and objected to a nurse who did not look motherly enough! He had her replaced. Now that the world knows that the children of Theresienstadt were actually sent to their annihilation, the extent of the lies of the Nazi is difficult to believe.

After weeks of preparation, the day of the visit came at last. Film was taken by "Actualita Prag" In the night before, all of the streets were again dusted and the pavement scrubbed. The program was entirely planned out and followed exactly. There was a train with bread, a car with vegetables meant for the children, cowherds and a train of singing workers who had met the Red Cross Commission during their tour, a football match, child opera – the child audience had to sit for an hour – , shops full of wares which had to be given back to the "German Clothing Department" the next day, etc. A popular anecdote circulated in the camp after the inspection: The camp commander had received a telegram from Potemkin in heaven: "Congratulations, you have outdone me!"

After our arrival in Switzerland, we could finally see that the success that had been hoped for by the Nazis had not come to pass. The whole show was too pretty to be

effective. Yet how many people nevertheless let themselves be convinced by the Nazi propaganda? Only now, after the English and Americans liberated the camps, do people believe the unimaginable horror which afflicted people from 1933 until the end of the war. At the time, people thought of the accounts told by those who had escaped the camp as being nothing more than horror stories. No voice was also raised when 600,000 Jews were killed in the Warsaw ghetto. Such inhumanity should never be repeated in the future. This will only be possible when people come to terms with the images of horror and all of the abominations which are an affront to God, mankind, and civilization are brought out for the world to see.