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Introduction : The Nazi policies and measures introduced between 1933 and 1945

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Version anglaise - The Nazi policies and measures introduced between 1933 and 1942 -



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Testimonies of the friends of Auschwitz
Paris, 24 March 2005

Hello, dear friends. You are here at the headquarters of the survivors of the Auschwitz concentration camp. Before I begin to talk about what was, and what is deportation, I would like to try and give an overall explanation, as simply as possible, of what the concentration and extermination camps were. You understand ? Good !

Very quickly, from 1933 onwards, Hitler's troops began to arrive in Europe, and to set up the concentration camps. The first camp that he put in place was set up quite close to Munich, it was called Dachau. It was a camp which was normally used to hold all those who were opposed to the Nazi regime. This concentration camp held, amongst others, important figures of the time, including Thomas Mann, who was a Nobel Prize winner. At the same time, a certain number of Jews were arrested and were sent to Dachau. It was a camp against those opposed to the Nazi regime.

At the same time, another concentration camp was being created at Sachsenhausen, in Germany, again for the same aims as Dachau. Then, little by little, the anti-Semitic policies of Germany were being put into practice and began functioning. This was nicknamed "la nuit de Cristal," or "The Night of Broken Glass". Throughout la nuit de Cristal, 7000 Jewish businesses were ransacked and burnt, and so were almost all the synagogues. They arrested the Jews and often encouraged them to leave Germany as quickly as possible.

Briefly, I want to remind you of several things. The first is what one calls eugenisme. I am going to explain in French, of course. Eugenism is the 'improvement' of the human race. In the context of the Nazi politics, everything was done to improve the human race. In other words, so that people should have blonde hair and blue eyes (Aryans). That's very important. One thing that is not well known is that between the period 1939-1945, 400,000 non Jews, therefore Aryans, were sterilised, men and women.

At the same time there was the eugenism and sterilisation of people who were considered incapable of creating the Aryans of the future, and also euthanasia of the mentally ill and those who were unproductive but who were, nonetheless, Germans. I'm telling you this to put Nazi politics in context. There were around 7000 people, children who were in the hospitals and asylums, who were considered useless to the German society and were consequently wiped out by gassing.

I have come here to explain to you how one arrived at the gas chambers. They were wiped out by gas- which gas took them ? Which gas did they use ? They were taken to places which were of course away from hospitals and which were specific locations. They had to go in lorries and these had nozzles which connected to the exhaust and contained carbon monoxide gas.

You've all done a little chemistry and consequently, you'd know that, when you burn carbon or petrol completely, there is a carbonic gas. Then it goes into the atmosphere and it isn't toxic. But when the combustion is incomplete, it produces a gas that you can breathe, that doesn't have any odour, that doesn't smell of anything, this is called Carbon Monoxide and it kills ! The children and the mentally ill are put into Lorries. The pipe from the exhausts are connected to the inside of the specially designed (airtight) Lorries, and they are killed by the Carbon Monoxide. It was only Germans who were killed ; we are talking about the period of 1940-1942.

Following that, in the structure of the repression which took place in all of occupied Europe, the Nazis created Extermination camps between 1941 and 1943, which are found in Poland. These four Extermination camps are Chelmno, Treblinka, Sobbor and Belzec. These camps were aimed at Jews ! In other words, within the policy of the

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extermination of Jews, Hitler created 2 types of camp : extermination camps and concentration-extermination camps (which had both functions). All of these extermination camps and concentration-extermination camps are found in Poland. There were four purely extermination camps, that is to say, into these camps above all, Polish Jews came. I recall that in Poland, there were more than 3 million Jews who were assassinated ; Poland contained numerous Jews at the time. A large number were killed straightaway. In certain camps, the Nazis would use the same method as when they killed their own children and the mentally ill. In other words in the first concentration camps "Chelmo" and "Sobibor", I believe they used Carbon Monoxide.

After, meanwhile, some large camps were created, such as Auschwitz and a large camp near Lublin called Majdanek. These camps had two functions ; on the one hand, the extermination of those who wouldn't return to the camps : as soon as they arrived they were immediately exterminated. Others among them would go into the concentration camp. Amongst all of the camps, the most important of all was Auschwitz-Birkenau. This camp was coupled with a military-industrial complex, meaning that around Auschwitz, and dependant on Auschwitz, there were 40 sub camps, which were in effect smaller concentration camps. They were put in place in some areas where the Nazis wanted to make slave labourers work in arms factories, coal mines and salt mines. All this was in "Haute-Silesie" in Poland. This also meant that the people who were in the concentration camps were strengthening the S.S. by fighting, or by selling slave workers to factories. Amongst the large industrial camps there was the camp "Buna-Monowitz" (the camp where Primo Levi was, who wrote a lot on the Shoah and probably the most beautiful and interesting books.)

Furthermore, we, my friend Henry Bulawko, who is the president of our organisation, and myself, we had the dreadful privilege to be deported from France, as Jews and resisters, although to be both is rare. Me, I was arrested not as a Jew, but as a resisters. Recognised as a Jew, I was sent to Auschwitz. My friend Bulawko was a rebel but he was arrested as a Jew. He'll recount on how this happened.

The extermination of Jews only happened in Auschwitz and Birkehau from 1942 onwards, and especially in 1943. In the other sub-camps there weren't any gas chambers. It was the small camps where prisoners would be forced to work, and moreover, where they could meet English prisoners too. There were meetings which could take place. The Jewish prisoners were totally isolated but they could work in the factories where other prisoners including French, English and other nationalities also worked.