

PASSAGE 3 : THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS

Hitler's new Europe was entirely based on the concept of superior and inferior peoples. Whether by annexations or by war, he was determined to create machinery for putting into practice the decimation of Eastern Europe. Equally, war or no war, as no other practical solution offered itself, he would eventually have had to find ways of physically exterminating the Jews: the only logical conclusion of the psychological defamation campaign on which most of his programme was built.

The 'concentration' camps were originally set up as extended prison services to deal with those resisting the New Order, and to eliminate them, with bogus legality, as 'traitors' or 'spies' if their 'reeducation' proved impossible. From 1941, most of this campus became vast slave-labour markets, but even then they varied a good deal in severity, largely depending upon the nationality of the prisoners they catered for. And even in the worst of them, however terrible the conditions, they offered at least a slim chance of survival.

The 'extermination' campus offered no such chance. They were created for the sole purpose of exterminating primarily the Jews of Europe, and also the Gypsies. There were four of these installations, planned exclusively for extermination; first, and as testing ground, Chelmno (Kulmhof), set up in December 1941. Then, following the Wannsee Conference of January 1942 which, chaired by Reinhardt Heydrich, put the official seal of approval on the extermination programme, Belzec (March 1942), Sobibor (May 1942), and the largest of them, Treblinka (June 1942). All were within a two-hundred-mile radius of Warsaw.

The decision to place all of them on Polish soil has been attributed widely to the well-known anti-Semitism of large segments of the Polish population. Although this fact may have marginally influenced the choice, it is more reasonable to assume that it was mainly prompted by tactical considerations. Poland's railway system covered all of the country, with stations in even the smallest towns: while large tracts of the Polish countryside, densely forested and very thinly populated, made isolation possible. In this sense- and this sense only- the war did contribute to making this huge and sinister operation possible, for it is unlikely that it could have been attempted in any other region of Europe.

None of the extermination camps existed for longer than seventeen months when, one after the other, they were totally obliterated by the SS. The official Polish estimate- the most conservative, and not university accepted- is that approximately 2,000,000 Jews and 52,000 gypsies (children made up at least one- third of this total) were killed in these four camps during that period. The concentration camps too had gas-vans, gas chambers, crematoriums and mass graves. In them too people were shot, given lethal injections, gassed, and apart from being murdered, hundreds of thousands died of exhaustion, starvation and disease. But - even in Birkenau, the extermination section of Auschwitz (where 860,000 Jews are believed to have been killed) - there was in all of them a chance of life.

In the extermination campus, the only people who retained this chance from day were the pitifully few who were kept as 'work- Jews' to operate the campus. Eighty-two people- no children among them- survived the four Nazi death- campus in Poland. But it was not only the policy behind the Nazi murder of the Jews, which distinguished it from other instances of genocide. The methods employed, too, were unique and uniquely calculated. The killings were organized systematically to achieve the maximum humiliation and dehumanisation of the victims before they died. This pattern was dictated by a distinct and careful purpose, not by 'mere' cruelty or indifference; the crammed airless freight-cars without sanitary provisions, food or drink, far worse than any cattle- transport: the whipped (literally so) hysteria of arrival; the immediate and always violent separation of men, women and children; the public undressing ; the incredibly crude internal physical examinations for hidden valuables ; the hair-cutting and shaving of the women; and finally the naked run to the gas chamber, under the lash of the whips.

1. The idea behind the establishment of concentration camps was...

- a) to exterminate the Jews
- b) to provide a market for slaves
- c) to eliminate 'traitors' if indoctrination failed
- d) to proselytize ' traitors' or eliminate them

2. The extermination camps differed from concentration camps in
 - a) their number
 - b) their locations
 - c) the severity of their prison environment
 - d) the chances of survival it offered to those in custody
3. It can be inferred from the passage....
 - a) that all concentration camps were set up in Poland
 - b) that 'Chelmo, Belsec, Sobibor and Treblinka' were in Poland
 - c) that all extermination camps were set up in Poland
 - d) that Wannsee is a place in Poland
4. Which of the following is a reason for the setting up of extermination camps in Poland?
 - a) Predominance of Jews in the populace
 - b) Prevalence of Anti-Semitism
 - c) Tactical considerations
 - d) All of the above
5. The Nazi genocide of Jews differed from other known instances of genocide on all the following counts except.....
 - a) the uniqueness of the methods employed
 - b) its policy of rigorous examination
 - c) its focus on humiliation of its victims
 - d) its use of war for decimation
6. The tone of the passage is
 - (a) descriptive & analytical
 - (b) narrative
 - (c) descriptive
 - (d) outrageous