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Preparations for and Organization of the Transports from Terezín to Auschwitz-Birkenau in September 1943

Abstract: As many as 5,007 people left the Terezín (Theresienstadt) ghetto in two large transports in September 1943. Their fate in the so-called Terezín family camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau was tragic since virtually all of them, with precious few exceptions, were murdered. This article is aimed at describing the compiling of the transports in Terezín and the factors according to which some groups of inmates had been selected for transport by the SS Command and by the Jewish ‘self-administration’. Based on an analysis of more than 2,500 petitions, submitted in a bid to exempt specific inmates from the transports, it is possible to trace their successful or unsuccessful attempts to save themselves from deportation. The article attempts to answer the question what criteria assisted prisoners in their request to be removed from the transport. What weight did parameters such as relationship to ghetto officials, social ties between prisoners, work for the Jewish religious community prior to deportation, work in the ghetto, illness and disability, criminal records, or family circumstances (‘mixed marriages’) carry in the decision to exclude them from these two transports?

Introduction

Between November 1941 and the end of April 1945, 140,000 Jewish men, women and children passed through the Terezín ghetto.¹ These prisoners came to the ghetto in hundreds of small and larger transports. For a significant number of them, the ghetto became a transit camp. In 60 ‘eastern transports’, 88,000 Terezín prisoners were deported to extermination, concentration and labor camps in Central and Eastern Europe. Of these, only about 3,800 survived until liberation.

¹ This research has been supported by GACR grant no. 19 – 05523S. The analysis presented in this article was part of the research project *Social Structure of a Nazi Ghetto: Analysis of Survival in the Terezín Ghetto*. Independently from the author of this work, the author of the most recent monograph on the Terezín ghetto, Anna Hájková, examined the same convolute of petitions. Hájková summarizes her results in the last chapter of her book, entitled “Transports from Terezín to the East”. See Anna Hájková: *The Last Ghetto. An Everyday History of Terezín*, New York: OUP, 2020, 201–238.

Among these transports were 5,007 people on board of two trains on September 6, 1943, to Auschwitz-Birkenau, with designations ‘DI’ and ‘Dm’.² Both these transports ended in the newly established Terezín family camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau³ and had been declared as ‘Protectorate transports’, meaning that the transports were to be composed only of prisoners deported to the ghetto from the Protectorate. Benjamin Murmelstein, the last ‘Elder of the Jews’ (*Judenältester*) in Terezín, expressed in a postwar testimony that the preparation of these transports might have been related to the desired suppression of “unreliable Terezín elements”⁴ as a result of the transfer of archives of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA, Reich Security Main Office) from Berlin to Terezín. Loesten’s (i.e. Karl Löwenstein’s) correspondence with Jehuda Bacon mentioned that an internal struggle within the ‘Council of Elders’ and attempts at defamation of the Ghetto Guard (*Ghettowache*) by SS-Hauptsturmführer Ernst Moes led to the decision for the two transports.⁵

The transports ushered a spate of tragic events that culminated in March 1944 in Auschwitz-Birkenau. After a six-month quarantine of the Terezín inmates, who altogether had not passed the selection on their arrival and were all placed in one special section of the camp in Birkenau – the so-called Terezín family camp – the decision was taken to completely liquidate them. Only a group of medical and nursing personnel, as well as seriously ill inmates, who were expected to die soon anyway, escaped this extermination. The other inmates, according to an entry by Dr Wolken, a physician in quarantine camp BIIa in Birkenau, a total of 3,752 people were sent to death in the gas chambers.⁶ These events

2 The marking of transports to and from the ghetto using a combination of the alphabet or Roman numerals (for transports to the ghetto from Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark and Slovakia) was carried out by the Jewish authorities. For an overview of deportations from the Terezín ghetto to ‘the East’, see Alfred Gottwaldt and Diana Schulle: *Die “Judendeportationen” aus dem Deutschen Reich 1941–1945*, Wiesbaden: Marix, 2005.

3 For basic information about the Terezín family camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau, see Franziska Jahn: “Das ‘Theresienstädter Familienlager’ (BIIb) in Birkenau”, in Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel (eds.): *Der Ort des Terrors*, volume 5, Munich: Beck, 2007, 112–115.

4 Murmelstein’s Testimony – Questions for Weinmann and K. H. Frank, n.d., 305–633–1, 112, Archives of the Security Services (ABS), Prague. Translation by the author.

5 Letter from Karl Loesten to Yehuda Bacon, 18.03.1961, O.64/103, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA). Available at: https://documents.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&search=advance&re_value=O.64&re_type=literal&fi_value=103&fi_type=exact. Last accessed: 01.05.2020.

6 I would like to point out the hitherto erroneous number of 3,792 persons murdered during the liquidation of the family camp given in literature. Somebody probably made this mistake which has since then been uncritically accepted. Cf. “Quarantäne Liste”, sign. D-AuII-3/1, inv. No. 29740, kart. 18, Archive of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (APMA); Miroslav Kárný: “Terezínský rodinný tábor v ‘konečném řešení’”, in idem., Margita Kárná, and Toman Brod

and the actual purpose of establishing the Terezín family camp have remained a subject of speculations to this day. The most probable purpose of the existence of the family camp, apart from eliminating the insurgent potential of the Terezín ghetto, was primarily its role of concealment. To this end, the Nazis used an innocuous name (Arbeitslager Birkenau bei Neu Berun) to disguise the true name of the extermination camp, keeping the deportees alive for a suitable period of time and forcing them to write antedated letters about their good stay in the camp to Terezín prisoners. Thus the six months stay in Auschwitz functioned as a decoy that the transports were in fact work transports which they were officially passed off as and not liquidation transports, what they had actually been in the end.⁷

These September transports formed part of a continuous line of hundreds of small and large incoming and outgoing transports, making the Terezín ghetto an assembly and transit camp for the Jewish population of occupied Europe. Each transport coming to the Terezín ghetto from Germany, the Protectorate and other German occupied countries was subjected to scrutiny in terms of protection of its newcomers by the Jewish 'self-administration'. In fact, on arrival in Terezín all the inmates, or actually the heads of families, had to fill in questionnaires giving reasons for eventual exemption from the departing transports to 'the East'.⁸ For the arriving prisoners, getting protection meant being at least temporarily exempted from the departing transports. The criterion for selection for the so-called commission protection lists with the names of the protected newcomers laid in their previous work for a Jewish religious community and in the protection of the relatives of the ghetto's leading personnel. With the gradual liquidation of the Jewish Community in Prague, these protection lists were getting progressively more extensive. For example, in case of transport 'Di', which left Prague on July 13, 1943, 236 people (i.e., 28 percent) of the total of 838 deportees were entered in the commission protection list.⁹

These lists of (temporarily) protected persons were revised before the departure of the September 1943 transports. The reason for the revision of these lists by

(eds.): *Terezínský rodinný tábor v Osvětimi-Birkenau*, Prague: Terezínská iniciativa-Melantrich, 1994, 35–49.

⁷ For an evaluation of the research carried out so far, for clarification of starting points as well as the potential significance and purpose of the Terezín family camp, see Tomáš Fedorovič: *Propagandistická role Terezína a terezínský rodinný tábor v Auschwitz-Birkenau*, in *Terezínské listy*, 46, 2018, 32–40.

⁸ Order of the day No. 67, 05.03.1942, and order of the day No. 91, 03.04.1942, Terezín collection, inv. No. 144, Jewish Museum in Prague (hereafter JMP).

⁹ Transport list Di, 06.08.1943, O.64/47 – 116–119, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA).

representatives of the Jewish ghetto leadership was to update the really indispensable and important persons for the running of the ghetto. According to the so-called Renunciation list No. 1 (*Verzichtliste Nr. 1*) from August 7, 1943, i.e. just one day after the start of registration for the September 1943 transports, 153 names were crossed out from the commission protection lists.¹⁰ However, an additional list of artists (*Zusatzliste der Künstler*) was drawn up on August 21, 1943, intended to protect 45 employees of the Free Time Organization Department (*Freizeitgestaltung*, FZG).¹¹

The decisive role in the preparation of the transports was played by the top representatives of the Jewish authorities on the orders of the SS. For the purposes of the SS, the Jewish 'self-administration' was a transfer institution, which had the main task of mediating all the demands of the SS to the prison community. As Benjamin Murelstein himself recalled after the war, the Jewish 'self-administration' had to participate in six tasks while organizing transports to 'the East':

1. Compiling the transports
2. Notifying inmates selected for the transports
3. Establishing a checking point (so-called *Schleuse* or channel)
4. Providing food and medication for the deportees
5. Registering actually deported inmates
6. Boarding deportees and loading luggage into freight (cattle) wagons¹²

The purpose of this study is to map out the first item of the preparatory stage in the context of the transports to Auschwitz in September 1943, and to valid the findings to some extent at least for the December 1943 transports. The analysis is based on more than 2,500 petitions, which were submitted to the officials of the Jewish 'self administration' in a bid to exempt specific inmates from the transports. They all are documenting the efforts of more than 4,200 individual prisoners, family members, prominent inmates as well as members of the 'Council of Elders', and eventually of individual departments of the Jewish 'self-administration', to protect potential deportees from their final call-up.¹³ Beyond the in-

¹⁰ "Verzichtliste Nr. 1" compiled by Beck and Zucker, 07.08.1943, O.64/47 – 122–123, YVA.

¹¹ Additional list of artists, 21.08.1943, O.64/47 – 150, YVA.

¹² Benjamin Murelstein's testimony concerning the organization of transports, 14.03.1946, 305–633–1, ABS.

¹³ This unique set of documents was collected as part of the so-called Documentation Action, which was driven by the prominent Zionist and later diplomat Yochanan Zeev Shek. Some of these materials were later transferred to Israel and form part of the O.64 (Terezín Collection) of the Yad Vashem Memorial, files 10.1–21.2 and partially file 23. Files 22.1 and 22.2 are con-

dividual cases, the petitions show the logic behind the selection policy of the Jewish 'self-administration'. Since hardly any official entries on the internal rules of the Jewish 'self-administration' have survived, these sources are also instructive for the study of its activities in general.

In the following, I will describe the strategy adopted by the inmates called up for deportation in their struggle for exemption from the transports. I will first give an overview of the compilation of the transports in regard to the different institutions within the Jewish 'self-administration' and the filing of petitions to these different departments. Next, I will show the function of the so-called protection lists, which were held by the various functionaries of the 'self-administration', and will, by means of various categories of prisoners, discuss who was actually deported and who was saved.

Compiling the Transports and Filing Petitions

The organization of transports, including the compilation of the names and exemptions from it, known as preparatory work (*Vorarbeiten*), was left to the Terezín Jewish 'self-administration', or entrusted to what were called the Large Transport Commission and the Small Transport Commission.¹⁴ Its instructions were to be put into effect by the Transport Department headed by Vilém Cantor, falling under the Central Secretariat, managed by Leo Janowitz. The Transport Department received not only all the information on inmates which were to be put on a specific transport, but also of those who should be removed from it.¹⁵ The Large Transport Commission was made up of some dozens representatives of national commissions and individual departments of the Jewish 'self-administration'.¹⁶ In contrast, the Small Transport Commission consisted only of se-

cerned with exemptions and information on inmates enrolled in the December 1943 transport to the family camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau. See Yad Vashem: "Yad Vashem Document Archive". Available at: https://documents.yadvashem.org/index.html?language=en&search=advance&re_value=0.64&re_type=literal&fi_value=103&fi_type=exact. Last accessed: 13.09.2022.

¹⁴ Vilém Cantor's protocol for the National Security (Police) Directorate in Prague, 13.02.1946, 305–633–1, 192–194, ABS. See on this and the following also Hájková, *The Last Ghetto*, 201–207.

¹⁵ Cf. description of W. Cantor in H.G. Adler: *Terezín 1941–1945. Das Antlitz einer Zwangsge-meinschaft*, Tübingen: Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1960, 287.

¹⁶ Marmelstein's testimony, given in the Prague-Pankrác Police Prison, b.d., 305–633–1, 48, ABS. The name Walter Wiener also figured among the people serving on the Transport Commission. See petition filed by the Youth Welfare Department (*Jugendfürsorge*) to exempt the family of Oskar Fuchs from transport, 16.08.1943, O.64/19.1 – 1809, YVA.

nior representatives of some departments of the Terezín 'self-administration' and decided in case of disagreement by the Large Transport Commission.¹⁷

We know that the initial selection of the persons intended for deportation was made by the Large Transport Commission. Reasons for exemption were evaluated before each 'Eastern transport'. Persons who were selected for the September 1943 transports had the opportunity to complete a special questionnaire, giving five chief reasons for exemption.¹⁸ Inmates had to take such questionnaires with them, when summoned to the camp's SS Command to be inspected.¹⁹ Even though every inmate called up for a transport could read already in a printed form that petitions for exemption from labor deployment transports were inadmissible,²⁰ around 4,200 prisoners were going through the petition process in an effort to save themselves or a third person from deportation to 'the East'. The two transports were officially declared as labor deployment transports (*Arbeitseinsatz-Transporte*). However, the prisoners were kept in the dark about the true purpose of the deportations and therefore sought to exercise their exemption.

The petitions were addressed to the Jewish 'self-administration' or to some of its members by name. There are as many as 4,239 names of Terezín inmates in the preserved petitions and material associated with requests for exemptions from these transports, kept in the volume dealing with exemption from the September transports. 3,721 of them filed petitions in their own name, trying to escape their own deportation. 518 persons acted on behalf of their close relatives, asking for their exemption from the transports.

The fate of inmates for whom a petition was filed depended on the reasons and criteria under which they were eventually removed from the transport or were left on the list. We know that 1,674 failed in their exemption petitions, thus accounting for 33 percent of all the deportees. 2,047 inmates originally registered for a transport were eventually taken off the transport lists, while inmates who did not receive any such life-saving protection had to go instead of them.

It remains to be explained why petitions of the remaining two thirds of 5,007 deportees called up for transports have not been preserved. Did they not file

17 Friedmann's petition addressed to Placzek, 28.08.1943, O.64/18.1 – 1661, YVA.

18 The reasons were: (I.) bearer of military distinctions (Iron Cross first class, gold medal for bravery, Order of the Crown, and other major distinctions), (II.) war invalid and also whether he or she was permanently unfit for transport as a result of injury, (III.) those who drew in pension or annuity, (IV.) whether inmates had relatives outside Terezín, (V.–VII.) fields of questions concerning 'mixed marriages' and offsprings born from such marriages. See questionnaire of Zdenek Baar, b.d., O.64/10.2 – 107, YVA.

19 Petition of Abraham Fink, 16.08.1943, O.64/14.2 – 925, YVA.

20 Call-up form of Gustav Friedmann, b.d., O.64/10.1 – 7, YVA.

them, or did they just not survive in the archives? Or perhaps they did not petition at all? Is it possible that these people reconciled themselves with their summons to transports, being convinced that their grounds for exemption failed to be adequate? Or was there a role played here by the obfuscation that these were not deportations to ‘the East’, but transports for labor deployment? So far, research has not been able to provide answers to these questions.

During a reorganization of Terezín’s Jewish ‘self-administration’ in January 1943, the camp’s SS Commandant Siegfried Seidl ruled that Paul Eppstein would bear the main responsibility for the operation of the ghetto in the new triumvirate of former high-ranking Jewish officials from Berlin (Eppstein), Prague (Edelstein) and Vienna (Murmelstein).²¹ Before, these responsibilities were in the hands of Jakob Edelstein. This transfer of final decision-making power (or rather lack of it) was accompanied by the targeting of petitions for exemption. Paul Eppstein, in these days active as the ‘Elder of the Jews’, received several times more petitions than the other high-ranking officials of the ‘self-administration’, including the previous ‘Elder of the Jews’, Jakob Edelstein.²² As a matter of fact, it was Eppstein, as the ‘Elder of the Jews’, that had the last say primarily in those controversial cases on which the Small Transport Commission could not reach consensus.²³ We may suppose that Eppstein, as the ‘Elder of the Jews’, did see and analyze many of those cases, having attached his initial E with a date, eventually with a request for a further consultation on the petitions.²⁴

Accepted and Rejected Petitions

In the following, I will refer to petitions for exemption from the two September transports to elaborate on the reasons why some of the prisoners were taken off the transport list and why some were deported.

Some of the major factors conducive to an inmate’s inclusion into a transport or exemption therefrom were undertakings given by individual leading officials of the Jewish ‘self-administration’. If such a pledge was undertaken by the ‘Elder of the Jews’, the resultant decision carried maximum weight. Marta Krai-

²¹ Official entry No. Ed/Ek from Terezín, 27.01.1943, collection Terezín, inv. No. 146, JMP.

²² Edelstein received 28 petitions, Murmelstein 28 as well, Zucker 80, and Eppstein 473. 463 other petitions were addressed to the ‘Council of Elders’, 464 eventually to the management (*Leitung*) or Transport/Exemption/Polish Commission; 473 have not been included in the overview.

²³ Vilém Cantor’s protocol for the National Security (Police) Directorate in Prague, 13.02.1946, 305–633–1, 192–194, ABS.

²⁴ Petition for exempting Gustav Steger, 09.08.1943, O.64/18.2 – 1800, YVA.

nerová, a member of the Jewish 'self-administration', pleaded for herself, her mother Ida and her brother Bruno Fuchs, a former member of the Ghetto Guard to be exempted from the transport. While Marta and Ida were successful, Bruno's name had also been removed from the transport list on September 4, 1943, but on the following day, he received a new registration number.²⁵ Eppstein's secretary Alice Myrants approached the head of the Transport Department, Cantor, with the request to exempt Fuchs definitely. But due to a shortage of time and possibly owing to tensions, mounting among the members of the Jewish 'self-administration', the request had not been granted, and Fuchs departed from Terezín in one of the September transports. It is evident that the later a person submitted his or her petition, the lesser chance for success he or she had. With every day prior to transport departure the chances for success and exemption from the transport increased by one percentage point. If Bruno Fuchs hypothetically petitioned ten days earlier, he would have raised his chance of staying in the camp by ten percentage points, as compared with those whose records of exemption are not available (control group).²⁶

Ghetto inmates also realized that a face-to-face meeting with Eppstein and presentation of their reasons for being taken off the transport list enhanced their chances for staying in Terezín. During their efforts to arrange a personal meeting with Eppstein, his closest colleagues played an important mediating role. His secretary Alice Myrants was requested by many petitioners to arrange such face-to-face encounters.²⁷ One of the aspects that have not yet been accentuated in historical research was the role of the spouses of the ghetto's high-ranking officials.²⁸ At the time of the September transports, it was primarily the wife of the 'Elder', Hedwig Eppstein, who interceded on behalf of some of the prisoners.²⁹

Protection Lists

The most important and widespread mechanism of protection consisted in establishing strong bonds with persons among the Jewish 'self-administration' be-

25 Petition of Marta Krainerová, b.d. (04.09.1943?), O.64/10.1 – 83, YVA.

26 The project led by Professor Štěpán Jurajda from CERGE-EI: *Social Structure of a Nazi Ghetto: Analysis of Survival in the Terezín Ghetto* (GAČR 19 – 05523S).

27 Petition of Dr Bauer, 15.08.1943, O.64/20.1 – 2036, YVA.

28 As an example, see petition for exemption of Růžena Ziemlichová from the transport to Treblinka in the fall of 1942, O.64/94 – 9 – 12, YVA.

29 Note on the exemption of the Rosenberger family, b.d., O.64/10.1 – 54, YVA.

lieved to have the power to arrange an inmate's exemption from transport. To have ones name on the personal protective list (*persönliche Schutzliste*) of a member of the 'Council of Elders', in case of registration and call up for transport, offered a high degree of protection indeed.

Thanks to their privileged position, members of the 'Council of Elders' had the possibility of protecting some of the inmates from deportation. Egon Popper, head of the Internal Administration Department (*Innere Verwaltung*), kept 57 names on his personal exemption list.³⁰ In a similar vein, we know the names on the protection lists of other members of the 'Council of Elders', namely Jakob Wolffig³¹ or Robert Stricker.³²

Even though not a member of the 'Council of Elders', Richard Friedmann, a former chief of the division for dealing with authorities at the Jewish religious Community in Prague and a Terezín notable, reminded the 'Council of Elders' that he had been given a mandate to nominate seven people "whose protection had been promised to me". This particular request is accompanied by Eppstein's initial and the words "correct/kindly see to exemption".³³

Although some inmates knew that the respective departments of the 'self-administration' would intercede on behalf of their next of kin summoned for transport, they made use of every opportunity to address other people who could also significantly help them. For instance, Lydia Altmannová wrote in her exemption letter to the management that Leo Janowitz, member of the staff of the 'self-administration' (*Stab*), Head of the Central Secretariat and her former university colleague and youth friend, promised her, half an hour before his arrest, that he would do everything in his power to prevent her inclusion in the transport, literally "to inhibit my inclusion".³⁴

Furthermore, Max Popper, an employee of the Labor Center (*Arbeitszentrale*), put on the list of a transport reserve, tried unsuccessfully to save his family from the transport on the day of its departure. He approached Erich Österreicher, Head of the Economic Department – Production (WAP), with a plea for further assistance since the latter's promises given to him earlier had been to no avail. What is quite bewildering in this case is the helpless obsequiousness Popper dis-

³⁰ Egon Popper, personal exemption list containing people up to the age of 60, b.d., O.64/47 – 131, YVA.

³¹ Petition of Jakob Wolffig, 31.08.1943, O.64/12.1 – 425, YVA.

³² Petition of Robert Stricker, 28.08.1943, O.64/12.1 – 426, YVA.

³³ Both quotes from petition of Richard Friedmann, 03.09.1943, O.64/11.1 – 203, YVA. Translation by the author.

³⁴ Petition for exemption from transport on behalf of Lydia Altmannová, 03.09.1943, O.64/15.1 – 1041, YVA. Translation by the author.

played, although he had already seen for himself that in this way he could not achieve his sought-after goal.³⁵

The petitions filed by the departments of the Jewish 'self-administration' on behalf of their protégés proved to have a much greater impact on the outcome of eventual exemptions than those submitted by individual inmates on their own behalf or by some of their relatives. In mathematical terms, the actual weight of such petitions was 14 percent greater with the 'Council of Elders', and even 19 percent higher in case of the Jewish 'self-administration'.³⁶

Each department of the Jewish 'self-administration' had its own protection list. Until its abolition in mid-August 1943, the protection list of the Ghetto Guard had as many as 348 slots.³⁷ The Youth Welfare Department (*Jugendfürsorge*) that had at its disposal 15 protected places also sought to exempt Alžběta Hirschová, one of the leaders in a children's home. Exempted from a transport, she was then transferred to take care of the Białystok children with whom she later found death in Auschwitz-Birkenau.³⁸

Protection lists were also known to have their own specific order of names, which turned out to be an important factor considered on many occasions, as proved by the preserved petitions. Alice Ehrlichová, a chief disinfecting specialist, was exempted from transport, as she had figured in the 14th place on the list of 186 names of the inner staff of the Insect Control Department (*Entwesung*).³⁹ The Bank of the Jewish 'self-administration' was another division for which we have a definite idea of the scope of its protected persons. The bank stated in its exemption list that out of the 37 inmates of Protectorate nationality, 20 people were registered, or rather enrolled, in labor transports. The entire protection list of the Bank of the Jewish 'self-administration' contained 87 names.⁴⁰ The Technical Department (*Technische Abteilung*) sent to the Transport Commission a list of persons over 60 years of age, defining three major groups for exemption. Group A was reserved for workers deemed indispensable for the department, group B contained workforce necessary for Barracks Construction (*Baracken-*

35 Petition of Max Popper, 06.09.1943, O.64/21.2 – 2374, YVA.

36 Professor Jurajda's research concerning the transports 'Dl' and 'Dm', in an e-mail to the author, 29.09.2020.

37 Exemption of Karel Schnürmacher, 04.09.1943, O.64/10.1 – 1, YVA.

38 Petition filed by Bedřich Prager, an official of the Youth Welfare Department, on behalf of Alžběta Hirschová, 16.08.1943, O.64/15.2 – 1142, YVA.

39 Petition of Josef Pacovský, head of the Insect Control Department, 03.09.1943, O.64/13.2 – 797, YVA. Cf. Youth Welfare Department to Zucker, O.64/12.2 – 559; 15.1 – 1045; 17.1 – 1457, YVA.

40 Exemption list of the Bank of the Jewish 'self-administration', 04.09.1943, O.64/14.1 – 803, YVA. Cf. also petition filed by the bank on the exemption from transport of its two colleagues, b.d., O.64/17.1 – 1452, YVA.

bau), while group C featured family members of reliable employees of that particular department.⁴¹ Attached to the Technical Department, the Railroad Construction Division (*Bahnbau*) insisted on the protection of its 30 workers critically needed for railroad maintenance. Interestingly, the list comprising 30 names was compiled at the instigation of the SS headquarters.⁴² Endeavors to keep the employees of the individual departments or divisions in the ghetto are attested to by their insistence on the stipulated protection quotas.⁴³

The extant correspondence maintained between the various departments and its senior Jewish officials with the Transportation Department indicate that the assignments of their personnel were not classified as intentional, but rather as ‘errors’ that had to be speedily corrected.⁴⁴ Julius Grünberger, head of the Technical Department, wrote in his letter to Eppstein, that he was inclined to believe that, as concerned the exemption petition on behalf of carpenters Oskar Beer and Isidor Zehngut from the Barracks Construction Division, the head of the Transport Department Cantor had not shown what Grünberger termed “correct grasp of the matter”, and that was why he called for their “authentic exemption”.⁴⁵

Besides the protection lists of the ‘Council of Elders’ and the individual departments of the Jewish ‘self-administration’, there were preserved lists drawn up by the Jewish municipality containing the names of persons working for the German SS Camp Command or the ‘Berlin “M” headquarters’, hence the archive of the RSHA in Terezín. Their protective effect for September transports was surprisingly slight.⁴⁶ The protective effect of the list kept by the ‘Berlin “M” headquarters’ was quite intriguing in that it did not provide any protection at all. Even though the list, comprising the names of 16 men, was compiled for the protection of persons against transports in September 1943, ten inmates were called up precisely for those transports. None of them survived.⁴⁷

41 Petition filed by the Technical Department, 23.08.1943, O.64/19.3 – 1994, YVA.

42 Petition of Bruno Knöpfelmacher, foreman of the first company, and Bedřich Stern, O.64/14.2 – 995, YVA. Their petition had been ignored and both were put on the transport.

43 Petition filed by the K-production concerning the additional list, 23.08.1943, O.64/18.2 – 1799, YVA.

44 WAP to the Central Secretariat/Transport Commission, 04.09.1943, O.64/10.1 – 17, YVA.

45 Both quotes from Julius Grünberger’s letter to Paul Eppstein, 04.09.1943, O.64/13.1 – 602, YVA. Translation by the author.

46 Permanent cleaning service for the headquarters, including the clubhouse for SS officers, December 1943, O.64/22.2 – 3125, YVA.

47 Protection list of the parties permanently working in the Bodenbach Barracks who were listed as protected, 05.09.1943, O.64/16.1 – 1248, YVA.

Deported and Saved Prisoners

Despite the fact that the fate of the Terezín prisoners may have been influenced to some extent by the Jewish 'self-administration' of the Terezín ghetto, whether Terezín inmates succeeded in staying in the ghetto or not depended primarily on the directives issued by the SS headquarters. One of the directives why Terezín inmates could end up in transports was an entry in their criminal records in the ghetto or their incarceration.⁴⁸ A criterion for inclusion was the fact that inmates had been imprisoned in one of the Terezín jails for over two weeks.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the WAP added that the SS Command insisted on inclusion into transport by order (*Weisung*) for those sentenced for more than three months.⁵⁰

In addition to the instructions and guidelines derived from those directives, the Jewish 'self-administration' laid down its own internal criteria, taking into account some groups of prisoners. Also relevant for protection against deportation was the exploitation of the prisoners' labor. The so-called K-production (*K-Produktion*), for example, located on the main square inside the ghetto, i. e. the manufacture of boxes for equipment facilitating starting engines of army vehicles at low temperatures, ranked among the production sectors vital for the war economy and was managed and manned by ghetto inmates. According to order of the day No. 328 dated June 1, 1943, some 1,000 people were slated to be deployed in this branch.⁵¹ However, the total numbers in this case speak of something very different than the fact that the requirements of meeting the Wehrmacht orders were also accompanied by the need to protect this production sector. According to Dr. Kussy, head of the K-production, the name of its worker Eliška Picková was on a list of 30 protected persons of the K-production. However, Picková was summoned for a transport in December 1943 after the relevant production was terminated.⁵² Even though other instructions issued by the SS headquarters in Terezín

48 Egon Preiss said that he had been included in a transport with his whole family, namely together with other protectorate inmates who found themselves in jail. Petition of Egon Preiss, 01.09.1943, O.64/17.2 – 1515, YVA.

49 To punish violations of SS prohibitions and orders, the so-called Jewish ghetto court was in operation in Terezín. It sentenced minor offences to the so-called Jewish prison, while some serious offences were dealt with in the prison at the SS Headquarters or by sending them to the nearby Gestapo police prison in the Little Fortress.

50 Petition by the WAP, 29.08.1943, O.64/19.1 – 1862, YVA.

51 Order of the day No. 328, 01.06.1943, A 3389, Terezín Memorial Archive.

52 Petition of Dr Kussy on behalf of Eliška Picková, 14.08.1943, O.64/14.1 – 818, YVA.

were aimed at protecting vitally important sectors for war production,⁵³ not all of the workers were automatically saved. A petition filed by the WAP concerning Otilie Saarová, one of the best seamstresses in the Uniform Mending Department (*Uniformkonfektion*), noted that she should be exempted from the transport as “we refer to the instructions issued by the SS headquarters”⁵⁴. This protective arrangement concerned the 13 best workers employed in the vital war production sectors, an understanding promised on September 4, 1943, by the station’s civilian employee, inspector Friedrich Komarek, to Gustav Korngold, head responsible for this division. Of those 13 allegedly “indispensable”⁵⁵ women mentioned in the official document for Karl Schliesser, head of the Economic Department, another eight women were called up for transports in September 1943.

Members of the Ghetto Guard (GW) constituted a sizable group heavily afflicted by call-ups for the September transports. At the instigation of SS Commandant Burger, the total number of GW members was to be reduced through transports, and as many as 150 of them were to be summoned for the September transports. Three former GW members, Kurt Singer, Viktor Drechsler and Richard Nettl, approached Eppstein with the argument that according to the official record, parents and children under 14 years of age and persons from ‘mixed marriages’ were eligible for exemption from transports. In their opinion, there were some 20 ‘Aryan’-related inmates as well as 50 people with children under the age of 14 years among some 300 GW members. If these persons were to be exempted from the transport, another 230 persons, i.e. “enough other material”,⁵⁶ would have remained for selecting 150 people for the transport.

Social capital also played a seminal role in many cases for exemption from a transport. The great importance of social bonds established among Terezín inmates either prior to their deportation or during incarceration in Terezín is illustrated in the correspondence of Kurt Bauer from the Transport Department who interceded for a brother and a sister-in-law of Max Löbl from the Central Secretariat in Terezín. As a reason for exemption he argued – in addition to knowing the family from Brno – that these were reliable and charitable people; he added that Löbl spent three months in the Sudeten Barracks as his “bed neighbor”.⁵⁷

⁵³ Information for Otto Zucker on the requirements of the SS headquarters (Moes and Bartels), 03.09.1943, O.64/17.2 – 1589, YVA.

⁵⁴ Petition filed by the WAP, 04.09.1943, O.64/11.1 – 218, YVA. Translation by the author.

⁵⁵ Official record for Mr. Schliesser, petition of Gustav Korngold, 04.09.1943, O.64/11.1 – 230, YVA. Translation by the author.

⁵⁶ Petition of Viktor Drechsler, Kurt Singer, and Richard Nettl, 28.08.1943, O.64/17.2 – 1534, YVA. Translation by the author.

⁵⁷ Petition of Dr Bauer, b.d., O.64/20.3 – 2153, YVA. Translation by the author.

The importance of the social ties originating in the rooms of Terezín's buildings and halls is also documented by Bauer's other petition pertaining to the exemption from transport of the wife and son of Julius Singer who had died of typhoid:

Her husband, Ing. Julius Singer, [...] lived for more than a year with us in the room for staff officials No. 124 and later 239 [...]. During his illness we, his roommates, promised him [...] that whatever happens we would stand behind his wife and his sick child [...]. [T]hey are threatened, and I dare to express a polite request on my own behalf and on behalf of all the friends of the deceased [...] to provide them the greatest possible protection.⁵⁸

Quite surprisingly, well-known personalities of Terezín's life were also included in the September transports. Karel Švenk, an actor, producer and composer, who was called up for the second September transport ('Dm'), can be counted in this category. His petition for exemption and that of his parents was supported by Rafael Schächter and seven other artists.⁵⁹ A great deal of credit for his exemption from the transport went to Otto Zucker, member of the 'Council of Elders' in the Terezín ghetto responsible for the youth, cultural life and work commitment of the prisoners, to whom Švenk wrote the following words: "Dear Sir! Overjoyed, I hasten to express my profound thanks. Now I will dedicate my life to arts, fulfilling my legacy and so forth. I thank you once again, greeting you, yours Karel Švenk".⁶⁰

The 'elite' of Terezín's contemporary theater and cultural life also interceded on behalf of Rudolf Weiss, expert in theater make-up, wigs and beards, "the only one who had any knowledge of the art of make-up as well as of making aids for make-up designers"⁶¹ and head of the barber shop in the Hannover Barracks. However, not even the signatures of Karel Švenk, Gustav Schorsch, Hans Hofer, Otakar Růžička, Karel Lustig or Eugen Weisz could stop Weiss's deportation.

Foreign nationals were also among those who were removed from transport lists. As mentioned before, the September 1943 transports had been declared by decision of the SS as transports made up of participants from the Protectorate transports. The Jewish 'self-administration' had to accept these guidelines and therefore it comes as a surprise that names of deportees from Germany, Austria and the Netherlands were also among the exemption petitions. The inmates thus

⁵⁸ Petition of Kurt Bauer concerning the exemption of the Singer family, 04.09.1943, O.64/13.1 – 643, YVA. Translation by the author.

⁵⁹ Petition of Karel Švenk, 30.08.1943, O.64/18.1 – 1607, YVA.

⁶⁰ Karel Švenk's transport number, 05.09.1943, O.64/21.2 – 2464, YVA. Translation by the author.

⁶¹ Petition filed by the members of the Free Time Organization Department, 13.08.1943, O.64/23 – 10, YVA. Translation by the author.

involved were well aware of this restriction and rightly and successfully took advantage of it. Persons who had arrived in some of the earlier German, Austrian or Dutch transports (a total of 230 people, i.e. 4.6 percent of all the deportees in both transports) were eventually called up for the transports, because the 'self-administration' had registered them as stateless.⁶² Another reason for why their names had been put on the transport lists could be their criminal records.⁶³ However, prisoners with German nationality, who had come to Terezín with transports from the Protectorate, were not taken into account.⁶⁴

There were also foreign nationals coming to Terezín in transports from Germany and Austria. Bertha Frommerová with her daughter were former Slovak nationals and there are reasons to believe that an existing agreement between the Slovak state and Germany on the deportation of Slovakian Jews was the main cause of their summons to the September transports.⁶⁵ The fact that German nationals were not supposed to get deported with the September 1943 transports offered a chance for many inmates from the Protectorate and Slovakia to get their names off the transportation lists. Many Protectorate inmates could refer to their marriage with German nationals in Terezín. Slovak national Alice Klopstocková was not deported, being the common-law wife of Otto Pollak, a German national who had come to the camp in a Vienna transport.⁶⁶ On the contrary, the German national Lieselotte Schönfeld, who had been deported to Terezín with the 95th Berlin transport, had to get a permission from the 'Elder of the Jews' Eppstein for her voluntary inclusion into transport to accompany her non-German fiancé Ervín Hecht, deported from Prague in transport 'AAw' in August 1942.⁶⁷

Another internal directive for automatic exemption from transports hinged on inmates' previous post of a regional head of Jewish religious communities and their families.⁶⁸ However, this did not apply to all former heads of the Jewish communities in the Protectorate. Judging by the notes attached to the petition filed by Arnošt Löwy, who had stood at the helm of the Jewish religious Community in Uherský Brod for 15 years, we may assume that in his case the 'self-admin-

⁶² Petition of Lilly Schatzmann deported to the ghetto from Dortmund, 04.09.1943, O.64/13.2 – 703, YVA.

⁶³ Note on the person of Anna Reisz, b.d., O.64/13.1 – 602, YVA.

⁶⁴ Petition of Max Körner, 28.09.1943, O.64/19.2 – 1925, YVA.

⁶⁵ Petition of Bertha Frommerová, 01.09.1943, O.64/19.2 – 1918, YVA.

⁶⁶ Note on the person of Alice Klopstocková, b.d., O.64/13.1 – 602, YVA.

⁶⁷ Information of the Transport Commission concerning Lieselotte Schönfeld, 06.09.1943, O.64/19.3 – 1993, YVA.

⁶⁸ Petition of Rudolf Steiner, b.d., O.64/10.2 – 103, YVA.

istration' itself sought to argue for his removal from the transport. Dr Wiener from Transport Department dismissed a postscript that could have meant survival for Löwy with a laconic reply: "Ernst Löwy [...] does not figure on any of the objective protection lists".⁶⁹ This eventually led to the inclusion of the whole family in the transport.

People of mixed descent ('*Mischlinge*') and persons related to 'Aryans' through 'German-Aryan mixed-marriages' ('*Deutsch-arische Mischehen*', DAM) constituted a large group of inmates who proved to be successful in their struggle to be exempted from the September transports. Contrary, prisoners from 'Czech[=Protectorate]-Aryan mixed-marriages' ('*Č[=Tsch]echisch-arische Mischehen*', ČAM) were universally included in the transport, unless other successful reasons for exemption were given.

All the efforts of the Jewish 'self-administration' were focused on preserving – to the greatest possible extent – families together. A major factor the 'self-administration' was obliged to take into consideration was the bulk of 285 petitions filed to prevent the separation of families (*Familienzerreissung*). A total of 151 of such appeals were accepted, and the petitioners were, indeed, exempted from transports. Some of the life stories, as described by the preserved petitions, are truly heart-rending. Such was the case of Kamila Seidlerová who petitioned for her three daughters, all of them aged around 50, to be removed from the transport list. Since all three had been included in the transport together, their mother asked for their exemption on the grounds of family separation, and if not possible, pleaded that at least one of them should be left in Terezín. Neither Alice Seidlerová nor her two other sisters had been saved from the September transport. Mother Kamila, who was deported later, was reunited with her daughters in the Terezín family camp in December 1943, and probably witnessed their murders in the Auschwitz-Birkenau gas chambers in March 1944.⁷⁰

Nearly 14 percent of all the submitted petitions for exemption (62 percent of them successful) were related to the petitioners' work for the ghetto. Protection from transports based on inmates' labor deployment proved its worth primarily in case of professional and skilled jobs in great demand. Inmates, who held very specialized jobs and were indispensable, could (at least) temporarily protect their parents as well. A case in point was František Süßland, the only roofer in the ghetto. Thanks to his 'unique' job, he was not even sent to outside com-

69 Petition of Arnošt Löwy, 16.08.1943, O.64/20.3 – 2156, YVA. Translation by the author.

70 Petition of Kamila Seidlerová, 28.08.1943, O.64/20.1 – 2045, YVA.

mandos to Oslavany or Kladno. He was in a position to arrange the exemption of his parents from the September transports.⁷¹

In addition, professional lobbying also helped in keeping a given person in the Terezín ghetto. A prominent figure in the ghetto, Hans Pick, former chief engineer of the Association for Chemical and Metallurgical Production in Ústí nad Labem, a leading personality of former Czechoslovakia's chemical industry, interceded for his colleague and fellow prisoner Max Freund, a chemical engineer and member of the Delousing Division.⁷²

Out of the 3,721 persons, who asked for exemption from the September 1943 transports, 493 of them gave as one of the reasons their inability to manage the transport due to illness. For their purposes in the matter of exempting petitioners from transports on medical grounds, the Jewish 'self-administration' made use of the services of the official physician (*Amtsarzt*) Hugo Holzinger.⁷³ Based on the data from the extant medical files, his official statements on the health of potential deportees decided about their temporary rescue or call-up for deportation. Medical testimonies and records on medical cards played a significant role in the process of putting inmates on or off the transport lists.⁷⁴ Hugo Richter and his family members, all prisoners in Terezín, were seriously affected. Richter himself suffered from cardiomalacia and asthma, and his wife and son were mentally ill. Their petition was examined by Holzinger who added a note to their petition, saying, "their exemption from a medical point of view is not justifiable".⁷⁵ However, according to Holzinger, the critical factor for exemption from transport was not fitness for work but rather severe physical damage.⁷⁶ Although the September transports had been declared as deportations to labor camps, some of the inmates, in spite of their incapacity for work entered in their work cards, were still included in the transports.⁷⁷

A relatively large portion of prisoners, at least 157 persons, included in the September 1943 transports, were volunteers. Their volunteer registrations were also filed through petitions. There were three categories of petitions concerning voluntary reports for transports. The first type comprised an unconditioned participation in the transport by the petitioner. The second one relates to the so-

71 Petition of František Süßland, 04.09.1943, O.64/13.1 – 619, YVA.

72 Petitions by Hans Pick and Karl Schliesser, 04.09.1943, O.64/11.1 – 245, 245a, YVA.

73 Petition of the War Invalids Department, 04.09.1943, O.64/12.2 – 540, YVA.

74 "(He) is not reported sick. No reason for exemption. (Signed) Holzinger." Holzinger's note on the petition of Josef Wantoch, 16.08.1943, O.64/19.1 – 1840, YVA.

75 Medical testimony, 20.08.1943, O.64/13.2 – 672, YVA. Translation by the author.

76 Holzinger's medical opinion on Julius Lappert, 01.09.1943, O.64/19.3 – 1964, YVA.

77 Petition of Kamil Upřimný, 05.09.1943, O.64/13.1 – 625, YVA.

called voluntary but conditional inclusion – *bedingt freiwillig*. This means that the petitioner was enrolled in a transport only if another mentioned person in the petition was exempted from the transport.⁷⁸ The last, third type featured what was called compensatory exchange. In such cases, individual inmates or a department of the Jewish ‘self-administration’ briefed the Transport Department that their exemption from transport would be compensated for by voluntary replacement with another inmate.⁷⁹ Several similar petitions have been preserved in the files of documents of the Transport Department. A conditional exchange is also known to have transpired, this time successfully, between Tomáš Kosta and František Eisenschimmel. With his offer, the latter, a famous member of the Construction Commando, actually saved Tomáš Kosta’s life.⁸⁰

Final Remarks and Conclusion

As many as 5,007 people had left the Terezín ghetto with the two transports in September 1943. After the compilation, the deportees had to board the trains, which each consisted of 50 freight wagons. Via the train station Bohušovice nad Ohří, just approx. two kilometers away, where the control over the train was taken over from the gendarmes by members of the Schutzpolizei (Schupo), the trains departed to Auschwitz. The first 50 wagons left Bohušovice at 2 p.m. on September 6, 1943, and the second set of 50 wagons departed at 8 o’clock in the evening of the same day. After the departure of the transports ‘Dl’ and ‘Dm’ life in the ghetto was gradually settling down to its old ways. Already three days after the transport departure the Magdeburg Barracks housed the Terezín premiere of Mozart’s “Magic Flute” (*Zauberflöte*) and nobody could then suspect that only less than one percent of the more than five thousand deportees would live to see their liberation.

The petitions are a rare testimony to the assembly of two transports and the attempts of the deportees to escape being transported away. Unaware of their tragic fate, they had tried to use every possibility to avert their inclusion in

⁷⁸ Petition of Ettie Gottesmann, O.64/13.2 – 756, YVA.

⁷⁹ If a member of a department volunteered for a transport, the respective department could suggest the exemption of another of its members called up for that transport. For instance, the Agriculture Department asked for the exemption from transport of Hermína Polláková in exchange of volunteer Anna Felsenbergová. See petition filed by the Agriculture Department on behalf of Hermína Polláková, 04.09.1943, O.64/10.1 – 30, YVA.

⁸⁰ Notification concerning František Eisenschimmel’s conditional voluntary report, b.d., O.64/10.2 – 135, YVA.

the transport. It is sad reality that almost half of all preserved documents in this convolute documents the failure of the Terezín prisoners. We must note that some of the documents, applications or lists requesting exemption from the transports contained the names of both groups of prisoners – those included in the transports and those removed from the lists.

Based on an analysis of almost 2,500 petitions for exemption, it is possible to trace the petitioner's successful or unsuccessful attempts to save themselves from deportations. The study of this particular file of documents is conducive to understanding the actual range of possible actions by the inmates themselves and of the Jewish 'self-administration', which was obliged to abide by the SS instructions in Terezín. In addition to unique information about the life of the Terezín prisoners, these applications provide micro surveys of important aspects of the coerced community, such as the importance of sponsorship by individual departments and/or the 'Council of the Elders', social ties between prisoners, value of labor or the lobbying and excellent protection for individual craftsmen in short supply. We could also examine a statistical effect of the time of application or the form of application. We observe protection of certain groups of prisoners (artists, agricultural workers, partly K-production), not significant effect of illness, an impact of the family relations (e.g., through marriages with non-Jewish Germans or Czechs).

Escaping a form of certain 'self-selection' through the Jewish administration required having, at the appropriate time, the appropriate 'key' accepted by the SS and applied by the Jewish administration. These 'keys' in the form of labor, transport incapacity (sickness), and relations with the 'Aryan' population constituted defense mechanisms of 'ordinary' prisoners. The above all most important and widespread mechanism of protection was the creation of important ties to the alleged 'power-full'.

Murmelstein, in his postwar testimony, stated that working on the transport committees carried with it a heavy burden of responsibility, since the elimination of one person resulted in the inclusion of another. Although exemption claims were in the end in most cases without factual basis, they had a great psychological effect as evidence of good will on the part of the leadership of the Jewish 'self-administration'.⁸¹ Such evidence of goodwill, however, only amounted to a 'temporary' reprieve. Of the 2,047 persons excluded from deportation to 'the East' in September 1943, only 291 were not deported by further 'Eastern transports', to see their liberation.

81 Deposition of Benjamin Murmelstein in his own case, 11.02.1946, 305–633–1, ABS.

