





AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU

dedicated to
Marceline Loridan-Ivens



Let us state once again: the point here is not to indulge in permanent self-chastisement or make a declaration of guilt as proof of remorse or atonement. This would be nothing more than hypocrisy and, more to the point, would have no effect whatsoever in political terms. We are not interested in pointing the finger or defaming the German people, unless, as happens in some places, there is an existence of solidarity with the murderers even today.

The focus here is on our obligation as human beings to remember the murdered, and this includes obtaining an explanation from a political point of view of the events which occurred at that time, both for the benefit of mankind and the good of democracy. We must understand what happened, how it happened and why it was allowed to happen: to acknowledge the sheer dimensions of this crime in all its horrific detail and in its entirety; to identify the system which conceived and implemented this plan and the society responsible for bringing forth this

system. We must examine the traditions of a seemingly irrational ideology, and explore the concrete strategic economic interests which supported it. And we must unearth the root cause of this evil, to explain what can be explained – even if all that remains is incomprehension, and the stunned silence which accompanies it.

Gerhard Schoenberner



“When, in the summer of 1941, he himself gave me the order to prepare installations at Auschwitz where mass exterminations could take place, and personally to carry out these exterminations, I did not have the slightest idea of their scale or consequences. It was certainly an extraordinary and monstrous order. Nevertheless, the reasons behind the extermination programme seemed to me right. I did not reflect on it at the time; I had been given an order, and I had to carry it out. Whether this mass extermination of the Jews was necessary or not was something on which I could not allow myself to form an opinion, for I lacked the necessary breadth of view.”

Page 14, Side track of the west side of the Auschwitz-Dziedzice,
arrival of Marceline Loridan-Ivens, 1944



“Whereas the Jews who had been imprisoned in former years were able to count on being released one day and were thus far less affected psychologically by the hardship of captivity, the Jews in Auschwitz no longer had any such hope. They knew, without exception, that they were condemned to death, that they would live only so long as they could work.”

Page 16, Former work shed



“For some time I employed 5.000 Russians almost daily unloading trainloads of swedes. The railway tracks were blocked, mountains of swedes lay on the lines, and there was nothing to be done about it. The Russians were physically all in. They wandered aimlessly about, crept into a safe corner to swallow something edible that they found – wich was a great effort to them – or sought a quiet spot where the might die in peace.”

Page 18, Railway sidings approx. 400 m from the main gate



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“During the spring of 1942 hundreds of vigorous men and women walked all unsuspecting to their death in the gas chambers, under the blossom-laden fruit trees of the „Cottage“ orchard. This picture of death in the midst of life remains with me to this day.”

Page 20, Railway sidings approx. 300m from the main gate
Pages 22-23, Camp orchestra square, „death block“ and the women’s barracks





"In July 1942 the Reichsführer SS visited the camp. I took him all over the Gypsy camp. He made a most thorough inspection of everything, noting the overcrowded barrack-huts, the unhygienic conditions, the cramped hospital building. He saw those who were sick with infectious diseases, and the children suffering from noma - which always made me shudder, since it reminded me of leprosy and of the lepers I had seen in Palestine - their little bodies wasted away, with gaping holes in their cheeks big enough for a man to see through, a slow putrefaction of the living body.

He noted the mortality rate, which was relatively low in comparison with that of the camp as a whole. The child mortality rate, however, was extraordinarily high. I do not believe that many new-born babies survived more than a few weeks.

He saw it all, in detail, and as it really was - and he ordered me to destroy them."





“What I have written above applies particularly to the female inmates of all types.

But then everything was much more difficult, harsher and more depressing for the women, since general living conditions in the women’s camp were incomparably worse. They were far more tightly packed, and the sanitary and hygienic conditions were notably inferior. Furthermore, the disastrous overcrowding and its consequences, which existed from the very beginning, prevented any proper order being established in the women’s camp.

The general congestion was far greater than in the men’s camp. When the women had reached the bottom, they would let themselves go completely. They would then stumble about like ghosts, without any will of their own, and had to be pushed everywhere by the others, until the day came when they quietly passed away. These stumbling corpses were a terrible sight.”

