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The Hierarchy Established by the SS in Concentration Camps; Benedikt Kautsky's Contribution to Further Understanding

Source:

The source is "Benedikt Kautsky's Description of the Concentration Camp Hierarchy," which describes how prisoners in the concentration camps during WWII were categorized and the positions they held. Kautsky discusses how prisoners are categorized in the hierarchal scale depending on their ethnicity, the crimes they committed, and their assigned jobs.

Location of Original Document:

This excerpt from Kautsky's book was published on the German History in Documents and Images website. The GHDI website obtained the excerpt from the English translation of *Nazism: 1919-1945*, Vol. 4: *The German Home Front in World War II* by Jeremy Noakes. The original German source is *Teufel und Verdammte. Erfahrungen und Erkenntnisse aus sieben Jahren in deutschen Konzentrationslagern* [*The Devil and the Damned. Experiences and Insights from Seven Years in German Concentration Camps*] by Benedikt Kautsky published in 1946 by Büchergilde Gutenberg, Zurich. There was a copy of the English version in the library and the German version was available through the interlibrary loan in the UC library system.

Biographical information:

Kautsky (1894-1960) was an Austrian economist, financial expert, and a Socialist. He was the son of Lousie and Karl Kautsky. His father was a well-known Czech-Austrian philosopher, journalist, and Marxist theoretician. Kautsky was arrested on May 1938 when the Nazis took over Austria (Encyclopedia, 2016). He spent the first three months of his incarceration at the Dachau concentration camp then transferred to Buchenwald. He was then transferred to camp Monowitz in Auschwitz in October of 1942. He was then transported back to Buchenwald on January 1945 and stayed there until its liberation in April of 1945. After the war he became a lecturer at the University of Graz and joined the Socialist Party of Austria (Wikipedia, 2015). He was an author of the reformist program of the Social Democratic Party of Austria in 1958 (Encyclopedia, 2016). According to Melvy/worldcat, his first publication was in 1914 and his last in 1960.

Description of Publication:

In this excerpt Kautsky addresses the hierarchy constructed by the SS, which gave some prisoners prestige that created competition for survival. Four categories existed for prisoners to be placed; the Top people, the Middle Class, the Great Mass, and Muselmann. The Top people held offices that ran the camp and were picked for efficiency or for their working ties with the SS. Those in this category constantly competed with each other and devised plans for supremacy. Better accommodations, an increase in power and respect were given to those who held higher positions. Before the war almost all at the top were German, but other ethnic groups could reach the top. The Middle Class held many and had less power and responsibilities. In the early years German “Aryans” were given priority, but this group grew filled with the influx of foreigners. Although work was hard and food was scarce, the mental stress was alleviated without the supervision of the SS. The Great Mass was considered to be “normal conditions” of labor, food rations, and supervision. Assigned workloads were the difference between life and death. The Muselmann were the lowest rank in the hierarchy. They were forced to march, do tough labor, starve, and live in filth and rags. In the camps everyone had a place.

Context of Publication:

The book, which contains the excerpt, conveys his experiences as a prisoner of three different concentration camps (Wien Geschichte). The excerpt is an example of what Kautsky experienced and learned throughout his time being imprisoned. According to Melvy/worldcat there have been at least six editions of the original German book. The book has been translated to English and Norwegian, but they are from the 1960 German edition.

Publication citations

Google Scholar provided twenty publications that cited the original German book by Kautsky using the different editions that were produced.

1. Adler, H. G. 1960. “Selbstverwaltung und Widerstand in den Konzentrationslagern der SS”. *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 8 (3). Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, pp. 221–36.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30195025>.

This journal article is about the autonomy and resistance in the concentration camps that were led by the SS. The article cites Kautsky’s book because of his description of the hierarchy that was created by the SS. Also with personal experiences while imprisoned. There were variety forms of resistance with the camps despite being ruled over by the guards.

2. Hans. H. Kornhuber, "Soziale und angewandte Psychiatrie," in *Psychologie und Psychiatrie der Kriegsgefangenschaft* (Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 1961).

In this book Kornhuber discusses the psychological effects and experiences that prisoners went through, like during WWII and the concentration camps. Kautsky's book was cited due to his experience being in different camps. The purpose of the camps at first was to hold political opponents and prisoners of war. Then they held Jews and others who were not considered to be part of the German people. The inmates experienced hard labor, ill treatment, and conditions that resulted in mass death and psychological scarring.

3. Helen Waterford, *Commitment to the Dead: One Woman's Journey Toward Understanding* (American Traveler Press, 1987).

In the book is about the story of a women's journey of her life through the rise and during Hitler's regime. The book provides insight and experiences to further understand the Holocaust. Kautsky himself was born in the pre-war time of Europe and had witnessed the changes that led to the rise of Hitler's regime. He was also a victim of Hitler's plans in reconstructing Europe and had witnessed the devastations caused during the Holocaust with the perspective of being in the camps. Waterford cited Kautsky's book because of the experiences he went through that are related to the author's book.

4. Lorenz, Dagmar C.G.. 1993. "Memory and Criticism: Ruth Klüger's Weiter Leben". *Women in German Yearbook* 9. University of Nebraska Press. p.207–24.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20688785>.

This journal article is about the autobiography of Ruth Klüger who was an Auschwitz survivor. Through her teaching and becoming a professor she provides a description of concentration camp life and the insights into the experiences of being a Jewish women. The author, Lorenz, uses Klüger's biography in looking at collective memory and the multidimensional perspectives of Germany. Kautsky is cited as he himself was a survivor from different concentration camps and has also written about his experiences as well.

5. Thomas Bronisch, "Suicidality in German concentration camps," *Archives of Suicide Research* (1996).

In this journal article the author looks into suicidality under extreme life-threatening conditions in order to understand more about suicidal behavior. The article looks at the former inmates of the German concentration camps as they have been exposed to such extreme conditions.

Although there was a low suicide rates many inmates contemplated suicide and the article explores that reasoning. Kautsky's book is used to support the article because it includes the conditions the prisoners were exposed to along with the SS ruling over them.

6. Bernd C. Wagner, *IG Auschwitz: Zwangsarbeit und Vernichtung von Häftlingen des Lagers Monowitz 1941-1945* (Walter de Gruyter, 2000).

In this book the author explores the activities of the company IG Farben that was German chemical industry conglomerate. The company worked in Auschwitz on the concentration camp Monowitz and with corporation with the SS. The book also looks at the lives of the prisoners who were forced to labor. One of the camps that Kautsky was imprisoned in was Monowitz. His experience in the camp provided evidence of what was it like for the prisoners in that camp.

7. Paul Neurath, Nico Stehr, Christian Fleck, *Society of Terror: Inside the Dachau and Buchenwald Concentration Camps* (Routledge, 2015).

The book is about the experiences the Paul Neurath went through being a political prisoner at the Dachau and Buchenwald camps. The book offers an inside look at what it was like to be a prisoner in the camps through reign of Hitler. Kautsky was a political prisoner and was held at both of these camps. His experiences complement Neurath's experiences to create more of an understanding of what went on in the camps, which is why the author cited Kautsky's book.

8. "The Myth of Six Million-Myths and Realities Concerning Auschwitz and other Death Camps." Institute for Historical Review. www.ihr.org/books/hoggan/18.html.

This is part of the short book that promotes Holocaust denial and was written by David Hoggan. Hoggan argues that the evidence for the Holocaust was manufactured to justify the war against Germany. Kautsky is cited in a quote stating that we never saw any gas chambers at Auschwitz. However, according to the Wikipedia page of David Hoggan he has been accused of re-arranging words from documents to support his claims, including the quote from Kautsky. The real context of the quote was that although Kautsky did not personally see the gas chambers they were described to him by trustworthy people and was not hesitant to reproduce their testimony.

Newspaper Articles

Searching the author's name provided an article from the *New York Times* that detailed his passing and gave a small biography of his life including his survival of three Nazi concentration camps. Another article from the *Los Angeles Times* described the German court trial of Ilse Koch, in which Kautsky was the leadoff prosecution witness.

Translator:

The book that contained the excerpt was originally written in German from the 1961 edition and was translated by Jeremy Noakes into English. According to Melvy/worldcat, Noakes has written several historical texts on German history and biographies. He is a known author, translator, and editor. His first publication was in 1968 and his latest in 2015. *Nazism, 1919-1945*, a four-volume work, is one of his highly regarded works.

Relation to other sources:

Kautsky's book has served as a key resource for other writers' research and publications on a wide variety of topics relating to German history. Books, articles, and journals have cited his book to help support their topics. Experiences of being held in different concentration camps have given readers a first hand experience of camp conditions and the thoughts of prisoners. Being able to convey his experiences in a book has provided an invaluable resource in further research and understanding.

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