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Inmate Hierarchies in Nazi Concentration Camps

- Source: GDHI Document : Benedikt Kautsky's Description of the Concentration Camp Hierarchy (Retrospective Account, 1961)
Permalink: http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1512
- Original German text: *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*]. Vienna, pp. 160-69. (1946)
- Source of English translation: Jeremy Noakes, ed., *Nazism, 1919-1945*, Vol. 4: *The German Home Front in World War II*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1998, pp. 162-168.

An interminable campaign for survival describes the life and tribulations of Benedikt Kautsky. Benedikt Kautsky, son of Karl Kautsky, a prominent Socialist figure, wrote a memoir that illustrated his life during the years spent in Nazi concentration camps. The document I used for the main focus of my source was found on the GDHI database. This short excerpt is a retrospective account taken from Benedikt Kautsky's book *Teufel und Verdammte Erfahrungen und Erkenntnisse aus sieben Jahren in deutschen Konzentrationslagern*, which depicts life within concentration camp walls, and more importantly the infrastructure system created by the Nazi regime. The translation of the title in English reads, *The Devil and the Damned. Experiences and Insights from Seven Years in German Concentration Camps*. There are a couple of versions of the book, the original was written in by Büchergilde Gutenberg in 1946, and a new edition was published in 1961. Kautsky's memoir was written to apprise readers of the abominable events that occurred in the camps. A socio-political hierarchy amongst prisoners was devised by SS guards in order to establish a self-regulation system. The years during the Second World War is a period in history which will live in infamy. Elmer Luchterhand, author of the *Prisoner Behavior and Social System in the Nazi Concentration Camps*, recounts the effects of such an inhumane system that turned prisoners against each other for survival. Prisoner behavior along with social hierarchies within the camp was a determinant for death or survival. Grouping was determined by prisoner offenses, race, birthplace, and political beliefs.

Richard Mitten, author of *The Case of Hans Schafranek*, written in 1991. The German Court found Schafranek guilty for defamation of Emil Carlebach. Hans published a book named *Zwischen NKWD und Gestapo: Die Auslieferung Deutscher und osterreichischer Antifaschisten aus der Sowjetunion und Nazi-Deutschland 1937-1941* ([*Caught*] *Between the NKVD and the Gestapo: The Delivery of German and Austrian Anti Fascists in the Soviet Union to Nazi*

Germany, 1937-1941. In it he expresses thoroughly the misconduct of Carlebach behavior. Carlebach would serve a month in jail after these allegations. Carlebach, was prisoner at Buchenwald with Kautsky. Schafranek would utilize primary sources of other literature and interpret them himself. He attempts to show proof that Carlebach was a leader in the *Lagerfeme*, the Communist camp authority that was to be blamed for the death of political opponents. The importance of this document is when German Court decided to eliminate an excerpt from Schafranek's book where he quotes Kautsky saying, "Kautsky had initially had qualms of about sharing his knowledge about the activities of a few Stalinist functionaries among the inmates, and especially of Carlebach. In a letter dated 22, March 1951 he explains this hesitation." Schafranek would formulate his own ideas and publish them for readers. Kautsky would then voice his hesitation. He states, "I have also decided (but) only after a long hesitation to give my statement. [I have hesitated] above all because I've always feared that among a public which is scarcely able to acquaint itself with the problems of the concentration camps, a completely distorted and false impression could arise, namely, that the inmates themselves were primarily responsible for the atrocities committed in the camp." Schafranek framing Carlebach and twisting Kautsky's words, were for his own benefit. Henceforth, this led to his final guilty verdict.

The controversy would continue through time believed by many. For example that Auschwitz was never an extermination camp and was more of a myth than an actual fact. In the book *The Case for Auschwitz* by Robert Jan van Pelt, Van Pelt would illustrate David Irving's libel against Deborah Lipstadt and Penguin Books for defamation and falsely calling him a Holocaust denier. Robert Jan Van Pelt used anti holocaust literature to attempt to prove his argument that gas chambers were implemented in the camps for the use of murder.. He quoted Wilhelm Staglih, a Holocaust denier who wrote the book *Der Auschwitz Mythos (The Auschwitz Myth)*. Through the book, Staglih cites Kautsky several times for the purpose of providing counter evidence against the existence of the Holocaust. Staglih cited Kautsky by stating, "Nevertheless the gas chambers were close enough to obtain reliable information about them." Staglih would argue that Kautsky failed to provide readers with names of the inmates who conveyed information regarding the gas chambers, he'd conclude this as a "pure fantasy." Staglih supports his case by writing, "he also failed to give a convincing explanation of why he, a *Volljude*, was not gassed." Using Staglih's information, Irving would do the same when arguing in court. The use of Kautsky's testimony by Stalich which was used as evidence that proved to be invalid and resulted in the verdict against Irving. Primary accounts were essential for case reports, without them what could they have proven?

Primary accounts were vital for educating the masses about the internal hardships they faced under command of the Nazi regime along with the system run by the SS guards. Gerhard Botz, a German politician, wrote the article *,Binnenstruktur, Alltagsverhalten und Überlebenschancen in Nazi-Konzentrationslagern* in 1996. This article was originally written in German, Botz

utilize the memoir of Benedikt Kautsky *Teufel und Verdammte* citing him several times. Botz mentions the importance of Kautsky's literature and prisoners who lived to tell their testimonies. Botz states, "If one surveys the relevant literature, however, in the field of knowledge that is at issue there are still quantitatively dominated collections of documents, depictions of individual fates and singularizing investigations of (often important) details and local phenomena and to emphasize again, autobiographical (and literary) testimonies of survivors are the most important sources of our knowledge of the internal functioning and behavior of prisoners - or, more precisely, about the forms of memory and forms of processing, indeed meaning of survivors and survivors." Above all, this article is based on such types of texts and on a self-edited spoken autobiography, which is also essentially based on scientific processing that originates from survivors themselves and has sometimes been published several times the one hand or generalizing and global comparative or essayistic representations on the other on the other hand." Benedikt Kautsky's memoir is proven to be useful to not only historians but the public who have yet to be educated on this matter.

It was evident that Kautsky's writings contributed to the description of the system and how the Communist group was head of the camp prisoners. Jochen Staadt also employs the use of Kautsky's *Teufel und Verdammte* while expressing the severity of the work statistics.

Staadt describe the structure of the system and how Kautsky labeled the communist upper class in Buchenwald a "camp Aristocracy." The hierarchy was evidently led by the political prisoners holding the highest social status in the camp. Staadt cites Kautsky when he says, "jealousy preserved its advantages and asserted its position equally against the top - that is, the SS - as against below - the mass of inmates." The infrastructure created by the Nazi regime was an evil scheme that led to the deaths of millions of Jews.

Years after the horrific events the world had witnessed, authors continued to produce literature focusing on prison life. Lars Fischer wrote a case study focusing on Austrian Social Democrats delivering accounts of the Holocaust.. He focuses on Benedikt Kautsky, provides important accounts of what occurred in the camps. Subsequently after the Anschluss in 1938, Kautsky was sent to Dachau in 1938, Buchenwald in 1938-1942, and Auschwitz in 1938-1945. He explains his book *Teufel und Verdammte*, which was an account of the SS infrastructure rather than journals written about daily life. This was something that was hard to be talked about, survivors witnessed such atrocious events that forever will be engraved in their minds. Literature continued to be produced about the coping mechanisms prisoners used for survival and a peace of mind. From the website holocaustmusic.org, an article called *Music and the Holocaust*, written by Olivier Messiaen, he quotes Kautsky saying, "while according to Benedikt Kautsky, German Military marches were prohibited, one was nitpicky in the Buchenwald KZ, and Auschwitz, where you can hear several Old Prussian marches." It was recorded that music played an important role in inmate behavior in means of survival and also instrumental for SS Guards while instilling fear in the prisoners.

Annotated Bibliography

- Kautsky, Benedikt: *Teufel und Verdammte. Erfahrungen und Erkenntnisse aus sieben Jahren in deutschen Konzentrationslagern*. Zurich 1946.
Kautsky's book is a personal account providing readers with a dramatic illustration of life during imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps and the systematic infrastructure created by SS commandants. Prisoners living within camp walls were assembled into bodies of "greater or lesser prestige" hence, creating a socio-political system for self-regulation of inmates. The detestable actions of SS guards running the camps exemplified the cruelty and hateful scheme of the Nazi regime
- Luchterhand, Elmer. "Prisoner behavior and social system in the Nazi concentration camps." *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 13, no. 4 (1964): 245-264.
Elmer Luchterhand addressed the effects of a system implemented by the Nazis inside concentration camps at the First International Congress of Social Psychiatry in 1964. Detailed content contributed by camp survivors such as Benedikt Kautsky unfolds the main thesis in Luchterhand paper. He cites Kautsky by stating, "If the concentration camp was generally hell, then the camps under control of criminals were hell multiplied by a hundred times."
- Mitten, Richard. "The Case of Hans Schafranek." *Central European History* 24, no. 2-3 (1991): 335–44. Doi: 10.1017/S0008938900019087.
Richard Mitten, author of a case report that entailed the trial of Hans Schafranek and Emil Carlebach. The German court found Schafranek guilty for defamation of Emil Carlebach for using outside sources and asserting them as his own. Schafranek was able to convince readers that Soviet's and German secret police worked together in delivering certain groups of people to the Gestapo. Emil Carlebach, a prisoner at Buchenwald was a member of the *Lagerfeme*; the communist camp leadership that was created by the Nazis for self-regulation of the prisoners. Schafranek would use Kautsky as a source in attempt to provide proof of the *Lagerfeme* being responsible for the death of political opponents in the camp. Schafranek would cite Kautsky by saying, "Kautsky had initially had qualms of about sharing his knowledge about the activities of a few Stalinist functionaries among the inmates, and especially of Carlebach in a letter dated 22, March 1951 he explains this hesitation." Kautsky cleared this issue in his own affidavit where he stated, "I have also decided (but) only after a long hesitation to give my statement. [I have hesitated] above all because I've always feared that among a public which is scarcely able to acquaint itself with the problems of the concentration camps, a completely distorted and false impression could arise, namely, that the inmates themselves were primarily responsible for the atrocities committed in the camp."
- Botz, Gerhard. "Binnenstruktur, Alltagsverhalten Und Überlebenschancen in Nazi-Konzentrationslagern [1996]." *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung. Supplement*, no. 28 (2016): 335-53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43941257>.

The Article written by Gerhard Botz originally in German, describes the importance of personal accounts of survivors. Literature written by survivors has been essential for distinguishing diverse testimonies in order to depict factual events and analyze them. Gerhard Botz mentions the importance of Kautsky and his writings when he writes, “Benedikts Kautsky's memoirs have been useful throughout many written literatures.”

- Staadt, Jochen. "Die Mauerbauer." *Zeitschrift des Forschungsverbundes SED-Staat* 16, no. 16 (2004).
Jochen Staadt literature was influenced heavily by the works of Kautsky. Kautsky's accounts provided evidence of the importance of the status within the castes constructed in the camps. The communist were at the top of the camp caste, many of them would survive due to their status. Kautsky, a communist himself felt as he was similar to those in charge although they were enemies of the Nazi's. Staadt would quote Kautsky when he described the communist group of inmates as the “camp aristocracy, which “jealousy preserved its advantages and asserted its position equally against the top-that is, the SS- as against below-the mass of the inmates.” Kautsky's statement was evidence of how the camp system operated.
- Staglich, W. (2011). *Der Auschwitz-Mythos: Legende oder Wirklichkeit? Eine kritische Bestandsaufnahme*. Place of publication not identified: Castle Hill.
Wilhelm Staglich was one of many Holocaust deniers, he wrote *Der Auschwitz Mythos* in which he claims that Auschwitz was not a death camp. This book was used by Robert Jan Van Pelt to provide contradictory inmate accounts about the use of gas chambers. In Van Pelts book, he uses excerpts from Staglich's book where he cites Kautsky saying, “Nevertheless the gas chambers were close enough to obtain reliable information about them.” Staglich purpose for this quote was to persuade readers that Kautsky failed to provide names of inmates who conveyed this information. Hence the denial of the mass extermination of Jews was all a delusion.
- Pelt, R. J. (2016). *The case for Auschwitz: Evidence from the Irving trial*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
Robert Jan Pelt wrote a British High Court case study of David Irving and Deborah Lipstadt for accusing him of being a Holocaust denier. The utilization of gas chambers for mass extermination of Jews. This was the main topic presented in court in which he provides contradicting evidence of Wilhelm Staglich. He mentions Kautsky from his memoir saying, ““nevertheless the gas chambers were close enough to obtain reliable information about them.” Trials that occurred in the future have concluded with a verdict benefiting the defendant with the help of primary sources of survivors.
- Seymour, David M., and Mercedes Camino. *The Holocaust in the Twenty-First Century: Contesting/Contested Memories*. Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.
This book written by David Seymour and Mercedes Camino was focused on Austrian Social Democrats that voiced what had occurred during and after the Holocaust. In the book, Lars

Fischer writes a chapter called *Benedikt's Post War Response to Shoah* where he uses the memoirs of Kautsky as a key source to explaining the system being ran in the camp. He quotes Kautsky saying, "among the prisoners the Jews held the lowest position." He then follows with, "he was despised and tormented not only by the SS, but by fellow prisoners, some of whom shamelessly exploited his utter defenseless." The system was in fact historical and factual.

- Auslander, Leora, and Tara Zahra. *Objects of War: the Material Culture of Conflict and Displacement*. Cornell University Press, 2018.
The book originally written by Leora Auslander and Tara Zahara consisted of contribution of authors. Noah Benninga's chapter *The Bricolage of Death: Jewish Possessions and the Fashioning of the Prisoner Elite in Auschwitz-Birkenau* was a system stated previously throughout the Second World War. Leora's book provides a chapter in which Kautsky is mentioned by author Noah Benninga
- Benninga, Noah. "The Bricolage of Death: Jewish Possessions and the Fashioning of the Prisoner Elite in Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1942–1945." In *Objects of War: The Material Culture of Conflict and Displacement*, 189-220. Cornell University Press, 2018. Accessed February 17, 2019. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt1w0dddh.14>.
Deriving from the book *Objects of War: The Material Culture of Conflict and Displacement*, Author Noah Benninga wrote a chapter labeled *The Bricolage of Death: Jewish Possessions and the Fashioning of the Prisoner Elite in Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1942–1945*. Here he mentions Kautsky when he explains the socio- racial system created in the camps. He quotes Kautsky by saying, "the prisoner camp-eldest . . . stood higher above a Muselmann than a wealthy industrialist or the steersman of a democratic state stands above a penniless, unemployed man sleeping on a bench in the open." The system in which they were obliged to living clearly shows a huge differences in the chances of survival.
- ORT, World. "Music and the Holocaust." *Music and the Holocaust: Messiaen, Olivier*, holocaustmusic.ort.org/places/camps/?fb_locale=da_DK&cHash=c128fc6bddbecb85d5371a308bd119a4. (2019)
This website by Olivier Messiaen is an online source that vividly illustrates the importance of music for prisoners and SS guards in concentration camps. He uses Kautsky memoir to provide personal accounts of events that occurred within the camp. He quotes Kautsky station, "while according, to Benedikt Kautsky, German Military marches were prohibited, one was nitpicky in the Buchenwald KZ, Auschwitz, where you can hear several Old Prussian marches." This is a minimal example of the various ways that music was influential for survival and terror.