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Das mehrsprachige Webportal publiziert fortlaufend Informationen zur historisch-politischen Bildung in Schulen, Gedenkstätten und anderen Einrichtungen zur Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Schwerpunkte bilden der Nationalsozialismus, der Zweite Weltkrieg sowie die Folgegeschichte in den Ländern Europas bis zu den politischen Umbrüchen 1989.

Dabei nimmt es Bildungsangebote in den Fokus, die einen Gegenwartsbezug der Geschichte herausstellen und bietet einen Erfahrungsaustausch über historisch-politische Bildung in Europa an.

Lesson 1

The October 1941 deportations from Berlin to Lodz in the reports of three eyewitnesses

The following excerpts are from a report written in 1958 by a former employee of the Berlin Jewish community. The author was born in Berlin in 1884, completed her doctorate in 1920, and was employed as an attorney until her dismissal under the "Law for the Reestablishment of the Civil Service" issued on April 7, 1933. [The law was passed in early April; she was probably dismissed in early summer.] She was deported to Theresienstadt in 1943.

"As I recall, on either the first or second day of October 1941, I was ordered, as director of the housing information office, to go to the Gestapo office at Burgstrasse together with two members of the executive board (of the Berlin Jewish community). There, Detective Commissioner Prüfer notified us for the record that we would be immediately deported to a concentration camp if we told any third party about the contents of his communication. Prüfer then informed us that the *Umsiedlung* [resettlement] of the Berlin Jews was imminent, and that the Berlin Jewish community would have to take part. Otherwise, it would be implemented by the SA and SS and 'you know how things will go then.' The Jewish people were to consider the whole thing a

residential evacuation operation. The Jewish community was to see that those being transported were provided with adequate clothing, food, and provisions for the Gestapo-supplied train cars.... I was present when the Jewish community consulted with the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* [Reich Association of Jews in Germany] that same evening. Despite substantial reservations, participation in the 'resettlement' in accordance with Gestapo wishes was decided, because we hoped to be able to ameliorate the situation of those affected." (Jewish Museum, Berlin)

Organization of the Deportation

"Two or three weeks before a transport would depart, the Gestapo would demand that the [Jewish] community submit a relatively large number [3,000-4,000] of completed questionnaires to them. The Gestapo would select those designated for the next transport based on these questionnaires. The forms were numbered serially and returned to the Jewish community. Then the Gestapo sent written notification to the individuals in question, who by a certain time had to report with their luggage to the assembly center in the Levetzowstrasse synagogue for the so-called resettlement.... We did not know what criteria the Gestapo used in assembling these transports.... The initial Jewish community practice of sending advance written notification to those individuals destined for the next transport was prohibited by the Gestapo after several months, because too many people fled after receiving these notices. After that, the Gestapo collected those who had been selected directly from their homes and brought them to the assembly center." (Jewish Museum, Berlin)

Inge Deutschkron also describes the beginning of deportations from Berlin in her book *"Ich trug den gelben Stern"* ["I Wore the Yellow Star"], Munich 1985, pp. 85-89. At that time, she lived with her mother and many other Jews at Innsbrucker Street 58 in Berlin-Schöneberg. One of the other lodgers, the 65-year-old widow Klara Hohenstein, received one of the questionnaires from the Jewish community:

"Shortly after 8 a.m. the doorbell rang loudly and insistently. Mother sat as though paralyzed. Almost noiselessly, she whispered only: 'For God's sake!' Since there was no doubt who was demanding entrance, I put on my coat with the 'Star of David' and opened the door. Two tall men in gray loden coats stood before me. They inquired: 'Does Klara Sara Hohenstein live here?' I pointed out

the door to her room and went back to my mother.

The next morning, it had quickly gotten around that those who had been arrested were in the Levetzowstrasse synagogue awaiting transport. It was said that one could bring them things. But then the wildest rumors began to circulate: everything was being seized from the deportees anyway, they were being beaten, and weren't getting anything to eat....

Under cover of darkness, my mother and I went to the synagogue on October 17. We stayed across the street from it. We didn't dare get any closer. We looked over at the synagogue, but couldn't see anything except the lighted windows....

On October 18, 1941, the first transport departed from Berlin to Lodz. After several weeks, a pre-printed postcard arrived that read: 'I am fine. I am in Lodz. Send me packages....'

Yes, we did send packages for a long time. They contained bread, dried vegetables, things that we saved up to buy. We never received an answer."

Classroom assignments:

- 1 Describe briefly how the initial phase of the deportation of Berlin Jews was organized.
- 2 How did the Gestapo try to conceal the truth about the deportations?
- 3 To what extent was the Jewish community in a dilemma?
- 4 Based on these texts, try to refute the argument that non-Jews could not have known about the deportations.
- 5 Discuss in class the question of why Mrs. Hohenstein was prepared to follow the Gestapo men.

Text for Homework:

The Deportation of Jews to the Lodz Ghetto

The first transport of Berlin Jews to Lodz on October 18, 1941, was quickly

followed by others on October 24, 1941, October 27, 1941, and November 1, 1941. At the same time the 5,000 Berlin Jews were being deported, Jews from Prague, Vienna, Frankfurt, Cologne, Luxembourg, Düsseldorf, and other cities were also forcibly removed to the Lodz ghetto.

Oskar Rosenfeld wrote about this deportation in his diary on February 17, 1942: "All Jewish community employees had to report with their money, papers, and house keys shortly before the departure. The next to last act of the spectacle had begun.

The sequence was: 1) surrender of house keys ...; 2) surrender of all certificates, degrees, licenses, personal documents (e.g., birth and marriage certificates), documents with photographs and other identity cards and papers (e.g., passports); 3) surrender of any money and gold without receipt ...; 4) the signing of a form whose content one wasn't allowed to read — with this signature, one authorized ... full discretionary authority for the disposal of property that was left behind; 5) receipt of a police notice with the words 'evacuated on ...' This completed the robbery and depersonalization. The only things left to these deportees were what they had with them in their knapsacks and suitcases. Just before departure, Gestapo officials also removed individual pieces of baggage. Books, musical instruments, things close to an individual's heart ... had to be left behind or handed over to the Gestapo. Five times a group of one thousand Jews was shipped out — desperately poor, deprived of all rights, and left to the mercy of blind fate."

Excerpted from: "The Diary of Oskar Rosenfeld," Frankfurt Jewish Museum, (ed.), *"Unser einziger Weg ist Arbeit: Das Getto in Lodz 1940-1944."* Vienna, 1990. p. 174.

English translation available for Oskar Rosenfeld's notebooks in Alan Adelson and Robert Lapidés (eds.), "Lodz Ghetto: Inside a Community under Siege." New York: Viking, 1989. pp. 1-5.

Homework Assignment:

The Rosenfeld text does not mention the physical annihilation of Jews.

Explain how the procedures described in this text are part of the process of "destruction."