

16 December 1941, Frank stated that 3.5 million Jews in the *Generalgouvernement* could not be liquidated, but that "action will have to be taken that will lead to successful destruction, in connection with the major measures which are to be discussed at Reich level." This was a reference to the impending Wannsee Conference, which is usually equated with the immediate launch of the genocide campaign throughout Europe. However, the "operations" mentioned by Heydrich in connection with the "evacuation of the Jews to the East" were presented simply as opportunities to gain practical experience "in view of the coming Final Solution of the Jewish question." The liquidation of those Jews who were deemed unfit for work was implied, and the subsequent destruction of the "remaining stock" explicitly disclosed. The psychological bridge between the emigration and reservation "solutions" and the Holocaust itself was created by the fiction of *Arbeitseinsatz* ("labour mobilization"); reference was also still made to the chimerical "territorial final solution," which was now to be achieved east of the Urals. On the other hand, the formulation that "certain preparatory work for the Final Solution" should be carried out "in the areas concerned," i.e., the *Generalgouvernement*, signified the beginning of selective liquidations. These started early in 1942 and from spring onwards acquired the character of a planned and systematic programme. Even then, however, it was implemented with varying degrees of intensity; initially the measures were mainly improvised and some operations had to be countermanded. It is important to note that the programme of annihilation thus retained its character as a temporary measure taken during the wartime state of emergency. The inclusion in the programme of the Jews in the occupied countries and satellite states originally occurred within the framework of a long-term "labour mobilization" programme; however, even the most elementary requirements for the fulfillment of such a scheme were lacking.

One further development was important for the implementation of the Final Solution. Since autumn 1941, Auschwitz-Birkenau had been expanded into an enormous "prisoner and munitions centre," mainly for the "utilization" of Soviet prisoners of war. The selection of Soviet prisoners, and the brutal treatment inflicted upon them, reflected Himmler's own belief that there were unlimited human reserves in the East. However, the turn of the tide in the war, and the appalling death-rate among the prisoners, meant that fewer human

reserves than anticipated were available and that they were urgently needed to fill gaps in the labour market in the Reich itself. Scarcely a week after the Wannsee Conference, Himmler issued his instruction to "equip" the SS concentration camps primarily with German Jews. Birkenau camp, where the technology of gassing had been developed with Soviet prisoners of war as the victims, was now to be part of a comprehensive programme for genocide. The *Generalplan Ost* stood in the background, preventing any attempt to fall back on interim territorial "solutions" to the "Jewish question" in the occupied territory of the Soviet Union. The programme of annihilation was now implemented with astonishing speed and in several waves. This operation (later named "Reinhard" after Reinhard Heydrich, assassinated in Prague in May 1942) formed the direct link between the *Einsatzgruppen* and the factory techniques of the Final Solution. The systematic destruction of the ghettos was followed by the withdrawal of Jewish labour from war industries; Jewish workers were also removed from the SS enterprises in the Lublin region, which then collapsed.

The use of gas vans as a transitional stage in the development of factory methods to destroy human life had begun because of a desire to prevent undesirable side-effects on the SS men caused by the semi-public shootings at Vilna and elsewhere. The fiction that only those Jews who were unfit for work were to be killed remained psychologically important. The selection process on the ramp at Birkenau helped Himmler's thugs to preserve this fiction. It was only a short step from this way of thinking to "orderly" destruction, which could be justified on the grounds that organized killing was more practical and "humane" than death from starvation or epidemics in the ghettos and camps. The horrific conditions produced by the brutal and inhumane treatment of the deported Jews were actually exploited by Goebbels to justify the deadly theory of "subhumanity." More importantly, people who under normal circumstances would have been roused to anger by the treatment of the Jews became indifferent, and their feelings of compassion were dulled. How many had the personal courage to see the whole truth behind the chain of cruelties, rather than putting the blame on occasional abuses?

After all, work camps of all kinds — voluntary Labour service, compulsory labour and ultimately the practice of working people to death — were the civilian counterpart of military service, which sent millions to the slaughter. Everywhere in occupied Europe, even in

the Reich itself, the labour camp became part of ordinary life. The atomization of the family, the destruction of traditional social structures, the sending of all age groups and professions to labour camps, training camps, education camps — these were everyday features of the Third Reich. The network of concentration camps and prisoner-of-war camps appeared to be part of this second civilization, offering an extreme example of the exercise of power over human beings.

The transfer of people within this labyrinthine network of camps was nothing unusual. However, the concentration of Jewish citizens in labour camps became an increasingly important transitional stage on the path to the Final Solution. The circumstances in which deportations occurred sometimes excited public criticism, but in general people chose to believe the fiction of the "mobilization of labour"; moreover, the removal of Jews to transit camps ensured that their fate was decided out of sight of their fellow citizens. Even in the occupied areas, resistance to the "mobilization" of Jewish labour occurred only rarely. Within the concentration camps, it had long been the practice to work people literally to death. The concept that arose as a result — that of "destruction by labour" — was one of the most effective pieces of cynicism in National Socialist ideology. The inscription on the gates of Auschwitz — "*Arbeit macht frei*" ("freedom through work") — reveals that cynicism; it illuminates the entire master-race mentality, which degraded human beings into mere numbers and had no respect even for the dead. This attitude first manifested itself in the "euthanasia" programme.

The fiction of mobilizing Jewish labour was used by the perpetrators of the Final Solution as a psychological justification for their actions. It is symptomatic that fanatical anti-semites such as Hans Frank and Wilhelm Kube began to protest against the systematic implementation of the extermination programme when it was turned against the reserves of indispensable Jewish labour in the Eastern regions. When the liquidations were not justified by the pretence that they were measures to combat partisans and to weaken "Jewish-Bolshevik" potential, as was the case with the *Einsatzgruppen*, then they were frequently accounted for by the need to make space for fresh transports. There were phases during which the pace of the extermination programme was slowed, to permit the tempo-

rary exploitation of the prisoners by means of forced labour. Many Jews saw this as their only chance of survival.

The use of bureaucratic and technocratic methods to destroy human life also served to suppress quasi-moral inhibitions. The original motive behind the development of technical methods of killing such as carbon monoxide and *Zyklon B* had been to avoid unrest among the general public. However, it was rapidly transformed into a problem of killing-capacity. The decisive preliminary stages of the systematic policy of the Final Solution were thus accompanied by the efforts of the RSHA to learn about these technical possibilities; the instructions given to Eichmann and Höss in autumn 1941 were of this nature.

The Holocaust was not based upon a programme that had been developed over a long period. It was founded upon improvised measures that were rooted in earlier stages of planning and also escalated them. Once it had been set in motion, the extermination of those people who were deemed unfit for work developed a dynamic of its own. The bureaucratic machinery created by Eichmann and Heydrich functioned more or less automatically; it was thus symptomatic that Eichmann consciously circumvented Himmler's order, at the end of 1944, to stop the Final Solution. There was no need for external ideological impulses to keep the process of extermination going. Protests from those parties interested in saving the Jewish workforce — the *Wehrmacht*, the armaments industry, SS-owned factories in the concentration camps, and the administration of the *Generalgouvernement* — proved largely ineffective.

The widespread assumption that the systematic policy of genocide rested on a clear directive from Hitler is based on a misunderstanding of the decision-making process in the *Führer's* headquarters. If such an order had been given, even if only orally, then those in high office around Hitler must have known about it; they had no motive to deny the existence of such a directive in their personal records and testimonies after 1945. Gerald Fleming has made a comprehensive search for traces of such an order from the *Führer*. All he can prove is that at the middle level of command there was talk of it in one form or another; however, Hitler's express approval of criminal orders and his intensification of the fight against partisans seem to be the only concrete basis for these opinions.

In fact, the idea that Hitler set the genocide policy in motion by means of a direct instruction can be completely rejected. Such an order would have compromised the fiction of the "mobilization of labour," which included the theory of "destruction by labour." This could not have been in the *Führer's* interests, especially as he would then have had to choose between the destruction of human lives and the mobilization of labour demanded by the war economy. Hitler consistently avoided making such a choice. This situation made it particularly difficult for the parties opposed to the extermination process to marshal their arguments: first, there was no one to whom they could appeal, and secondly, even if there were, they would have had to break through the taboo that surrounded the Final Solution. Thus it was that *Generalgouverneur* Hans Frank saw no possibility of appealing to Hitler over the withdrawal of urgently needed Jewish workers.

The absence of any direct order for extermination also explains how almost all those in an influential position were able to suppress their awareness of the fact of genocide. Albert Speer provides the most striking example of this tendency. Hitler's dominant position at the centre of all the National Socialist elites reinforced such behaviour, because his conduct was exactly the same as theirs: he took care not to allow conversation to turn to events in the concentration camps. This gave rise to the widespread impression that Heinrich Himmler was the driving force. In terms of ideological motivation this was not the case, for Hitler was always the advocate of radicalization.

The utopian dream of exterminating the Jews could become reality only in the half-light of unclear orders and ideological fanaticism. Then, despite all opposing interests, the process developed its own internal dynamic. It is therefore impossible to assign sole responsibility for events to Hitler, Himmler, Heydrich, Bormann, the SS, and the activists in the German Foreign Ministry. Many leading National Socialists tended to stay out of events as much as possible, although they had actively supported the deportation programme. The willingness with which the Ministries of Justice and the Interior gave up to the Security Service (SD) and the *Gestapo* their jurisdiction over the deportations, which they had initially defended strenuously, is a striking example of a general endeavour among officials to

divest themselves of any responsibility whilst accepting that the events themselves were inevitable.

Adolf Eichmann offers a spectacular example of the mechanism of compartmentalized responsibility, which in his case was combined with bureaucratic perfectionism and submissiveness to the demands of the authoritarian state. As he testified in Jerusalem, his authority extended only as far as the gates of Auschwitz-Birkenau; he was just responsible for carrying out the deportations. This fragmenting of responsibilities was a typical feature of the regime. It had its roots in the organization of the NSDAP, which had been imposed by Hitler and his followers during the 1920s. The relative efficiency of the National Socialist system was based precisely upon Hitler's principle of conferring unlimited powers for specific tasks and allowing political coordination between institutions only where it was unavoidable. Any institutionalized communication between the lower levels of government was systematically prevented. Responsibilities were thus segmented. In the various war crimes trials, the former satraps of the regime always pleaded that they had merely followed orders and been cogs in the machine. No one was prepared to accept overall responsibility or to consider the political consequences of the individual decisions that they made. Noncommunication and collective suppression of knowledge complemented each other and, when these mechanisms failed, they were replaced by a vague awareness that involvement in the escalation of crime had gone too far for any opposition to be possible.

If these psychological mechanisms prevented the National Socialist elite from facing up to the escalation of criminality and drawing the necessary conclusions, then we can more easily accept that most ordinary Germans were reluctant to believe rumours and incomplete information. It is significant, in this respect, that the truth about the Holocaust was accepted only with hesitation and reluctance even by Western public opinion and Allied governments. In so far as German civilians must bear a share of moral responsibility, this does not lie in the fact that they did not protest against the Holocaust, particularly in view of its all-pervasive activity; instead, it is to be found in the passive acceptance of the exclusion of the Jewish population, which prepared the way for the Final Solution. An awareness of increasing injustice definitely did exist, as can be seen

in the reaction of public opinion to the revelations about the Katyn massacre.

Ideological factors — the effects of anti-semitic propaganda and the authoritarian element in traditional German political culture — are not sufficient in themselves to explain how the Holocaust became reality. The political and bureaucratic mechanisms that permitted the idea of mass extermination to be realized could also have occurred under different social conditions. The ultimately atavistic structure of the National Socialist regime, coupled with the effective power of newly established bureaucracies, proved to be the decisive factor in the selection of negative “elements of *Weltanschauung*” and in the overwhelming loss of reality that was epitomized by Hitler’s mentality. The genesis of the Holocaust offers a deterrent example of the way in which otherwise normal individuals can be led astray when they live in a permanent state of emergency, when legal and institutional structures collapse, and when criminal deeds are publicly justified as national achievements. The Holocaust is a warning against racial phobias and social resentment of minority groups; but it is also a reminder that the manipulation and deformation of public and private morality are a constant threat even in advanced industrial societies.

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A Product of Euphoria in Victory

Within the broad spectrum of interpretation, my thesis might be termed “moderate functionalist.” I do not accept the intentionalists’ view that the key decision — the conception of the Final Solution as a fixed goal — had already been taken long before the war and merely awaited the opportune moment for implementation. My position does not deny the significance of Hitler’s anti-Semitism, only that the intention to murder the Jews had been consciously derived from it well in advance.

Concerning Hitler’s anti-Semitism, historical consensus exists on the following: Psychologically, it was a deeply held obsession. Ideologically, it was the keystone of his *Weltanschauung*. Without his understanding of politics in terms of a Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy and his understanding of history in terms of a Social-Darwinist struggle of races (in which the Jews played the most diabolical role), the whole edifice would collapse. Finally, Hitler gave expression to this anti-Semitism in violent threats and fantasies of mass murder. Indeed, for a man whose Social Darwinism implied the final resolution of any conflict in terms of the survival of one adversary through the “destruction” of the other, and whose anti-Semitism was understood in terms of race, mass murder of the Jews was a “logical” deduction. Granted all this, the relationship between Hitler’s anti-Semitism and the origin of the Final Solution still remains controversial.

Even if the Final Solution can be “logically” deduced from Hitler’s *Weltanschauung*, it is improbable that Hitler made that deduction before 1941 and consciously pursued the systematic murder of the European Jews as a long-held goal. The assumption that

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Nazi Jewish policy was the premeditated and logical consequence of Hitler's anti-Semitism cannot be easily reconciled with his actual behavior in the years before 1941. For example, Hitler's view of the Jews as the "November criminals" who caused Germany's defeat in World War I was as fervently held as any of his anti-Jewish allegations. Indeed, the oft-cited passage from *Mein Kampf* lamenting that twelve or fifteen thousand Jews had not been gassed during the war makes far more sense in the context of the stab-in-the-back legend than as a prophecy or intimation of the Final Solution. The "logical" consequence of the thesis of the Jew as wartime traitor should have been a "preventive" massacre of German Jewry before the western offensive or at least before the attack on Russia.

In actual practice Nazi Jewish policy sought a *judenrein* Germany by facilitating and often coercing Jewish emigration. In order to reserve the limited emigration opportunities for German Jews, the Nazis opposed Jewish emigration from elsewhere on the continent. This policy continued until the fall of 1941, when the Nazis prohibited Jewish emigration from Germany and for the first time justified the blocking of Jewish emigration from other countries in terms of preventing their escape from the German grasp. The efforts of the Nazi Jewish experts to facilitate Jewish emigration both before and during the war, as well as their plans for massive expulsions (what the Nazis euphemistically called "resettlement" or *Umsiedlung*) were not merely tolerated but encouraged by Hitler. It is difficult to reconcile the assumption of a long-held intention to murder the Jews of Europe with this behavior. If Hitler knew he was going to murder the Jews, then he was supporting a policy that "favored" German Jews over other European Jews and "rescued" from death many of those he held most responsible for Germany's earlier defeat.

It has been argued that Hitler was merely awaiting the opportune moment to realize his murderous intentions. Not only does that not explain the pursuit of a contradictory policy of emigration in the meantime, it also does not explain the long delay. If Hitler was merely awaiting the outbreak of conflict to pursue his "war against the Jews," why were the millions of Polish Jews in his hands since the fall of 1939 granted a thirty-month "stay of execution"? They were subjected to sporadic massacre and murderous living conditions but not to systematic extermination until 1942. If Hitler could kill at

least seventy thousand Germans through the euthanasia program between 1939 and 1941, why was it not "opportune" to murder several hundred thousand German Jews who constituted an "internal menace" in wartime? It certainly would have occasioned far less opposition than euthanasia. Why was this period not used to make preparations and plans for mass extermination, avoiding the clumsy improvisations of 1941? In short, the practice of Nazi Jewish policy until 1941 does not support the thesis of a long-held, fixed intention to murder the European Jews.

Hitler's anti-Semitism is more plausibly seen as the stimulant or spur to a continuous search for an increasingly radical solution to the Jewish question rather than as the source of a logically deduced and long-held "blueprint" for extermination. As the "satanic" figure behind all other problems, the Jew was for Hitler the ultimate problem and required an ultimate or final solution. Hitler's anti-Semitism thus constituted an ideological imperative which, given the competitive nature of the Nazi state, played a central role in the evolution of Nazi Jewish policy. The rival Nazi chieftains constantly sought to expand their private empires and vied for Hitler's favor through anticipating and pursuing Hitler's desires. In his function as arbiter, Hitler in turn sought to avoid totally antagonizing or alienating any of his close followers, even the most incompetent among them such as Rosenberg and Ribbentrop. Thus, when competing Nazis advocated conflicting policies, all plausibly justified in Nazi terminology, Hitler had great difficulty resolving differences. Paralysis and indecision were often the result. When, however, the competition was carried out at the expense of helpless third parties, such as Jews and populations of occupied territories, protected by no countervailing force, radicalization rather than paralysis followed. Hence it was the conjuncture of Hitler's anti-Semitic obsession, the anarchical and competitive nature of the Nazi state, the vulnerable status of the European Jews, and the war that resulted in the Final Solution.

By 1941 Nazi Jewish policy had reached an impasse. Military and diplomatic success had brought millions of Jews into the German sphere, while the already limited possibilities for Jewish emigration were constricted further through the outbreak of war. Germany's self-imposed "Jewish problem" mushroomed while the traditional

solution collapsed. Interim solutions of massive "resettlement" — in Lublin and Madagascar — in like manner were not viable. The imminent invasion of Russia posed the same dilemma once again — further territorial conquest meant more Jews. At some point in the spring of 1941, Hitler decided to break this vicious circle.

Overwhelming documentation exists to show that Germany, under Hitler's prodding, planned and prepared for a *Vernichtungskrieg* — a war of destruction, not a conventional war — in Russia. It would be a clash of ideologies and races, not of nation-states. Detailed negotiations between the army and the SS ended in an agreement with the army's promising logistical support and conceding freedom of action to small mobile SS-units — *Einsatzgruppen* — charged with "special tasks" behind German lines. All customs and international law concerning war and occupation were to be disregarded. . . .

With the decision to murder the Russian Jews, Hitler broke out of the vicious circle in which each military success brought more Jews into the German sphere. This did not, however, immediately alter German Jewish policy on the rest of the continent. Emigration, expulsion, and "plans for future "resettlement" still held sway. . . . Thus the preparations for the murderous assault upon the Russian Jews did not have immediate repercussions on Nazi Jewish policy elsewhere. The emergence of the Final Solution for the European Jews was a separate process resulting from a separate though certainly not unrelated decision. . . .

On July 31, 1941, Heydrich received Göring's authorization to prepare a "total solution" (*Gesamtlösung*) of the Jewish question in those territories of Europe under German influence and to coordinate the participation of those organizations whose jurisdictions were touched. The significance of this document is open to debate. Most historians have assumed that it refers to an extermination program. In contrast [functionalists] have interpreted it in terms of a "comprehensive program for the deportation of the Jews" to Russia and an attempt by Heydrich to strengthen his jurisdictional position to carry out this task. . . .

However uncertain the origins of the July authorization and however vague the phrasology about the fate intended for the Jews,

this much is known. It was signed by Göring, who two weeks later expressed the opinion that "the Jews in the territories dominated by Germany had nothing more to seek." Göring did not spell out their fate further, except to say that where Jews had to be allowed to work, it could only be in closely guarded labor camps, and that he preferred that Jews be hanged rather than shot, as the latter was too honorable a death. An impending mass expulsion of Jews into Russia was neither mentioned nor implied.

The authorization was received by Heydrich, who already had an authorization signed by Göring for coordinating Jewish emigration, dating from January 1939. When Jewish emigration gave way to plans for massive "resettlement," Heydrich had felt no need for a new "charter" and cited the older one when asserting jurisdiction over the emerging Madagascar Plan in 1940. Moreover, Heydrich had just spent the previous months organizing the *Einsatzgruppen* for the extermination of the Russian Jews, and that murder campaign was now in full swing. The historical context would thus suggest that, if indeed Heydrich was the initiator of the July authorization, he did not need it to continue the emigration and expulsion activities over which he had long established unchallenged jurisdiction but rather because he now faced a new and awesome task that dwarfed even the systematic murder program of the *Einsatzgruppen*.

Precisely how and when Heydrich and his immediate superior, Himmler, became aware of their new task is not and probably never will be known. But given the political structure of the Third Reich, in which rival paladins vied for Hitler's favor and were successful to the degree in which they anticipated and realized his desires, and given the extermination program already underway in Russia, Himmler and Heydrich surely needed little more than a nod from Hitler to perceive that the time had come to extend the killing process to the European Jews. That such a Hitlerian incitement lay behind the July authorization cannot be definitely proven. But the testimony of Rudolf Höss and Adolf Eichmann indicates that at some point in the summer of 1941, whether in July or shortly thereafter is unclear, Himmler and Heydrich began to act on the assumption that Hitler had given them the "green light" to prepare an extermination program. . . .

Given the already apparent inadequacies of the *Einsatzgruppen* operations — their inefficiency, the lack of secrecy, and the psychological burden on the executioners — and their even greater unsuitability for use outside Russia, the most important problem Himmler and Heydrich faced was how and where to kill the Jews. Ultimately the Nazi planners solved this problem by merging three already existing programs with which they had prior experience: the concentration camp system, euthanasia gassing, and Eichmann's specialty of forced emigration and population resettlement. Auschwitz, because of its rail connections, was chosen as one site for a killing center. The possibility of other sites in Russia may have been weighed until the military and transportation situation made this unfeasible. The exact type of gas to be used remained undetermined, in the end the Polish camps manned by euthanasia personnel retained carbon monoxide while Auschwitz and Maidanek adopted Cyclon B.

When was this solution — deportation to camps equipped with gassing facilities — finally approved? The answer lies in another question: When did the construction of the first death camps and the initial shifting of euthanasia personnel begin? The course of events at Auschwitz is not helpful in validating the date, for Auschwitz was already a labor camp at which many Russian prisoners of war were being systematically killed. The gassing of some of these Russian prisoners in September 1941 with Cyclon B in Bunker 11 at the *Stammlager* was followed by at least several gassings of small contingents of local Jews in the "old crematory." However, the gassing of large transports of Jews in the converted farm house at Birkenau did not begin until late January 1942. This sequence provides no clear indication as to when Höss was first aware of this new killing task. Belzec and Chelmno, however, provide a better check, for neither was then in existence as an operating labor camp and both were constructed solely to kill Jews. The date when construction on these camps began can thus provide a crucial check as to when a significant number of Germans knew what they were about in preparing for the Final Solution. Most of the German defendants in the Belzec and Chelmno trials were not at those camps at the beginning and could provide no relevant testimony. However, the testimony of two German defendants in this regard, corroborated by the testimony of local

inhabitants in those areas taken by the Poles immediately after the war, clearly points once again to October 1941.

Let us examine the Chelmno evidence first. Since early 1940 a *Sonderkommando* under Herbert Lange, headquartered in Posen, had been carrying out euthanasia operations in East Prussia and the incorporated territories. According to Lange's chauffeur, he drove the *Sonderkommando* chief around the Warthegau in the fall of 1941 searching for a suitable location for a death camp. He then drove Lange to Berlin and back, arriving in Chelmno in late October or early November. Thereafter a team of SS men was assembled from Posen and Lodz, followed by a guard detachment of Order Police. A work force of Polish prisoners from Lodz together with local inhabitants was put to work renovating and fencing the old villa or *Schloss*, where the Jews would be undressed and loaded into the waiting gas vans. After preparations were complete, the gassing began on December 8.

Polish postwar interrogations of the *Volksdeutsche* (ethnic German) inhabitants of the village provide the same sequence. According to the *Amtskommissar* of Chelmno, he was away from town toward the end of 1941 when some SS men arrived and investigated the *Schloss* and other buildings. Some days later, after his return, Lange appeared and confiscated various buildings. Lange returned still later with a team of SS men, followed by police. Some weeks after the arrival of the SS unit, work on the *Schloss* was complete and the first truckloads of Jews arrived. Such a sequence of events would necessitate Lange's having received his initial instructions to establish a death camp at Chelmno no later than mid- or late October but more likely toward the beginning of the month.

The sequence of events at Belzec leads to much the same conclusion. Again we have the testimony of only one German defendant, Josef Oberhauser, initially an employee of the euthanasia program and subsequently adjutant to Christian Wirth, the inspector of the Polish death camps of Operation Reinhard. Oberhauser was assigned to Globocnik¹ in Lublin in October and arrived there in November 1941. His first job consisted of bringing to Belzec building materials as well as Ukrainian guardsmen from their training

¹ SS General Odilo Globocnik, responsible for Belzec, Treblinka, Sobibor, and Maidanek. — Ed.

camp at Travniki. He was in no doubt as to what was intended in Belzec, as the construction supervisor showed him the plans for the gas chamber. By Christmas the initial construction was finished, and Oberhauser became Wirth's liaison to Globocnik. After the first gassing test killed fifty Jewish workers, Wirth went to Berlin for six weeks. Upon his return in March, the first transports began to arrive.

According to local inhabitants, three SS men came to Belzec in October 1941 and demanded a draft of twenty Polish workers. Work began on November 1 under the direction of a young ethnic German *Baumeister* from Kattowitz, who supervised the construction according to a set of plans. After putting up two barracks and the future gas chamber near the railway siding, the Polish workers were dismissed on December 23. By then black-uniformed former Russian prisoners of war had arrived to carry on the work and guard seventy Jewish laborers. After more barracks, guard towers, and fencing were completed, the Jewish workers were killed in the first test of the gassing facilities in February 1942. Full-time operations then began in March. Thus not only is the Oberhauser testimony confirmed, but an Eichmann visit to an empty camp at Belzec in October 1941 and his reception by a lone police captain fits this sequence of events precisely. The few wooden buildings he saw must have dated from the former Jewish labor camp at Belzec.

While many euthanasia personnel were sent from Germany to Russia in the winter of 1941-1942 and were not reassigned to the death camps until the spring of 1942, some key personnel were already involved earlier. Not only had Wirth and Oberhauser been sent from Berlin in the fall of 1941, but Brack also dispatched to Lublin his chemist, Dr. Helmut Kallmeyer, the man he had unsuccessfully tried to send to Riga in late October. Kallmeyer admitted being sent to Lublin after Christmas, but said no one had had any use for him and he had been quickly sent back. *SS-Untersturmführer* Dr. August Becker, on loan from the SS to the euthanasia program since January 1940 for the purpose of delivering bottled carbon monoxide to the euthanasia institutes, testified frankly (when terminally ill and no longer facing trial): "Himmler wanted to use the people released from euthanasia who were experts in gassing, such as myself, in the great gassing program getting underway in the east." Before being assigned in December 1941 to supervise gas vans oper-

ating with the *Einsatzgruppen* in Russia, Becker had already heard talk in Berlin that other members of the euthanasia program were being sent to Lublin to start "something similar," only this time according to rumor it would be for the Jews.

If the October documents cited above indicate that middle echelon officials of the Führer's Chancellory, Foreign Office, and *Ostministerium* were then discussing special reception camps and gassing in relation to the Jews, the Chelmo and Belzec testimony indicates that, within the SS, preparation for constructing the death camps was in fact already getting underway in that month. Such evidence makes very compelling the conclusion that by October Hitler had approved the mass-murder plan. It must be kept in mind, however, that the death-camp solution was not self-evident; it had to be invented. Precisely how long the whole process of initiation, invention, and approval took, we do not know. In the accounts of Eichmann and Höss, they learned from Heydrich and Himmler respectively by late summer of 1941 of Hitler's order to destroy the Jews but not yet how that was to be accomplished. If the death-camp solution had been approved and was being implemented in October, it is at least *very probable* that the problem was first posed by Himmler and Heydrich to others in August, and that they themselves were first incited to the task by Hitler in late July.

Furthermore, the evidence concerning the founding of the death camps at Chelmo and Belzec does not support the hypothesis of the primacy of local initiative but rather indicates considerable interaction with central authorities in Berlin. Both camps involved the reassignment of personnel formerly involved in the euthanasia program, which was coordinated in the Führer's Chancellory. Both commandants, Lange and Wirth, made trips back to Berlin before their camps began operating. Both camps received visits from Eichmann on inspection tour from Berlin. Both utilized killing technology developed in Germany — in Belzec the stationary gas chamber on the euthanasia institute model, and in Chelmo the gas van, which was developed, tested, produced, and dispatched with drivers by the RSHA.

These conclusions are not compatible with the theories of Adam and Haffner, who date the decision for the Final Solution to the fall or winter of 1941, nor with Broszat's thesis of the primacy of local

initiative in setting the process in motion. Central to all these theories is the conviction that the failure of the Russian campaign was crucial in launching the Final Solution: either in forcing Hitler to choose different priorities, as in Haffner's case, or in forcing the Germans to find a solution to the Jewish question other than "resettlement" in Russia, as with Adam and Broszat. If the death camps were already approved and the initial steps were being taken in October, the process involved in launching the Final Solution had to have begun much earlier, at a point when victory in Russia was still expected by the end of the year. Aronson's dating of "late fall," somewhat altered Hitler's outlook, likewise is too late to account for this course of events unless the time between the change he postulates in Hitler's thinking and the commencement of death-camp construction were almost instantaneous. It would appear that the euphoria of victory in the summer of 1941 and the intoxicating vision of all Europe at their feet, not the dashed expectations and frustrations of the last months of the year, induced the Nazis to set the fateful process in motion. . . .

In conclusion, there was no Hitler order from which the Final Solution sprang full grown like Athena from the head of Zeus. But sometime in the summer of 1941, probably before Göring's July 31 authorization, Hitler gave Himmler and Heydrich the signal to draw up a destruction plan, the completion of which inevitably involved the exploration of various alternatives, false starts, and much delay. Considerable "lead time" was needed, for the Nazis were venturing into uncharted territory and attempting the unprecedented; they had no maps to follow — hence, a seeming ambivalence surrounding German Jewish policy in the late summer and autumn of 1941, which was aggravated by two factors. The first was the decision in mid-September to deport German Jews before the new killing facilities had been devised. The second was the Byzantine style of government in which initiative from above was informal, information was shared irregularly, and uncertainty was often deliberately cultivated. By October, a not unreasonable two or three months after Hitler had given the green light to proceed, the pieces were falling together. Many outside the SS were now involved, and there had emerged the rough outline of a plan involving mass deportation to killing centers that used poison gas. The first concrete steps for implementing this

plan — beginning construction of the earliest death camps at Belzec and Chelmo and the first transfer of euthanasia personnel, both inconceivable without Hitler's approval — were taken by the end of the month. The decision for the Final Solution had been confirmed.