

"The Deportations"

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Translated by Andrew Zulker

At the beginning of the summer of 1942, the camp saw an influx of foreign Jews—mostly Polish and Czech—coming from the occupied zone, especially Paris. The newcomers told us in detail about the hunts for Jews, people being arrested in the streets, arrested while they slept in their beds at night.

They had been confined in the Drancy-Bourguier Concentration Camp near Paris. Many had died there as a result of mistreatment or of hunger. No one had been admitted [to a hospital]. In the end it was decided that they should be deported en masse to an "unknown destination".

Up to that point, the German authorities had mostly arrested men who were then transported to concentration camps to serve as hostages, who could be shot in the case of sabotages, which were a frequent occurrence.

This time, they helped themselves to men, women, youths, and even children. Families were separated. It was a flood of wretched and ruined creatures: wives who did not know where their husbands were, parents without children, children who no longer had parents. People told stories of a train waiting in a station outside Paris, full of little children crying, calling their mothers who were gone. A line of guards surrounded them, prohibiting anyone from approaching them or bringing them something to eat or drink. Traces that would have allowed the children to one day be identified—even reunited with their parents, if their parents were still alive—had been destroyed. The system had been applied even to babies in the cradle.

One glance at the newcomers' faces told their whole story. Pale, hollow, with skin dried out like parchment, the whole face covered with wrinkles, eyes burning; they could speak of nothing but what they had lost, slow, very tired, without moving, without hope. Hardly the strength to sigh. They all seemed to say: What now? How much longer?

Among ourselves, we were still clinging to the illusion of the "border" that was the demarcation line. The noontime news reports were always optimistic. The war could not last much longer now—we would spend the last winter at Gurs—afterwards would come the end, liberation, peace.

At the end of June 1942, the camp received an almost unnoticed visit from a small commission of three or four tall, blond young men. They glanced inside a block, inspected the infirmary, the central hospital, the C.C.A.'s office. They asked this or that prisoner their place of birth. If the response was "Germany"—they simply said "Ah—hm." Later we learned that it was a commission of the Gestapo.

One fine evening, one of the first days of July, one of the block leaders informed his colleagues on behalf of the Director that the next day the blocks would be "consigned", which meant total

prohibition from entering or leaving. This would be in order to establish lists. He added: "It seems to be for something important—but the Director didn't say what." [As it would turn out,] it was serious indeed and the Director was keeping it a secret until the last minute.

The next day, the blocks were closed, and everywhere we saw employees from Censorship and Administration walking by with pieces of paper. Everyone reported to the culture barrack. In the lists were first written the usual dates. Then came other questions: Do you have family in France? Have you performed any service for France?

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Unfortunately there was not a single directive—neither for the inmates nor for those who were making the list. No one realized how mortally important it was.

Some said: Bah, it's just one more list like all the others; nothing will come of it—the others racked their brains, tried to put it together, to guess—both at the time and during the days and nights that followed. Experience had taught us that sometimes you had to say one thing, other times you had to say another. You had to be Polish sometimes, sometimes Hungarian, sometimes you have to have papers, sometimes none, sometimes you have to have been in France for a long time, other times never to have seen it, etc. If we had had even a tiny indication, if the Director had made the slightest allusion, many would have been able to save themselves simply by telling the truth. But as it was, little by little the ones making the list got tired, and we had to finish the whole thing afternoon,—it was a hot sunny day—so decisions about the lives and welfare of thousands and thousands were made without knowing why, with a levity free of qualms. —

From that day on, a certain jitteriness developed in the camp, especially among the women. Rumors—from what source, no one knows—started to circulate that there were going to be deportations to outside France. But, others objected, it was Hitler who sent us here—why would he come for us now? We pressed the Deputy Director, Mr. Hess, with questions. He sent us to the Director. The Director claimed to know nothing, but he assured us that there was no question of leaving France nor even of leaving the free zone, and that everything would be for our good. In the sermons in religious services, the Director's promises were communicated to the prisoners—the preachers spoke out against those who incited these "false and criminal rumors"... But, ... the night of July 30-31, the English radio reported that Hitler had asked Mr. Laval to hand over to him the foreign Jews in the free zone. This piece of news was naturally not divulged in the noontime news report.

On July 31, the Camp received a visit from Mr. Lowry, President of the Nimes Coordination Committee which brought together the Red Cross, the Quakers, the YMCA, the American Joint [Distribution Committee], the Children's Aid Society (the OSE, OEuvre de secours aux enfants) and others. As usual, the representatives of social institutions in the Camp had a meeting, at the end of which the author

[I] asked Mr. Lowry if the bit of news from the English radio was in line with the truth. "Since you already know it," he replied, "I must tell you that it is true—unfortunately."

The same day, the office of the C.C.A. [Comité de Coordination des Actions, Joint Action Committee] wrote three letters to influential people and organizations, asking them to forestall this hardship if it was still possible—otherwise at least to protect some groups, such as the elderly, children, those who had visas, etc. These letters went out the next day by special carriers. That was Friday. Saturday or Sunday, the Quakers were in Vichy. There, people claimed to know nothing. The Quakers told them that in Marseille, arrests were reported to have taken place, that hundreds of people had been interned in the Camp des Milles. The response was that it must have to do with local measures, that in Vichy, they knew nothing about it. Even the "good connections" were silent this time, completely silent—the whole thing was a masterpiece of secrecy. But at last we learned anyway. In exchange for the release of the French prisoners[?], Mr. Laval had offered Mr. Hitler the foreign Jews in the free zone. The figure was fixed at 10,000 individuals. Later, under the pretext that the 10,000 had not been delivered by the agreed-upon deadline, the Germans demanded 15,000, then 20,000; finally it became a general measure. The Quakers offered to take the 10,000 into their care—Mr. Laval refused.

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In the camp, fears took shape more and more. Growing nervousness, anxious waiting, a sense of heaviness—the mind still refused to believe it, but it could no longer be denied that something horrible was being prepared—the Director still claimed to know nothing—Monday morning he was seen walking for a while with the Doctor—afterwards he reiterated that it would be for our good—the Doctor who was the Hospital Captain told us: "As long as you see the French flag flying there out front, that will give you the promised protection." —

Nevertheless rumors and news continued to circulate. People talked about a long train of livestock cars at the station in Oloron, about the arrival of a whole posse of trucks and buses; people reported that at Gurs a hundred or more of the new State Police had arrived.

That afternoon, sure enough, two young officers in black uniforms—modeled after the German S.S. uniforms—walked in where a group where someone was speaking—we heard frightened cries—the speaker said: "Don't be frightened—these gentlemen are only delegates of the international travel company." At the same time, the Director went from block to block, calling many people over to ask them whether they would want to stay if their parents, children, spouses left the camp or whether they would rather go with them. They were given one minute to make their decision and sign the paper saying that they would be leaving of their own will. "Leave and go where?" No answer.

That hour, once more, decisions were made without any information, without any time to deliberate—Oh, to describe the heartache, the despair of so many fathers and mothers who, later, when the families had been torn apart, would have to live with the fact that they brought their children into the abyss with them.

Monday evening, there remained no more doubt about what was happening. The camp Young Women's Club gathered in their meeting space for the last time. We had been together for 18 months. In this atmosphere of cameraderie and working side-by-side, we had found an inner sense of satisfaction, even joy—we had succeeded in conquering "Gurs"—but this time, it went beyond our strength; this one could not be conquered. —"Together we have gone through moments of crisis, serious moments, happy moments"—we talked about patience, about having strength in ourselves, about trust in God, about "the hope that now, in this next most dire trial, you may find strength in yourselves, for yourselves, for your parents, for the future. —"

"I am not speaking as what people call a teacher. Forget me, but don't forget what I have taught you—no, I know that you will not forget me, just as all of you will always be on my mind. But I want you to be able to remember me as someone who always saw herself ready to do her duty, ready to accept her lot, ready to give it her best effort, wherever fate, whatever God, put before her—regardless of how difficult the circumstances might be.

"May the memory, may the living image of the Menorah give you the strength on the day you most need it—just as you have brought joy in this place to so many who were downcast, just as you in this place embodied the call to optimism, to the future."

No one said another word. The young women did not want their tears to be seen. We separated to pack our bags.

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The Director worked all night with Mr. Hess and Mr. Hans making the lists. The secret was kept until the end. The inmates who worked in the administration offices had been sent back to the blocks. We knew nothing for sure of what was going to happen. Everyone had their bags packed.

The next morning, the blocks were consigned. The camp was surrounded by rows of "black-coats". Even the block leaders were not allowed to go out. Through an almost unbearable silence, we heard the lists from the Directory come in. They came in around 9:30am. The barrack leaders were assembled in the block secretary's office—the crowds waited outside. The block leader read off the names. They fell from his mouth one by one, like death sentences.

The first thing we noticed was that the list contained, in alphabetical order, almost all the people of German or Austrian nationality. Here and there, some old people were not included; occasionally some names were apparently forgotten by mistake—but still no clear-cut lines.

The luggage would have to be stacked in front of the block. Inspections were made and thus all of the work that had been done the day before had to be redone. Then, the trucks loaded up and took everything to the train stop. Two things to notice here. Since the whole thing had been a complete secret up to the very last minute, we were so distraught, so in the dark as to the criteria for the deportation, that when this first convoy was taken away, there were practically no attempts to intervene to help this or that person affected; no one tried to hide or risk trying to escape.

And for each person who had family in the camp, next came the question: Was my child, my husband, my wife on the list? The ban was lifted around 2 or 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Women flooded into the blocks where their husbands were. They came in with their bags on their backs, suitcases in their hands, bursting at the seams, often open and half-packed, unable to help with anything. First we noticed that, in most cases, it was whole families that had been called. But were they going to travel in the same train cars? When it came close to departure time, people said farewell in case they never saw each other again.

We had one last meal, then the call to go to the blocks, luggage in hand—in the men's blocks almost everyone was ready—the names were called one after another—people said goodbye to each other—the person who was called went out into the road—little by little the groups assembled. As the last one was put in order, the caravan slowly started out towards the entrance of the Camp, towards the two large train sheds—those who were left stood along the wire fences waving goodbye with their hands or handkerchiefs—many of the ones leaving tried to keep a good face on—even to smile.

In front of the women's blocks, the calls took longer, the goodbyes took more time—this or that one wasn't there; the employees stated to get irritated—someone heard an old woman say, "Why are we being forced to leave here? We were so happy at Gurs."

And then that scene that none of us will ever forget as long as we live. The sun sets—long lines of prisoners slowly assemble—girls and women of all ages—hunched over, tired, weeping softly. In hands, on backs, the "little luggage". But this "little luggage" was hardly anything. For at Gurs,

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everything was valuable—an empty box, an iron candlestick, an old piece of cardboard. Those old women clung to every last possession they still had, be it a rag or a scrap of colored paper.

The guards accompanying them hurried them along: "Fast! Faster!" Here and there, a step got quicker, but they could hardly even carry their own weight. As for us? We were shut up in our blocks, fists ready in our pockets—the guards would throw a punch, but it was 20 women for every one of them—finally a few of us broke out of the block despite the ban; others followed—we accompanied the women who were leaving out through the last row of blocks all the way to the

hospital, where a line of "black-coats" prohibited us from going further—one last helping hand lent, one more look through tear-filled eyes—then the women continued on until they reached the large train shed on the right. The one on the left side was for the men.

From the hospital courtyard, the Head Doctor waved goodbye. The sixty-year-old man could not stop weeping.

Many tried to keep their heads high. The young women set an amazing example. Young Emmi left with her mother. She had lost her father on the way to Gurs in 1940. For two years, she had worked and worked to have a gravestone set up for him. When she saw me in front of the block as she passed by, she shouted: "Do not forget my father's tomb." That was the last thing she said. Emmi was 17 years old.

Another young woman, Hanni Hirsch, who had been released earlier [and was staying] in a university center, had her mother in the camp. After long months of trying, she had finally obtained a travel permit. She was supposed to arrive the day of the departure. The camp being consigned, they did not let her see her mother, who was probably leaving forever. The mother, when she learned of her daughter's arrival, tried in vain all day to get permission to say a few words of farewell to her, even from across the fence, from a distance—not possible. At the very last minute, a friend made it possible for them to see each other at the station, before the train left—clearly unofficially.

Marianne Engel, 19 years old, had been an assistant at the office of the Joint Action Committee. That afternoon she came back to the office one last time; she asked if she could still be useful.

"You almost look a little bit joyful," I said to her, seeing that she was dressed in her good blouse and had put on a little bit of blush. "I must tell you something," she said— "up to this point, if I had to leave a place, it usually left me feeling indifferent. Today is the first time that I'm sorry to leave—I feel like I've found something here; I feel that maybe I've been able to be of service in some way."

Marianne had never said a word about her feelings. The next day, they brought me her farewell letter, not very long—she did her best to express in very modest terms how much she had been inwardly enriched at Gurs, and that she hoped, thanks to the values that she had learned here, to make it through this incomprehensible fate that awaited her—even if it did not permit her to see any of us again—a word of gratitude, that was all.

I saw her again in the evening, as everyone was going down to the trains. We shook hands for the last time. She looked back one or two times more. Each time, she had a smile for me.

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The next day rumors circulated that the train had not left; then, that it was traveling with the doors open at a very reduced speed. Later, that the Germans had not accepted them, that they had been expecting laborers, and would send them back. In those days, such floods of

prayers went up to heaven, prayers from the heart, —but God did not want to hear them.

We knew that a second convoy was supposed to follow it two days behind. On Thursday, the block leaders and the charities' efforts to learn the criteria governing the deportation measures were met with success. We learned that, essentially, the measures concerned all Jews of German, Austrian, Polish, and Czech origin who had entered France after 1936. It was expected that there would be exceptions for: persons over 60 years of age (later 65); members of the clergy; children under 16 without family; husbands of pregnant women; parents of French children; those who were "Aryan" (in the camp this was interpreted to mean individuals who had a non-Jewish parent or spouse); parents of children less than two years old; and individuals who had rendered some kind of service to the France nation: those who had belonged to a combat unit for at least three months, or were particularly valuable to the French government or economy.

All of these directives were constantly being emended, reduced, and sometimes even expanded again. We learned them little by little. But as a result of the constant changes, the situation became incredibly muddled and impossible to keep a handle on. People were constantly having to call Vichy, urgently asking for this or that document which usually ended up arriving too late—if the charities had them, the camp authorities had not yet been informed—it was in this complete chaos that often thousands of human lives were thrown into the abyss—the welfare of countless creatures the world over.

In the official text from the Head of Security of Vichy, dated August 24, we read that the deportations were supposed to end by September 15, but to this day they have not stopped.

Friday, August 8th, the blocks were closed again. The day before, all of the block leaders had gone to the Deputy Director, Mr. Hess, and given him the names of the people to be exempted, along with the reasons for their exemption. The next morning, we waited and waited for the lists to come in. That hour between 10 and 11 am tore our nerves to pieces. Finally, they arrived. It was essentially the rest of the Germans, Austrians, and Polish this time—600 for the whole camp.

The representatives of the charitable organizations, as many as were to be found in the deserted street, agreed among themselves—"you help the doctors, you take the sick, you take the children" etc. Some went to find Mr. Hess, to inquire about all the individuals who had been marked for exemption the day before but were now on the list anyway—the Deputy Director was pale and weary, he had discussed the names with the Director all night—in vain—when he saw us enter, he lowered his bloodshot eyes, grabbed all of the papers in front of him and threw them into a corner of the office—he had certainly done his best and there was nothing more he could do.

At the Director's office, it is impossible to describe the kind of day that was taking place. In addition to the charities, the block leaders had found a way either to go in themselves accompanied by a

guard, or to send camp employees in to speak with the Director on their behalf.

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They brought in lists primarily enumerating the errors that were found in the official list. The charities did the same thing but went further, asking for exceptions for these or those people more or less worthy of special treatment. It must be said that not all of the delegates realized the magnitude of their responsibility.

If they were requesting the protection of their personnel, that was considered fair, especially given that the whole question was being discussed with Vichy via telegram. (Later, as it happened, this "protection" turned out to be problematic, with a practical exception made for the Quakers who were allowed to keep their personnel there longer.)

But if anyone tried to extend the exception to other people, simply for being siblings or more distant relatives of charity employee—that was too far.

For those who were conscientious of what was going on realized the real issue in the matter of the interventions: They had to hand over a fixed number. To save one meant condemning someone else in their place—and did they have that right?

In the first convoy, there being no directives—at least not that the charities or internees were aware of—a great number of people were deported who should not have been. This time the interventions tried to fix some of the errors. Not all.

A man named Max Sternmeiler left despite his Romanian papers which he had in his possession and had shown to the Director. Later, when his wife, who had been brought to the Rivesaltes camp, telegraphed to ask for a paper from the Gurs camp confirming her husband's Romanian nationality, and thus hers as well, the husband had already left with his papers in his pocket. The woman was condemned, too.

It was probably another result of the unbelievable levity with which the great lists had been drawn up in the first place. Not knowing what was going to happen, the man had not told them his real nationality, because of previous experiences.

The interventions in the Director's office lasted from 11 o'clock in the morning until midnight. Endless crossing out and adding on—the secretaries sitting off to the side received so many papers signed by the Director that at 2 o'clock in the morning when the call for the trains was made, the corrected lists got mixed up with the old ones—at that point there was no helping.

In the camp the official plan was based on what had happened Wednesday. But since we were better prepared this time, many tried to hide. Most of them were found, because that afternoon, the Head of Surveillance organized a hunt in the camp. Many were found in the barracks of the empty blocks, others underneath the stage in the

"culture barracks". Those who had hid themselves in the latrine holes and the equipment barracks had better luck.

The storekeeper of the Joint Action Committee hid for 24 hours in a coffin among the dead at the morgue. Others found a hiding place in the ceiling of an old infirmary. A lunchroom worker succeeded in hiding himself in a broken down truck in the train shed itself, where he was supposed to wait for the departure. A librarian who was already in the train shed succeeded in squeezing himself into the wood gas generator of the Director's own car. In this way he made the trip between the camp and the train station several times. He was on the verge of fainting, when around 8 o'clock in the morning he was at last able to get out. Later he succeeded in saving himself in Spain.

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These people who had hidden successfully reappeared within a day or two of the convoy's departure. At the beginning they were subjected to punishments for 8 days, but soon they were simply left to be the first on the list for the next convoy. If they had a worthwhile profession, they were allowed to go out during the day in order to work for one or another of the Camp authorities. (Tailors, cobblers, etc.)

Then, they deported them. From Marseille came the news that the children in the Hôtel Bonpard had fled up to the roof when the police arrived. Most of them ended up being able to be rescued from deportation and placed in youth homes. That Friday, there were seven suicide attempts. The worst case was a man named Feldklein. He was a young married man who had rendered fine services as a nurse at the Central Hospital. He was a real comrade, always in good spirits.

His was the second attempt that morning. He slit his veins. We succeeded in "saving" him. He didn't leave. But from that day on, we would see him standing in the window of the Hospital that looked over large barracks across the way, where people would later be gathered for the departures. Feldklein could not stop looking at it, and all the while, not a word passed over his lips—except for one single word that he repeated from time to time: Angst (fear). Afterwards he was transferred to the St. Joseph insane asylum. According to the English radio, nearly 300 suicides were counted in the camp.

That evening, the prisoners made their sad way to the train shed. When the guards took it upon themselves, as they had the first time, to help the women carry their luggage, a young officer was heard saying, "Let those Krauts carry their bags themselves." The guard did not obey. Later, when one of them shouted at one of the poor creatures, this time it was one of the black-uniformed police officers who put him in line. In general, the plain old guards and police officers did their sad duty with as much tact and mercy as was possible. The behavior of those who were leaving made that easy to a large degree.

It could be said that the police presence was unnecessary. Sometimes it even seemed that they disappeared, in the face of the

peaceful and disciplined attitude of the prisoners. Especially during the night hours when the departures happened, when they put their helmets on, rifles in hand—really we were surprised if we paid any attention to it at all. It was as if people's glances landed beside them, or over their heads.

This air of silent dignity was, it is true, partly a result of the fact that some of these poor people were too weary to really realize what was happening. They had seen their fate approaching, they had trembled, fought against it—now it was decided—there was nothing more to do.

But there were also some real heroes there, among the men as well as the women. Miss Dr. Geismar, a block physician between 50 and 60 years old, left voluntarily so as not to abandon those who were sick.

The "volunteers" had a whole story of their own. If a man had a wife who was less than 60 (or 65) years old and thus not protected, and did not want to be separated from her, he signed a paper declaring that he was leaving as a "volunteer". The same went for children who did not want to let their parents leave alone.

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Old Emmanuel Mann, 82 years of age, had 16 children and grandchildren in the camp, including his daughter, Madame Muller, who had had one of her legs amputated. She had a prosthetic, so she was declared "transportable". So, they came to ask Mr. Mann if he wanted to leave of his own will, given that all of his 16 children were going to leave. Mr. Mann signed the volunteer sheet. Since he could not walk, two guards carried him the whole way. With his arms over their necks, the old man made the sign of the blessing over those who stayed behind, shouting, "Do not lose hope, my brothers; one day, God will gather us back together."

A woman of some years, Mrs. Weill, was in the infirmary suffering from cancer. A hopeless case. She had two young daughters, one of whom had watched her fiancé leave two days earlier. The whole day, the poor girls had tried to get an intervention so that they could stay with their mother, knowing that the separation would be the end of her. I saw those girls crying for hours and hours. And a while later, sitting in a corner of the train shed, their tears flowed still. At that moment Miss Holbeck of the Toulouse Quakers arrived from another camp. Arm in arm, we went in to see the Director. After hesitating a few moments, he crossed the two girls off the list. When we went back to the train shed to give them the news, cries of horror and despair. The doctor from the infirmary, had judged it better for this woman who was, according to her, completely hopeless, that he should send her with her children, and had had the patient taken down to the train shed. She barely made it to the train shed before passing out. The doctor from the hospital gave her injections, and they brought her back to the block, with her rescued daughters by her side.

At that moment an important person from among the Camp authorities walked by. Seeing the scene, he said: "Over there they're

killing themselves, over here they're fainting—really these rascals are giving us a run for our money."

The only excuse for this man was that he had had a very difficult night and then a very difficult day. But it is hard to find an excuse for Miss Aubry, Head Nurse of the Secours National, who passed the time leading up to the departure sitting on a stone ramp in front of the train sheds—telling jokes and laughing out loud. —

The outcome of all the brouhaha with the lists was that in the end, there were so many exceptions that it was necessary to find "new material". The wretches in the blocks kept waking up to the sound of cars flying down the road. How many of those poor souls who thought that they had been forgotten, exempt, rescued, suddenly saw a guard next their bed: "Quick, quick, get up, get your luggage"—hearing those heavy footsteps approach already made everyone in the barracks tremble—is he going to pass by—is he going to come in here? Many stopped sleeping in their barracks. Among them was one named Fritz Beer, when he learned that they had come for his wife, who was a nurse in one of the blocks.

Another group was those in possession of an emigration visa—the outcome of long years of effort, of waiting, of despair, of new hope—in Germany, in Belgium, in France—parents who thought that at last they would be able to go find their children who were waiting for them—nothing they could do. One elderly couple had gotten their freedom to go that very Friday morning—nothing they could do.

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The deportation went more quickly this time. As before, it was 30 people per train car. They tried to keep families together, as much as was possible in all the jumble. Those who had been called were calm and disciplined.

All of a sudden, a young nurse starts sobbing loudly. "I don't want to go to Frankfurt—they're taking us to Frankfurt, no, no"—we try to calm her—little by little she starts to cry more softly, then she boards the train like everyone else—she had often told us that her fiancé in New York was in the process of sending her a visa so that she could go join him—that they would be able to go make a life together—and at some point after the war, they were going to get married. —

That departure was followed by a third, 70 people this time. The train cars were hooked up to the train that was carrying the deportees from Rivesaltes.

Around mid-August, Director Kaiser left the camp. His place was taken by Mr. Gruel, the former Administrator, who, after a several months' absence overseeing a disciplinary camp for French prisoners, had come back just to have an up-close view of things following the 2nd convoy.

In the meantime, Gurs had been chosen as a Screening and Deportation Center for the departments of the southwestern region,

just as Rivesaltes was for the southeast, Les Mille for Bouches de Rhône etc.

Outside camp, raids were being conducted—the hunt for foreign Jews. In Marseille, the police proceeded in a perfunctory manner, arresting people regardless of their religion or race, sometimes even French people. In general, the results of these hunts depended on the good or ill will of the Prefecture authorities, and to a lesser extent the local authorities.

In many places, the mayor made known that on such and such a day, Jews had to present themselves “to be deported”. In other places the names on the list was “unofficially” made known to those concerned. Many hid or changed residences. Expeditions were organized to flee to Switzerland, to Spain. In the beginning many succeeded in reaching Switzerland. After six weeks they counted about 3000 new arrivals (although that included some refugees from Belgium and Holland as well). Spain was harder. In some cases, the guides took people’s money, abandoned people in the mountains, or even denounced them to the gendarmes themselves. Those who succeeded in crossing the border were well received by the *carabineros* [Spanish law enforcement] who gave them food and a place to sleep—but afterwards they brought them back to the border—although at least they did not put them in the hands of the French border guards.

Later, Switzerland only welcomed certain categories of people. Those who were turned away and the other unlucky ones were arrested by the French gendarmerie who generally showed understanding. They were brought to Camp Rivesaltes which became the deportation center for all of non-occupied France starting in September.

In all this it should not be forgotten that a large percentage of the victims of all this had emigrated from other countries or been hunted from country to country for years. Considering all that they had already been through, their energy, their initiatives in the camps from 1940 on—and their strength to persevere demand great respect.

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Thus, day by day at Gurs we saw buses and trucks arrive with those who had been arrested. Most of them had made it through the war thus far more or less free—under surveillance but at home in their villages. Often they had friends, even family at Gurs; many had sent care packages there. Now they were prisoners in the dreaded camp themselves.

There were also some who had fled from Belgium or Holland. Many had fallen into the wrong hands, had sacrificed their last penny, their last jewel. They had escaped the Germans, hoping to avoid deportation; they thought that they were safe once they reached the “free” zone, only to learn that, just like that, they were going to fall into the abyss that they had fled. I remember a gentleman who arrived with some members of his family—a pious, distinguished man—he had come from Belgium the day before. Together they had been brought to the departure place—when he saw me all he said was: “One night at

Gurs! I know that you can do nothing for me—perhaps for the children?" We succeeded in saving one of the girls, who was engaged to a wounded Frenchman, a prisoner of war. In other cases like theirs, we intervened unsuccessfully.

Finally we saw old friends arrive, former prisoners who had been released or sent away on sick leave a year or more ago.

When you went into the blocks, on every face, in every eye, there was always the same question, without exception: Is there any hope for us? Almost everyone told themselves, believed, that they were a "special case". Most imagined that they could see this or that chance for themselves; they clung to some last shred of hope. But others, who saw more clearly, did not raise their eyes from the ground. —

They were not used to the hardships of camp life, nor to the discipline. It was so complicated just to send a telegram. You had to think about being censored with everything you wrote.

It took so long for the mail to go out—and for the response to come. And it was true—the factor of "time" decided many people's fates. Papers from the consulate, birth certificates, and so many other documents that would have been able to save the recipients, arrived after they were gone.

There were many children, many young women among the newcomers—but everything that had been there for them earlier was gone—no school, because there were no teachers; the Menorah had lost all of its branches except three—a few days later, the decision from Vichy arrived that they should be transferred to the girls' home at Le Contal where they would be considered safe—a decision that covered almost all of them—too late.

In general we noticed that it was the best ones who had left. Among those from the old crowd who had stayed, besides the true exceptions, there were many clever types, with a lot of information and sometimes a lot of money, in a word people with connections—street girls.

We only got about 10% of the number of newcomers that we had expected. On the one hand, we were happy for those who had been saved, but with the fixed-number system that we were under, it came as bad news for us for the rest of us too.

The first convoy that left under the new leadership was about 70 people. The day before the departure, the charities collectively approached the Director to ask him to let them know the names beforehand and give them some kind of rights or an ability to veto, as was the case at Rivesaltes and

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a few other places. He promised. The next morning we gathered in his office. The charities had divided up the blocks among themselves beforehand, and had files based on the model of the files that the Camp administration had—with all the dates, all the material concerning each person in the Camp. As there were so many questions to address, we insisted most of all on all of the moments that could work

in favor of an exception (French family, a former stay, services rendered in France, etc.). We often had more details than the Camp did. The individual cases, ranked according how good their chances likely were, had been discussed in the charities' regular meetings.

In this way, we came to the Director's office well-prepared. The Director, after the names were read, called on members who were clearly on his side. Within a short time an agreement was reached to cross off 13 names. As there were enough volunteers to carry us beyond the required number, everything went smoothly.

During this work, the "Foreigners' Social Service" affiliated to the Ministry of the Interior at Vichy assumed an increasingly dominant role. They were the ones who made connections with other camps and with Vichy. The Director took advantage of the situation to communicate with the other charities via that organization alone. But soon the Foreigners' Social Service itself fell from grace in Vichy. Some of its members had stopped two train cars full of the children of deported parents in Lyon, but at that time the Germans were still demanding that whole families be handed over. The Director used this as an excuse to revoke the charities' influence over the lists, and even to stop communicating the lists to them. The charities' role thus became almost purely social.

The next strike, so anxiously awaited, came on August 31. The following night, the leader of the convoy held in his hand the three-columned list of names with nationalities and professions. At the bottom of the paper was written: "The German authorities acknowledge having taken possession of 502 persons including the names above."

In the meantime the problem of family members on the outside had become very serious. Many women had husbands who worked in the labor companies. The fate of those men was sealed. They were gathered up in their main offices, surrounded by gendarmes, and taken away. Telegrams were constantly coming in, asking whether the families wanted to accompany them as volunteers, offering all sorts of advice, or bidding their last goodbyes. Those were often mixed in with similar telegrams coming from wives. These "volunteers" were promised that they would see their husbands or sons—but when they asked if they would travel on the same train car or at least on the same train, the answer was: "not guaranteed". Poor people who got up all those false hopes.

But there were often cases that didn't work out. One man, separated from his wife since the beginning of the war, begged—not to be released, no, all he wanted was to be deported together with his wife who was living 80 km away from the camp—to see her just one more time—not possible.

The Director always had new ideas for keeping things unpredictable. This time those sentenced for deportation were taken into an empty block—there were both old and new prisoners. After the Director's office announced that everything would go normally, according to the directives and without either errors or preferences,—these were some of the day's cases:

A father of 7 children, some of whom were in the Camp. According to the charities' files he was a rabbi, but in the questioning, the proof was judged to be insufficient. A commander, of Polish origin but who had served for France, wounded in the other war [World War I].

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Young Silberberg, a boy of about 17 years, who was a few months past the prescribed cutoff. Likewise a mother with several children, the youngest of whom was just slightly older than 2 years old. (same reason)

Young Miss Ladenburger, 20 years old, as good-hearted as she was beautiful. An only child, she lived with her aging parents in a small village. Her father was gravely ill, her mother was blind—neither of them spoke a word of French. Their daughter was all they had. Being older than 16, she had to go—justice had to be done. An hour before departure, a telegram came in giving news of the father's suicide. We were able to hide it from her. I saw her leave the camp, her young shoulders bearing a superhuman burden. And in a little village, all alone, wept a blind mother.

A man named Heinrich Hendler had been transferred along with his family from Camp Gurs to Camp Noe (Toulouse). A father, mother, and children, the youngest of whom was 8 months old at the time of the deportations. At Camp Noe, everything started with rumors, originally having only to do with a simple relocation. The deportations in that department were going to go out from Camp Récébédon, which was also near Toulouse. So, without any indication of what it was really about, the question was posed at Noe one day whether anyone wanted to sign up to go to Récébédon. For one reason or the other, Mr. Hendler signed his family up. What a shock when it became clear that by signing the paper, he had volunteered his whole family for deportation! And all the more since the youngest child protected the whole family. Thanks to all kinds of interventions, they were ultimately able to be saved. But the oldest daughter had already gone to Récébédon. At Gurs, Hildegard (Ethel) Hendler had been one of the most active members of the Menorah. Tall, lively, full of a spirit of initiative and camaraderie, she had always had a good influence on the other girls. We have never been able to forget her folklore songs that she sang on the Gurs stage.

The Hendler family was finally able to be saved, but the Director of Récébédon did not want to grant to young Ethel her liberation. So she left.—She was her parents' joy, and seven people shook [with grief] for her. It was, by the way, at Noe or Récébédon where they threatened the poor people with machine guns on their way to the train.

That day, we saw the most disgusting briberies. Individuals without a single argument in their favor stayed in the blocks, untouched—because they had been able to pay the authorities fabulous sums of money. Twenty-seven people had been held back [from deportation] as the result of all kinds of interventions. They had

been put in the prison as essentially "Reserve". They thought that they were safe. Some of their luggage had gone back to the blocks. But around 5 o'clock in the morning, they were all required to go to the block for deportees, and 26 of them had to leave. There were not enough victims, mostly as a result of unjustified interventions. But already by noon of that day, one victim had denounced the Head of Surveillance to the Director, telling the Director that he had accepted a very valuable jewel from him. Other material was added on. The investigation led to the arrest of the accused man, and eventually to his indictment. But that did not bring back any of those who had gone.

Towards the end of the afternoon, they closed the block even to the charities. Everyone was parked in the barracks to wait for the calls and to have supper. From time to time, the head of someone walking by could be seen through one of the gaps in the wall. It was like a pen of animals, corralled together before being slaughtered. Truly, that was how we saw ourselves and our fate. "They're leading us to the slaughter," people said at Gurs.

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Some of the "newcomers" had been hiding or fleeing when they were arrested. They had no luggage. That whole day people were constantly calling the mayors of their villages, and a truck made rounds throughout the department. It was not a great success.

There was also the shortage of clothing. At 3 o'clock in the morning, people were still taking collections from those who stayed behind, searching for the last shred of fabric in the storerooms—even still, women were leaving for Poland (or even further) in nothing but their summer dress. Some children wore espadrilles [canvas shoes with soles made of rope] on their feet, not even a proper pair of sandals.

Many French people came from the villages at night to shake their hands once more. Naturally, they were not admitted.

The Director's office distributed printed declarations for people to sign, which allowed them to hand over possession of their property—moveable or immovable—to the General Union of Jews in France (L'Union Générale des Israélites en France, Ugif). But foreseeing the day when the UGIF would likewise be dispossessed of its wealth, the charities had taken down addresses where money, jewels, suitcases etc. could be sent, or they took on the property themselves, as a deposit, and gave the owners a receipt.

The night went on. It was quiet in the barracks, where most people slept half-lying, half-sitting. Then, the departure time arrived. Outside, under a light rain, sat the long line of buses, surrounded with guards in helmets, rifles in hand. Names were called one last time, then the barracks were emptied one after the other—I can still picture Mr. Israël Span, of the famous theatrical group "Habima"—he was an old man, crippled, but with such a sharp, lively mind and such a big personality. Mr. Blojfeder from Brussels—his 7 brothers, fallen in battle on the field of honor at Warsaw, could not

save him. The last ones to board were Mr. and Mrs. Nadelberg. They had recently arrived from Belgium with their daughter; they had been arrested trying to cross the French-Swiss border. The Germans had assigned them a place in the forced labor camps—they had escaped.

The whole afternoon, whenever he saw me, his [Mr. Nadelberg's] eyes asked one single question full of fear—he had kept repeating, "Do me good, do me good." You could see in those eyes the goodness of their hearts, you could see the nobility of their character in every feature of their faces. I was incapable of "doing them good". They were being handed over to those from whom they had just escaped.

They were waiting by themselves in the last barrack. The wife looked as if she were in another world. Someone touches her arm. "Madame, it is your turn." She wakes up from her trance; horrible cries rise from her throat: "Murderers, murderers" and so on without stopping. Her husband next to her is pale, like a dead man. Miss Holbeck of the Quakers took the poor woman in her arms, boarded the bus with her, and held her like that all the way to the train station. We were not close by. But who could ever stop hearing that hopeless cry: "Murderers".

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In September, Rivesaltes became the deportation center. At Gurs, the consigns continued, the rumors, the terror. But those who left still held on to a little hope, because at Rivesaltes, as we had learned, the screening was done more humanely; the charities were welcome to give their input. As for us, we continued to judiciously take down every detail. Every convoy that went to Rivesaltes was accompanied by at least one member of the social

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institutions, who brought our documentation to the friends working there. The first time, 32 of the 102 people sent were able to be saved.

At Rivesaltes it happened that the secretary of the Prefecture of Perpignan, when he received an order from Vichy at the last minute that the original number be increased by 50%, found the courage to ignore the message until after the departure. At Rivesaltes, human considerations played a role—a father and his 7 children who had come from Gurs were released with the reason given, "Not possible to send this beautiful rural family." At Rivesaltes, children were able to be saved in youth homes, sometimes even up to the age of 20. And a blind eye was turned towards evasions.

Later, even at Rivesaltes the conditions became harder. The way in which information was communicated had always been horrible. Each time, everybody was gathered together, sometimes in the middle of the night. Those whose names were called then had to separate from the others and were taken to Block K, which was in the middle of the other blocks. People were allowed to leave only to get their luggage or to line up for departure.

One day, a man comes to Rivesaltes. He finds his wife whom he has not seen since May 1940. She had succeeded in passing herself off as "Aryan", under a false name. The poor man dares not speak to her, so as not to put her in danger. That very day, with his wife watching, he is deported.—

The sick, "inasmuch as they are in good enough condition to be transported", were included in the convoys. When the medical commission from the department visited, they made such a clean slate that from then on, the French doctors in the Camp essentially declared everyone "transportable". Miss Elise Carlebach was discharged from the hospital as a convoy was going out. She was hardly moving on her stretcher. Somehow she ended up not leaving. The next morning she had died. Mrs. Jacob Landau, the mother of a 13-year-old boy who had received high honors in the French schools, was in the camp with her husband. For many long months, she suffered from dystentery. The doctors were giving up all hope. But the charities took care of her, virtually day and night, as they did for a few others. Finally she made it through the worst and the dysentery stopped—very slowly she regained a little strength—she seemed to be saved, even though she was only able to take a few steps holding onto her husband's arm. Nothing they could do. She was discharged from the infirmary in a wheelchair—she was deported.

Berthel Gradewitz, a young woman of 21 years, had a paralyzed foot such that she could not take a step without her equipment—nothing they could do. Not to mention those suffering from edema, those poor bodies swollen all over—nothing they could do.

The prisoners who were doctors told us that 20% would not make it through the journey alive.

From the second convoy on, the inspections became especially careful to confiscate knives, files, needles, etc. Cases of suicide on the trains were reported—one fortunate woman had reportedly thrown herself outside—Who could not sympathize?—Did not people say that once they arrived somewhere in Poland or Russia, most of them were going to be kept in locked train cars?—Furthermore the radio had just confirmed this news.

One departure day, it was September 23, the last member of the Menorah leaving for Rivesaltes asked me if it was true that the young women were going to be sterilized so that they could be given to the soldiers.

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That departure for Rivesaltes was particularly disgusting and desperate. They had packed men and women, young and old into the same train car. With all the fruit that they were getting, the nerves, the movement of the train and the nighttime cold, many began to have diarrhea. As always, the car had a bucket of water and a sanitary bucket, open to all eyes. No one can describe the scenes, the desperate lengths to which some poor wretches let themselves go.

Nor could anyone forget the case of the Gutmann children, not that it was an isolated case. The father, being "untransportable", had stayed in the village. The poor mother had come with her three children between 3 and 6 years old. These people could not have been rich—their clothes made that plain enough. But each one of the children was properly dressed, clean, hair neatly brushed; each one wore their little piece of ribbon in their hair. They slept all three together on a coushin on the ground, with their arms around each other's necks—that night the mother did not leave them out of her sight for one second. What was going through her mind? Later, we saw the children again—without their mother. Nothing was sacred for them anymore, not even a mother. —

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What has become of them, all these deportees, these individuals and families who have disappeared? The Red Cross is not allowed in; the news is practically zero.

God alone knows where they are. He does not abandon them.

Throughout the whole world, day by day, countless children are trembling for their parents—wives for their husbands, parents weeping for their children. Will there come a day when they see each other again—and for how many of them?

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