


News from Prague

Zprávy z Prahy



 Tomáš Kraus

Eight decades

PRAGUE, 27th January - In mid-January 1945, the Red Army launched military operations between the Oder and Vistula rivers by agreement of the Allied High Command. This opened a front to relieve the Western troops, caught by surprise by the unexpected counter-attack of the German army in the Ardennes. The rapid advance of the 1st Ukrainian Front forced the Nazi command to hastily evacuate the prisoner-of-war and concentration camps in the area. The regiment, commanded by Anatoly Shapiro, had fought a tough battle in which nearly half of the men were killed. The horrors of the war were therefore known to each of them from frightening proximity. But what they discovered in this camp was beyond their comprehension. "When we opened the gate, we saw human ruins, literally just bones covered with skin. Some stood there barefoot, even though it was bitterly cold... They tried to touch us, perhaps to convince themselves that it was true," Anatoly Shapiro, who lived to a ripe old age and often spoke about his experiences at universities in the USA, where he managed to emigrate after the war, later recalled. And, as he often pointed out, he did not understand how it was possible that all the prisoners in this camp were Jews. Because - he was a Jew too.

The camp was located in the original Polish town of Oświęcim, which the Nazis renamed Auschwitz. Since then, that name has inspired horror, as has the name of the village next door with the originally romantic name of Březinka, which has gone down in history as Birkenau.

So much for history.

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In March, we are planning a seminar with an excursion to Bergen-Belsen. More info coming soon...

Eight decades have passed since the moment described by Anatoly Shapiro. The opening of the Arbeit macht frei gate is one of the key events in the history of the world. We can attribute various meanings to it, from historical breakthroughs to existential philosophical reflections. This event in the context of this site has literally changed human history and its understanding, from religious debates (where was God?) to psychiatric diagnoses of PTSD transmission.

A full 8 decades have passed. Is that a lot or not enough? From the perspective of the individual, it's a lifetime; from the perspective of history, it's an episode. But what's changed in eight decades? The motivation for our work - we individuals who have been marked for life by family history - but also the institutions that have set out to cultivate a culture of memory, has always been the mantra of those who survived the Nazi hell through a series of incredible coincidences - NEVER AGAIN.

If we look around the world today - thanks to today's technology it is indeed possible to get a global view - we find that this has not been achieved. This slogan now appears to be an empty phrase. The bipolar political world may have collapsed in those eight decades, but there have been huge human tragedies all along. However much they have avoided our Euro-Atlantic space, they have this time affected other parts of the world, especially Asia and Africa.

Survivors of the Nazi rampage, for which the name Holocaust has come to be applied, have pointed, among other things, to the roots of what happened. The evil was generated in the historical context of centuries of hatred against one group of people, namely the Jews. Many argued that this was actually a coincidence and that any other group could have been the object of persecution. But is this really the case? Today, eight decades later, we are witnessing similar expressions of hatred against the Jews, and on that global scale. This time they are wrapped up in rationalizations of the political causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but make no mistake. It is the very same hatred that led to the gas chambers.

So how is it? Has humanity learned its lesson? And what would Anatoly Shapiro have to say about it?

Tomas Kraus

Networking workshop: "Nazi forced labor sites in northern Bohemia and Saxony"

ÚSTÍ n. LABEM, 9th October - a networking workshop was held in Ústí nad Labem on the topic of Nazi forced labour in the border region of Saxony-Bohemia. Participants were representatives of various organisations and institutions that deal with this topic from different perspectives.

The speakers included Mr Jan Hasil from the Archaeological Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, who spoke about the status and prospects of forced labour archaeology in Bohemia. Petr Pijáček from the association 'Politiciční vězni', made another interesting contribution about the forced labour camp Rovnost at the time of the communist regime in the former Czechoslovakia.

The activities of the authorities responsible in Saxony and the area of tension in which they operate were discussed in more detail from a German perspective. Between the presentations, the focus was on exchange and networking between the participants. Among other things, we presented the exhibition 'Ztracená paměť', conceived by the Institute and its partners.

The workshop concluded in the afternoon with an excursion to the Rabštejn underground factory, where prisoners from the Rabstein concentration camp, a satellite camp of the Flossenbürg concentration camp, were used to produce aircraft parts for the company Weserflug GmbH.

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to participate, the interesting contributions of the guest speakers and the lively exchange of ideas.



"Antisemitism and Us", Teachers' Seminar



TEREZÍN - From December 6 to 8, 2024, we hosted the seminar Antisemitism and Us in Terezín for teachers and peer educators from the [Anne Frank Youth Network \(AFYN\)](#). The event was organized in collaboration with [European Practitioners against Antisemitism \(EPNA\)](#), and with support from the German Federal Foreign Office.

Program and Key Speakers

The seminar offered a rich program focused on how to teach about antisemitism and the Holocaust in a way that has a tangible impact while avoiding unintended antisemitic outcomes. We were honored to welcome outstanding speakers:

- Tomáš Kraus, who guided participants through the authentic environment of the Terezín ghetto, sharing his family's stories to enrich the educational experience.
- Jakub Drábik, who gave a lecture titled What is Fascism?, exploring its origins, manifestations, and methods of prevention.
- Peter Weisenbacher, who presented FRA research and additional data on how antisemitism is perceived and experienced by members of the Jewish community in Slovakia.

ITI/Laurenz Neureiter

Teachers and peer educators shared their experiences and discussed methods for recognizing and addressing antisemitism effectively in classrooms. Additionally, we explored tools such as Golden Arrows and Deep Democracy, which promote constructive dialogue on controversial topics.

Survey Findings and Participant Feedback

During the seminar we presented the first version of a survey on anti-Semitism in schools, on which we collaborated with teachers, representatives of the Jewish community and a sociologist. Although most teachers have not seen an increase in anti-Semitism, we know from school preventionists that they see an increase, especially in the form of conspiracy theories.

Participants appreciated the practical approach, shared examples, and concrete tools for teaching. Some of their feedback included:

"What was new for me? Methods, the approach to the topic of antisemitism, lesson preparation, and information from the lectures."

"I liked everything, especially the combination of practical and professional perspectives, the opportunity to share experiences, and the interaction with young people."

"I will use almost everything in teaching."

Acknowledgments

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all participants – teachers and peer educators from AFYN (Anna Dvořáková, Antonie Fraňková, Karolína Škaroupková) – for their active engagement and contributions.

Special thanks to the Terezín Memorial for the support and cooperation, and Terezín Fortress, and Hotel Memorial for hosting us. We are also deeply grateful to EPNA and the German Federal Foreign Office for their support in making this seminar possible. We look forward to continuing our collaboration and our efforts to combat prejudice in schools.



Workshop "Just an Ordinary Day"

PRAGUE, 16th October - Thomas and Laurenz visited the School of International and Public Relations in Prague-Nusle and held a workshop there with A-level students. The activity 'Just an ordinary day' was used to illustrate the effects of anti-Jewish laws and regulations during the Nazi era. In group work, the participants were able to compile and analyse information about the actual circumstances using original documents.

We would like to thank you for the invitation and the lively discussions with the pupils.

ITI/Laurenz Neureiter

Digitisation of the State District Archive Mladá Boleslav

MLADA BOLES LAV, 17th December - We visited the State District Archive in Mladá Boleslav for the umpteenth time on behalf of the Terezín Initiative Institute, where we continued the digitization of the Mladá Boleslav District Office. This time we focused on applications for certificates of Czechoslovak citizenship.

This digitisation is being carried out in cooperation with LINDAT/CLARIAH-CZ, the Czech-German Future Fund (CNFB) and the Holocaust Victims Foundation (NFOH). The resulting digitised documents will be made available on the holocaust.cz portal in the Holocaust Victims Database, where they will be used for further research, education and the preservation of historical memory.



📷 ITI/Hana Čadová

We thank all partners who help us in our efforts to preserve and make available historical sources.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Welcoming volunteers at the Austrian Embassy

PRAGUE, 15th October - Our colleagues Thomas and Laurenz had the opportunity to meet the Austrian Ambassador in Prague, Bettina Kirnbauer, during a meeting with new Austrian volunteers at the Austrian Embassy. Our new volunteer from the Gedenkdienst organization, Laurenz Neureiter, joined us at the beginning of September and immediately became a popular and productive member of our team.

Thomas Elmecker also started his journey with us as a Gedenkdienst volunteer. Today he is an integral part of ITI and we are very grateful for him!

We would like to thank the Austrian Embassy and Ms. Bettina Kirnbauer for their warm welcome to our new colleague and for their long-term support of our work. Together we continue the fight against forgetting and remember history for a better future.



📷 ITI/Thomas Elmecker



Q&A with Mrs Lehovcová

PRAGUE, 17th October - A group of exchange students from the USA visited us in Jáchymka for a workshop we organised in cooperation with @vertoeducation. During the time we spent together, we discussed the repressions and regulations that gradually eroded the rights of Jews in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and how they affected them. In one activity we discussed what an ordinary day might be like for us, and then we saw how, over time, personal life became more and more restricted and participation in society was forbidden.

The workshop was followed by an insightful Q&A discussion with Mrs Lehovcová, who told the story of her mother Anna Hyndráková, who survived Theresienstadt and Auschwitz, as well as her own upbringing after the war, how the family dealt with their history and Mrs Lehovcová's experiences with anti-Semitism during the communist regime and in today's Czech Republic. We would like to thank Mrs Lehovcová for sharing her story with us and the participants for their keen interest and participation.



📷 ITI/Laurenz Neureiter

Self publishing made easy!

PRAGUE, 7th November - afyn.cz got together and held their very own zine workshop.

The history of zines (which are small DIY magazines) is characterised by their use by marginalised groups in particular to express themselves artistically and the issues that mattered to them, both cheaply and quickly. After learning about the rich history of zines, we got right down to making our own. At the end of the workshop we presented our little creations to each other and saw all the beautiful ways in which zines can be used: From making your own little comic book to creating an informative brochure, anything is possible.



📷 ITI/Thomas Elmecker

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