SUMMARY

At Dachau the only objective of the inmates was to survive under the most primitive and cruel conditions which constantly threatened their sanity and physical existence. Little more than this was humanly possible. As a result of these abnormal conditions, this camp of 30,000 men cannot be compared to the structure of any normal society differentiated by social classes, political, religious, or professional affiliations. Hence, neither normal moral standards nor normal political or sociological criteria are applicable to the Dachau situation.

The inmates of the camp did not act as members of their former social class or as representatives of political or religious groups—whether they were professional men, workers, intellectuals, Communists, nationalists, Catholics, or Protestants—, but only as human beings in a struggle for survival against starvation and mass murders. This was true as much of the minority of those who took charge of the internal organization of the camp under the SS as of the majority of those who did not.

Living under these abnormal conditions, the inmates, especially those who had gained a position of some power and security, were frequently degraded and degenerated to a criminal level copying the methods and practices of the SS for their own protection and benefit. Because so many of the administrative positions were held by German prisoners, rather strong anti-German sentiments developed among the non-German inmates of the camp.

The only form of self-organization among the prisoners took place within the framework of the internal organization of the camp. The "Labor Allocation Office" (Arbeitseinsatz) and its subsidiary branches was the key agency which was successively in the hands of different cliques who frequently abused their position of power for the sake of personal advantages. These groups were composed largely of Germans until the last six months.

Otherwise, the level of existence in the camp together with the insidious system of internal controls, whereby prisoners themselves were placed in the service of the SS, did not permit the emergence of any organizational form. There was no underground organization or political activity in the
accepted sense of the word. Even expressions of mutual help and solidarity among members of the same national group never transcended the level of personal relations between people bound by friendships, common background, and language. They never took the form of organized action.

Only during the last phase of the camp, an organizational network was set up between leading representatives of various nationalities which led to the formation of the "International Prisoners Committee" -- today the highest authority in the camp. This Committee was concerned entirely with matters of self-help in preparation of the eventual liberation of the camp. It has never been dominated by any political program or orientation.

This report is based on two days' investigation of conditions in the Dachau Concentration Camp. It does not intend to give either an exhaustive history of the camp or a comprehensive survey of all aspects of camp life. Numerous reports are in the process of being written which, when completed, will give a full picture of the Dachau Concentration Camp. This report is concerned primarily with one aspect of life in Dachau: the internal organization of the camp, the evidence of self-administration among the prisoners and the emergence of special control and pressure groups, as well as the position of the various social, political, and national groups within this organizational framework.
HISTORY

Dachau is the oldest Nazi concentration camp. It was set up in March 1933 and constructed to house a maximum of between 8,000-10,000 prisoners. It was designed to serve as a camp for German political prisoners and Jews. Early 1935, however, the first criminal prisoners arrived in the camp and, ever since then, the camp has included a small minority of criminal prisoners. The original number of inmates grew substantially in 1937 after the German annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia. During the war the prisoner body was further increased steadily through the influx of political and military prisoners from the occupied territories and through numerous transports arriving from other German concentration camps. The first Polish prisoners arrived in 1940, to be followed in 1941 by prisoners from the Balkan countries, and in 1942 by the first Russian prisoners. Throughout this period the camp also absorbed a large number of prisoners from the occupied Western countries, especially France.

While the total number of inmates fluctuated owing to incoming and outgoing transports and the systematic policy of extermination in the camp—it was generally, during the war, between 22,000 to 30,000; roughly three times the maximum capacity of
the camp. It reached its peak sometime in 1944 when numerous transports arrived from the evacuated concentration camps in the East (e.g., Auschwitz), the West (e.g., Natzweiler) and inside Germany. Dachau then held more than 60,000 prisoners and included an entire network of smaller subsidiary camps located in its immediate surroundings. These over-crowded conditions were largely responsible for the subsequent increase in the death rate at the camp. Aside from the official murders by the SS, thousands and thousands of prisoners died during the fall and winter of 1944 from starvation and typhus.

Shortly before the camp was liberated, the Nazis sent out a large transport of special prisoners, consisting chiefly of Russians, Poles, Germans, and Jews. The Nazis also evacuated the so-called "honorary prisoners" (Ehrenhaftlinge), i.e., the famous political and religious hostages they held at Dachau (Niemoeller, Schuschnigg, Daladier, Blum, etc.). Plans to destroy the entire camp were apparently foiled at the last moment. At the time of liberation there were about 32,000 prisoners left in Dachau. The daily rate of people dying of exhaustion, starvation, and typhus was about 200. It is now between 50 to 80.

**COMPOSITION**

The inmates of Dachau can be classified according to two categories: (a) by nationality, (b) by the type of crime of which they were accused. The differentiation by nationalities of course, only arose during the war when the camp began to include different national groups. Before the war the number of foreigners was insignificant. German, Austrian, and Jewish prisoners represented the numerically strongest groups.

During the war, the Germans and Austrians became a numerical minority. The numerically strongest national group were the Poles, followed by the Russians, French, Yugoslavs, Germans, Jews, and Czechs. A rough estimate at 1 May 1945 gives the following statistical breakdown: Poles: 9,200; Russians: 3,900; French: 3,700; Yugoslavs: 3,200; Jews: 2,100; Czechoslovaks: 1,500; Germans: 1,000; and a number of other national groups (Belgians, Hungarians, Italians, Austrians, Greeks, etc.) below 1,000. The average number of Germans held here during the war, however, was about 3,000. Some two thousand Germans were evacuated and killed in the last big transport a few days before our occupation of Dachau.

Although it was the practice of the camp management to keep the various national groups mixed up with each other, members of the different nationalities always retained a natural sense of belongingness, solidarity and group-feeling.
The prisoners were further divided according to the type of crime of which they were found guilty indicated by differently coloured patches worn on their uniforms or work-clothes. The most important patches were the red ones identifying political prisoners, the green identifying criminal prisoners, and the black identifying "asocial" elements, i.e., people who had violated labor regulations, committed sabotage, etc. There were numerous other patches (pink, purple, yellow) identifying other crimes. Prisoners of war sent to Dachau were treated and designated as political prisoners.

As far as the prisoners themselves are concerned, the camp was divided sharply only between two groups: the "reds" or political prisoners and the "greens" or criminal prisoners. The SS tried to break down this distinction by an ingenious system of creating a "prisoners' elite", composed of both "reds" and "greens", which assumed power over the internal organization of Dachau, controlled and frequently terrorized the camp in the name of the SS, but formally independent of the SS. This system of internal organization will be discussed in the following section. However, despite this organization of internal corruption and terror, by which the SS exercised its control indirectly, the mass of political prisoners continued to live in sharp separation from and opposition to the "criminals" and most of the prisoner bosses whom they despised, feared and hated.

It is impossible to classify prisoners according to any other category—either by social status, class, background,
or by previous political and religious affiliations. These factors dividing people in a normal type of society are totally inapplicable to the situation at Dachau where people lived the most abnormal kind of existence imaginable. Regardless of origin, education, wealth, politics, or religion, people living in Dachau for a certain time were gradually reduced to the most primitive and cruel form of existence—motivated almost exclusively by fear of death. They no longer acted as former bankers, workers, priests, Communists, intellectuals or artists, but primarily as individuals trying to survive in the physical conditions of Dachau, i.e., trying to escape the constantly threatening death by starvation, freezing, or execution. Some may still have thought of themselves in terms of their former social and political background or labels; but it is important to ask to what extent these old social labels determined their actions during the time of their imprisonment at Dachau. As far as we could ascertain, these factors are completely irrelevant for explaining the behavior of the inmates of Dachau. Living conditions in the camp were such that all former professional, social and political distinctions were gradually obliterated. People still behaved differently, some well and courageously, others evil and cruelly; but these differences cannot be derived from or identified with their former social labels (whether aristocratic, military, intellectual, or proletarian), but simply reflect the different personal reactions of individuals to a situation in which all are reduced to the most primitive social level of a struggle for mere physical survival.
ORGANIZATION

The organization of the camp was based on the system of indirect rule. There were two separate spheres of control: (a) the external control apparatus of the SS Guards, (b) the internal control organization in the hands of the prisoners themselves.

The organization of the SS Guards is comparatively unimportant. It followed the regular pattern of this para-military outfit. The key positions seem to have been the "camp commandant", in charge of the entire SS establishment Dachau, next, the SS leader, in charge of the labor gangs and transports (Arbeitseinsatzfuehrer); and finally the position of the intelligence officer (Vernehmungsfuehrer) of the Political Division, in charge of security, discipline, and punishment.

These men, however, and their subordinates exercised hardly any direct control whatsoever. Instead, they used as instruments for their rule the internal organization of the camp in the hands of the prisoners themselves. This internal organization of the prisoners followed the regular pattern of a Nazi hierarchical regime. It was headed by a camp senior (Lageraeltester); under the camp senior there were (a) the secretary (Lagerschreiber) and his staff, in charge of the records, (b) the chief of police (Polizeifuehrer) and the camp police (Lagerpolizei), and the Chief of the Labor Allocation Office (Arbeitseinsatz) and his staff, in charge of all aspects of work performed inside and outside the camp. The Labor Office sent out the "work details" (Arbeits Kommandos), of which there were about 160, each headed by a foreman called the "Capo".
Together with the camp senior these agencies and their chiefs formed the central authority of the camp.

The camp was further divided into "blocks" (Blocks) and "cells" (Stuben). And each block and each cell, in turn, had its "senior" and "secretary", called Blockaeltester (Stubenaeltester) and Blockschreiber (Stubenschreiber) respectively.

This system of internal controls served the interests of the SS most effectively. In order to deal with the enormous number of prisoners, they only had to deal through the men of the central authority to whom the subsidiary camp authorities were responsible. The SS issued general orders; the particulars of carrying these orders out were left to the internal organization of the prisoners.

It was the familiar Nazi technique of indirect rule. To guard against sabotage under this set-up, the SS at Dachau, as everywhere else, employed its own systems of prisoner spies and informants inside the camp and applied the most ruthless forms of terror whenever necessary. As agents the SS made particular use of the minority of criminal prisoners (about 700)—sometimes disguised by red patches as political prisoners.

Under these conditions it is evident that to be part of the camp administration afforded the best possible means of survival. In an official position the individual enjoyed not only a certain sense of personal power and security, but could also negotiate deals which brought him and his friends certain small privileges in work, food, clothing, and living conditions. Hence, the struggle for survival in the camp to the extent that it was manifested in overt actions frequently took the form of fighting for power through the camp administration. In this process, of course, certain groups emerged among the political prisoners who seized positions of control and exploited them for their own personal benefit and for that of members of their group. Moreover, in an atmosphere, filled with terror, fear, threats, starvation and death, many of the old legitimate political prisoners themselves became corrupted and degenerated to the level of the criminals, i.e., used the brutal, criminal methods of the SS and the "greens".

There are numerous reports about thefts, beatings, and killings by political "Capos" in different positions. When this stage was reached where prisoners persecuted fellow prisoners instead of preserving a sense of common solidarity, the success of the SS method of control was, of course, complete. However, it would be incorrect, as pointed out above, to identify these groups with any social or political label. Even when they abused their power to the excess of criminal activities, they never acted as representatives of a definite social or political group, but merely
as people who, having succeeded in seizing a position of limited power, exploited this position for personal advantages and favors. That so many formerly genuine political prisoners succumbed to this pressure and sank to a criminal level of existence was one of the real tragedies in places like Dachau.

GROUPINGS OF PRISONERS

LABOR ALLOCATION OFFICE: Of all the administrative agencies within the internal organization of the camp, the Labor Allocation Office (Arbeitseinsatz) was the key office. This office allocated the labor requirements for the different "work commandos" (Arbeitskommandos) and also determined the composition of the transports which were shipped out from Dachau. Both functions were of the highest importance insofar as the nature of work frequently determined one's means of subsistence (e.g., agricultural workers were generally better fed and could smuggle food back into the camp) and insofar as transports were greatly feared since their destination was generally unknown. To the extent that the prisoners had any voice or pressure on their use and disposition, this was exercised through the labor office.

The office was run entirely by prisoners. The staff consisted of a chief, several assistants and a group of clerks. The office maintained files which contained all personal data pertinent to the allocation of individuals for work of various kinds. The three main sources of employment at Dachau were (a) work inside the camp, (b) work at the SS camp, (c) work on farms and in factories in the area. The lists of people to be shipped off on transports was usually compiled from those prisoners who were not part of a regular "Working Commando."

In operation, the SS Labor Leader (Arbeitseinsatzfuehrer) simply informed the chief of the Labor Office to have a certain number of men ready at a certain time for work or for shipment on a transport. The selection of the men for any given assignment was largely left to the Labor Office itself, which drew up its lists in consultation with the block and cell seniors. It would be easy, however, to exaggerate the extent to which the Labor Office enjoyed freedom of action in these decisions. In many matters, especially in the cases of transports which were politically important, the SS office would hand down a list of people whom it wished to have included in the assignment.

Nevertheless, the positions in the Labor Office and the subsidiary command over the "work commandos" afforded sufficient power to serve as an incentive for individuals and groups to seize these positions and defend them against outsiders. Historically
these groups were Germans simply because Germans were the oldest inhabitants of the camp. As far as we could trace the developments back, some kind of a group or clique seems to have first formed in 1937 under an Austrian Socialist by the name of Brenner. The "Brenner Group" in the Labor Office included both German and Austrian Socialists. After the release of Brenner, it was superseded by a combination of German Socialists and Communists under a certain Kuno Rieke (Socialist) and a certain Julius Schaetsle (Communist). This combination and their staff were in control of the Labor Office until June 1944 when Schaetsle was suspected of conspiratorial activities and shipped off in a transport. Rieke died shortly thereafter in the camp. A temporary regime succeeded the Rieke-Schaetsle group until September 1944 when a new regime gradually took over eliminating all Germans from positions of influence in the Labor Office. This last group, composed primarily of Alsatians, Lorrainers, French, Luxembourgers, Belgians, and Poles, is still in charge of the Labor Office today.

None of these groups can be considered as underground; none of them represented a political body. There was no evidence that these people acted as members of a political group with a definite political program or purpose. These men held together in their own small group or clique for the personal advantages their position offered them in the generally miserable conditions of the camp. This is not to say that they did not try to take care of friends. But the favors they could dispense were on such a personal basis and on such a low level of small physical improvements that they could never form the basis for any organized activity or relationship. It was simply part of the living conditions in the camp and part of the control system set up by the SS which placed certain of the groups of prisoners in positions of minor power. And these same factors were equally responsible for the degeneration of many of these men to a level of criminal activity against their own fellow-prisoners. Since Germans, being the oldest inmates, had generally seized control of most of the positions of influence in the administrative apparatus in the camp, the other national groups naturally developed distrust, antagonism, and frequently intense hatred of these German prisoners.

OTHER POSTS OF CONTROL: The Germans, however, were not alone in charge of all the leading positions. The key post of the camp senior, for instance, was held by a certain Melazarian, an Armenian and former Red Army officer; and many of the block and cell senior as well as the "Capos" of the "work commandos" were chosen from different nationalities. Melazarian had so completely sold out to the SS and was so generally hated by all the inmates of the camp that he was almost beaten to death after occupation and finally executed by American troops. The same fate befell the German chief of the camp police, a certain Wernicke. But even the generally rather strong feelings against Germans are not universal, for in place of Melazarian who was dismissed before our occupation, a certain Oskar
Mueller was appointed "camp senior". Although a German and a former Communist, Mueller enjoys the respect and admiration of the representatives of all national groups. At present he is also a member of the "International Prisoners' Committee", to be discussed below. But as in the case of the people who abused their position of power, so in the case of Mueller who did not. His former political views, as he himself stressed, have nothing to do with his present activities in the camp. He has performed his functions for the benefit of all the inmates in the camp in order to save what can humanly be saved under the disastrous conditions of life in Dachau without any other aim or motivation.

NATIONAL GROUPS: There was no organized activity in the camp in any other form. Even the national groups which formed more or less natural divisions in the camp did not develop any organizational form. Bonds between prisoners speaking the same language and possessing the same national background naturally existed; but these personal bonds did not result in any organizational expression or in overt activities of any sort. Men of the same nationality stuck together in order to preserve their sanity and to prolong their physical existence. In the course of time, however, certain natural leaders emerged out of these national groups and these unofficially recognized
leaders within the various nationalities, in turn, were eventually responsible for the only real organization which has existed in Dachau; the "International Prisoners' Committee" which is the highest prisoner authority in the camp today. There were no "international" relations on the basis of common political or social grouping. For example, no kind of unifying element seemed to exist between Russian and German Communists, or between French and Polish Catholics. Nor did people of any one national group seem to show any marked preference for members of their own social class or political affiliation as distinguished from compatriots with a different social or political background. This indifference clearly showed the levelling influence of life under the primitive, dangerous conditions of Dachau which gradually blurred all former sociological and political distinctions.

INTERNATIONAL PRISONERS' COMMITTEE (IPC): When American troops entered Dachau on the evening of 30 April they found an "International Prisoners' Committee" (IPC) functioning in the camp. The IPC was in complete control of the camp. Most of the SS Guards had fled together with most of those prisoner elements who had cooperated with the SS and had themselves been guilty of maltreatment and murder of fellow-inmates.

The origins of the IPC go back to sometime in September of last year when Allied military successes in the West promised the possibility of an early liberation of the prisoners. A small group of inmates employed in the camp hospital served as a nucleus for the IPC: an Albanian (Kuci), a Pole (Nazewski), a Belgian (Faulet), and a British-Canadian (O'Leary). They established contact with representatives of other nationalities, Russian, French, etc., and also cooperated with one German, the above-mentioned Mueller, who was a recent arrival in the camp. Aside from Mueller, the "hospital nucleus" of the future IPC, did not work with any German prisoners. They were too much afraid of the spies working among the Germans.

The aims of this group were simple. They wished to prepare for the advance of the Americans, save as many lives as possible in the last critical phase before liberation, and keep a record of criminal SS activities and personalities. In this program they seem to have been quite successful. Since last December they tried to keep certain key inmates as "patients" in the camp hospital where they enjoyed a certain protection. They likewise enlisted the help of a great number of block and cell seniors to control the activities of criminal elements among the prisoners and to nip in the bud any provocative action which the SS might use to unleash mass massacres. They prepared lists of crimes and criminals among the SS and their prisoner stooges. Finally, they tried to keep informed about the advance of the Allies, listening to foreign broadcasts, and spread the news by their men throughout the camp. When
American troops were near Augsburg, they even established contact through prisoners working on farms in that area.

The building up of this rather closely-knit network of activities was facilitated by the gradual disintegration of SS controls during the last months, the replacement of old SS Guards, the comparatively small number of guards toward the end (about 250), and confusion created by orders and counter-orders from higher headquarters. In the last days before liberation, the IPC came practically out into the open. On 27 April, for example, a large transport of 6,700 Russians, Poles, Germans, and Jews was scheduled to leave the camp. By changing national identity patches and padding the camp records, 1,000 Russians were "hidden" in the camp and escaped the transport and destruction. Of this transport only 60 men survived the massacre staged by the SS guards on the road south of Munich.

On the following day, the IPC actually issued circulars informing their fellow-prisoners that the committee had taken over, that they should stay in their barracks and maintain law and order so as to prevent provocations. An attempt by the SS to evacuate another transport on the evening of 28 April failed when the inmates simply did not leave their barracks. Besides this simple aim of organizing for the purpose of saving as many lives as possible, the IPC did not have any program. There was no political activity of any kind, and no social differentiations within the group. Even the national distinction which excluded the Germans (except for Mueller) was not actively directed against the German inmates of the camp, but rather a protective measure to guard against possible sabotage of their efforts by German prisoners who were at the service of the SS. Thus even the activities of the one well-organized group emerging in the camp proved that the only rationale for organizing any group activity under the conditions of Dachau was derived entirely from the primitive motive of personal survival, and not from any social, political, or religious associations.

The IPC is now the highest prisoner authority in the camp. At present it is headed by a former Soviet General (Michailow); the Belgian Haulot is Vice-President. The committee has daily meetings with the army authorities and is charged with carrying out the orders issued by the American camp commandant. Sub-committees for all basic necessities, police, food, sanitation, work, disciplinary measures, etc., have been established. In this way the Committee and its various branches continues to assist in the process of maintaining order in the camp and preparing the conditions for the release and repatriation of the prisoners at Dachau.