



HÉLÈNE LANGEVIN

The seventeenth day of trial, 11 December 1947

Presiding Judge: Please, call witness Langevin.

(Witness Hélène Langevin stands up.)

Presiding Judge: Will the witness please state her personal data?

Witness: Hélène Langevin, 38 years old, of French nationality, former member of the National Assembly, non-religious, no relationship [to the defendants], resident in Paris.

Presiding Judge: Is the witness a daughter of the well-known physicist?

Witness: Yes, I am the daughter of the famous French physicist.

Presiding Judge: I advise the witness to speak the truth in accordance with Article 107 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Making false declarations is punishable with a prison term of up to five years. Do the parties submit any requests regarding the mode of hearing of the witness?

Prosecution: No.

Defense: No.

Presiding Judge: The witness will testify without taking the oath. Will the witness please say what she knows about the case itself, and especially with respect to the defendants whom she recognizes? Can the witness provide any specific facts?

Witness: I would like to present the Auschwitz camp as a part of the German repressions that affected the French nation. It was not until the spring of 1942 that they started taking people to the Auschwitz camp, but German repressions in France began much earlier, especially when it came to the French intelligentsia. In order to give an accurate overview, I must start with the arresting of my father by the Gestapo in his flat on 31 October 1940. The arrests that followed came one after another, and in 1941 the executions by shooting began. The victims of the first execution were three lawyers. Then, there was the



famous execution in Châteaubriant, Brittany, where 50 people were killed, including many intellectuals, doctors, and engineers. In 1942, my husband Jacques Solomon, together with several of his friends and people of science, was shot dead.

The first time people were taken to Auschwitz was in March 1942. That first transport may be considered as a trial transport for the Germans to see what reactions it would cause in France. The next transport was sent in June. The number of transports grew faster and faster, and in the summer of 1942 there were several transports organized every week. The first transport consisted of Jews. Then on 6 July, the first transport of political prisoners was sent. It was the time when the systematic extermination of political prisoners began. In 1942, the number of transports sent from France amounted to 50. In 1943, only 18 transports were sent from France. In the previous year, Germans emptied all concentration camps in France and only the solidarity of the French nation, or all those who were struggling with German repressions, namely the Jews and the members of the resistance movement, could impede the mass arrests.

In January 1943, I myself came to Auschwitz with a transport of political prisoners, composed only of women. In 1944, 18 transports were again sent from France, including one transport of political prisoners consisting of 1,650 people; however, they were not kept in the camp. In addition to political prisoners who were deported individually, entire French families were also taken away. In 1942, the first deportees left their children in France, but in August of the same year the Germans organized two transports that consisted exclusively of children. It was announced that the children would soon join their parents. They really joined their parents – after being driven into crematorium furnaces, which none of them left.

It is said that the total number deportees was 120,000, but in reality there were probably much more of them. We cannot forget that at that time the Germans considered a significant part of France as incorporated to Germany or Belgium. Therefore, we can say that from the 120,000 French people, or more precisely 150,000, only 21,600 stayed alive.

The situation of the French in the Auschwitz camp was particularly difficult. The climate was very hard to endure. They did not speak German or Polish, so it was difficult for them to find employment in *kommandos*. Among those 150,000 victims, there were many young people. In my transport, there were many young girls – almost all of them died.



I would like to mention my friend Denielle Casanova, secretary general of the Union of Young French Girls. She was a dentist by profession, which contributed to the fact that she had a relatively privileged position in the camp, but instead of thinking about herself, she used all the possibilities to help the whole French group who arrived with her. Under those circumstances, she came down with typhus fever. It was the cause of death of the majority of people, because no one avoided that epidemic. Marie Politzer, the wife of great philosopher Georges Politzer, who had been executed in Paris on the same day that my husband was shot dead, died with her.

I would also like to recall some of the great intellectuals who were massacred in Auschwitz. First, Abraham – physicist, professor at the Sorbonne University, laboratory director, [professor] at the *École normale supérieure*, was taken away in December 1943 at the age of 75. Another French physicist – Eugène Bloch, also a professor at the Sorbonne University, who replaced Professor Abraham as the laboratory director when the latter retired; he was also deported and killed in Auschwitz. The great microbiologist at the Pasteur Institute, Volent, a student of the great Mechnikov, who was taken away with his wife in December 1943, Professor Axoli, Pierre-Bloch, a former university of technology student, a waterway engineer – and many others, because we can say that the Germans tried to exterminate the greatest French intellectuals.

Presiding Judge: Can the witness say anything about the defendants?

Witness: From among the defendants, I recognize defendant Mandl.

Presiding Judge: What can the witness say about her?

Witness: I would not like to talk much about the facts that the Tribunal is already well aware of. I will describe an event that concerned myself.

At the beginning of 1943, after our arrival at the Birkenau camp, a great selection took place. We did not know what it meant. We were ordered to leave through the camp gate and go to a large meadow in front of the camp. We stood there without food until the night came. In the morning, we were told to return to the camp and run in a single file. Most of us were numb with cold and not able to run. Singer Alice Viterbo, who had a wooden prosthesis, stood by my side. I knew she would not be able to run. At that time, I thought that we just



had to avoid whip strikes. I did not know that our lives were at stake then. I told Alice to hold on to the back of my sweatshirt, and that we would go as fast as we could. As soon as we crossed the gate, someone started hitting us with a stick, so we went even faster, but then *Oberaufseherin* [senior overseer] Mandl, who saw that Alice was holding on to me, knocked us over. Alice Viterbo, who of course found it difficult to get up, was taken to block 15.

I do not want to repeat other facts. My friends, who will testify later, will probably have a lot to say, because they stayed in the Auschwitz camp even longer than I did. I think it is unnecessary to repeat the same things.

Presiding Judge: Thank you. Are there any questions?

Prosecutor Kurowski: I would like to ask the witness if she stayed in any French camps before the deportation to Auschwitz.

Witness: First, I was in the Santé prison in Paris, then in the Romainville camp near Paris.

Prosecutor Kurowski: I would like to ask if the regime in that French camp was in any way similar to Auschwitz. Was the way the prisoners were treated similar?

Witness: The regime in Romainville was naturally much less strict than at Auschwitz, because it was not a labor camp, but rather a camp where people waited for deportation. Also the proximity to Paris and the fact that the Romainville fort was inhabited by French people, impeded any greater repressions. That is why we were able to violently protest because of insufficient amount of food, and we were sure that the French would hear our screams. However, apart from the fact that women were transported out of the Romainville camp, men also left that camp and were executed by firing squad. One morning, 50 husbands of our female colleagues were taken away in this way.

Prosecutor Kurowski: The Witness has mentioned here that entire French families were deported. Was it a mass phenomenon?

Witness: I have already testified that in 1942, 70,000 people were deported from the French camp, and the transports consisted of 1,000–1,500 people [each].

Prosecutor Kurowski: My question goes in that direction: I would like to know what – according to the witness – was the purpose for deporting entire families? Was it about



repressions and fear or rather the extermination of those families, creating for them such living conditions in exile that they would not survive?

Witness: Both of those objectives were set simultaneously. On the one hand, they hoped to terrorize the French nation; on the other, they wanted to exterminate those who resisted.

Prosecutor Kurowski: If we take into account what the witness is saying now, as well as the fact which the witness provided earlier – that from the 150,000 deported people only 2,600 stayed alive – we should not consider it a coincidence, but a result of a thoroughly thought-out German policy.

Witness: The first transport was exterminated by natural means, that is lack of food, lack of clothes, excessive work, but also by the fact that people coming from France, who were absolutely not able to resist such treatment, were often forced to sleep outside in March in Upper Silesia. However, the destruction apparently did not seem swift enough, because in the summer of 1942, gas chambers and crematoria were built.