

11. COMMEMORATIVE EXCURSION TO ENGERAU with the Unveiling of a Memorial in Wolfsthal

Program

Unveiling of a Memorial in Wolfsthal 9 a.m.:

Ecumenical worship service in the **Wolfsthal** Community Church with father **Ernst Walecka** and pastor **Laszlo Hentschel**

10.30 a.m.:

Unveiling of a memorial for Hungarian-Jewish slave laborers who were murdered during the "death march" from Petržalka (Engerau) / Bratislava to Bad Deutsch-Altenburg

Program:

Speeches: Mayor **Gerhard Schödinger** and **Wolfgang Sobotka** (representative from the provincial government)

Historical introduction: Professor **Szabolcs Szita** (Holocaust Documentation Center of the Hungarian Auschwitz Foundation, Budapest) and Dr. **Claudia Kuretsidis-Haider** (Research Center for Post-War Trials)

Historical witness: Professor **Jonny Moser** (DÖW)

Kaddisch: Rabbi **Schlomo Hofmeister**

Musical accompaniment: **Donaustimmen**. Followed by **reception**.

Memorial Ceremony in Petržalka 1 p.m.:

Ceremony at the **memorial for the Hungarian-Jewish slave laborers** at the **cemetery in Petržalka** (Engerau) / Bratislava

Program:

Addresses of welcome: H.E. **Josef Markus Wuketich** (Austrian Ambassador in Bratislava), H.E. **Alexander Ben-Zvi** (Israeli Ambassador in Bratislava)

Speech: Dr. **Peter Salner** (President the Jewish Community in Bratislava)

Historical introduction: Dr. **Eleonore Lappin-Eppel** (Austrian Academy of Science, Vienna), Dr. **Claudia Kuretsidis-Haider**

Historical witnesses: **Endre Várnai** (son of one of the murdered Hungarian-Jewish slave laborers), **Béla Varga** (Hungarian-Jewish slave laborer during the Nazi-time)

2.30 – 4 p.m. :

Journey to sites of the former Engerau camp in Petržalka

Historical background:

Dr. **Claudia Kuretsidis-Haider** (FStN)

Commemoration in Bruck/Leitha

4.30 p.m.:

Commemoration ceremony at the **cemetery in Bruck/Leitha** for 155 murdered Hungarian-Jewish slave laborers

Program:

Historical background: Dr. **Petra Weiß** (City Archives of Bruck/Leitha)

Speech: Dr. **Irmtraut Karlsson**

Historical witness: Professor **Paul Lendvai**

Sunday, 27 March 2011

Departure 7.45 a.m. (daylight saving time!)

Return: 6 p.m.

Meeting point:

1020 Vienna, Praterstern 1 (in front of the **Jüdisches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung**)
Metro stop "Praterstern" exit: Heinestrasse

Contribution: EUR 11,-

Registration by 20 March 2011:

Organizer:

Dr. Claudia Kuretsidis-Haider (Austrian Research Center for Post-War Trials)

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For more information see:

<http://www.nachkriegsjustiz.at/service/archiv/Endbericht%20Engerau-Fahrt%202010.pdf>

http://www.nachkriegsjustiz.at/ns_verbrechen/juden/Kuretsidis_Diss.php

Claudia Kuretsidis-Haider, „Das Volk sitzt zu Gericht“. Österreichische Justiz und NS-Verbrechen am Beispiel der Engerau-Prozesse 1945-1954, Innsbruck-Wien-Bozen 2006.

Petra Weiß / Irmtraut Karlsson, Die Toten von Bruck. Dokumente erzählen Geschichte. Vorurteile – Anordnungen – Schicksale, Berndorf 2008.

Historical background

When the 2nd WW seemed more and more hopeless, also to the German leaders, they ordered to build a so-called Imperial Defence Line (or South-East-Wall) in the second half of the year 1944, which was meant to enable the *Wehrmacht* to defend the eastern frontier of the German Reich against the Soviet Army. Along the eastern frontier, of which was then the German Reich (and thus Austria of today), the South-East-Wall reached from Bratislava to the southern border of Styria. Members of the local civilian population as well as members of the Hitler Youth and the *Volkssturm*, foreign laborers and Hungarian Jews were recruited for forced labor. The Jews were put up in forced labor camps. All in all there were twenty such camps along the “Austrian” part of the South-East-Wall. Engerau was the most northern one. Engerau (today Petržalka) is a district of the Slovakian capital Bratislava. Another camp for Hungarian Jews existed in Bruck/Leitha.

The Engerau-camp

The Jews were put up in barracks but also in farms, barns, stables, and cellars, very close to the resident population. The working and living conditions were quite similar to a concentration camp. Like in other camps along the South-East-Wall the Jews were guarded by members of the SA (most of Them from Vienna) as well as by so-called political leaders (officials of the Nazis). The SA guards were subordinated to Edmund Kratky, who was later replaced by Erwin Falkner.

The “deathmarch”

When the Soviet Army approached Engerau in March 1945 the Nazis ordered the transfer of the prisoners to the concentration camp of Mauthausen. They were actually supposed to be transported by train, but due to the confusion at the end of the war that was not possible. That was the reason why the captives were forced to walk on a footmarch from Engerau via Wolfsthal and Hainburg to Bad Deutsch-Altenburg (which was felt by the victims to be a kind of “hunt of rabbits”, in German *Hasenjagd*). Numerous prisoners, however, were not able to march due to the prevailing conditions in the camp, so they were shot by a special commando on 29 March 1945. In the following night, the majority of the prisoners left the Engerau camp escorted by SA-guards and political leaders. On their way to Bad Deutsch-Altenburg approximately 100 prisoners were shot, killed or died because of exhaustion. The survivors of the evacuation transport were shipped in Bad Deutsch-Altenburg heading for the concentration camp of Mauthausen. When they arrived there after a week, many of them had died either because of starvation or being shot by the guards. A few days later – before the liberation of the concentration camp of Mauthausen–, those, who had not been gassed the days before, were sent on another footmarch to the Gunskirchen camp near Wels in Upper Austria, where the American troops liberated them on 4 May 1945.

The Engerau-trials

Only ten days later, one of the SA-guards reported the horrible crimes committed in Engerau and the following “death-march” to the Austrian police. On 22 June 1945 prosecution in Vienna was called in and started its investigations. At several on-the-spot-investigations five mass graves were found in Engerau containing 512 male bodies and they were buried at the Petržalka cemetery. With his announcement the SA-guard caused the most extensive court case in the history of the Austrian people’s courts (which had the duty to charge nazi crimes) concerning the number of the trials (6), the number of the convicted (20; out of them 9 death sentences, one life-imprisonment) and the period of time it lasted (from 1945 to 1954). All in all investigations against 72 alleged perpetrators were conducted until the 1990ies.