

Commandments

by Thomas Ország-Land (August 2016)



–In Memoriam Lili Meier

Not one of them guessed the purpose of the chamber
when Obersturmführer Hössler, standing at ease
before the portals, thus addressed a band
of tired, disoriented new arrivals.

I welcome you on behalf of the camp commander,

his words, as eventually paraphrased under oath
by Sonderkommando member Filip Muller.

You have arrived at a labour camp of the Reich.

*As our brave warriors fight for the fatherland,
so you shall work for the welfare of New Europe.
We'll pay you fairly, and will safeguard your health
and give you ample chance to display your merit.*

*Now kindly get undressed and hang your clothes
on the hooks. I trust you will remember their numbers.
And, after your shower, there will be a bowl of soup
and coffee and tea. And yes, before I forget it:*

*You must show proof of your qualifications for work
commensurate with your level of competence.*

*Would diabetics who aren't allowed sugar, please,
report to staff on duty... after the shower.*

Did Obersturmführer Hössler think he was clever?
Probably not, since the text was no more his own
than his dress or his worldview. But the words

will survive as long as the Sixth Commandment.

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