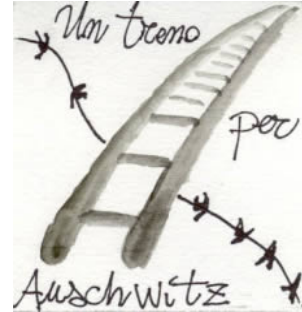


## 25–29 January 2006— A Train to Auschwitz

ITCS Primo Levi - Bollate participated to the initiative "A train to Auschwitz" with a delegation of some students of the 5<sup>th</sup> year. The trip was organised with the contribution of Provincia Milano, ITCS "Primo Levi" and our association. Dario Marcandalli of Primo Levi Parents' Association participated also in order to collect feelings, experiences and images testifying the tragedy. Here is a short report of the experience.



On occasion of the annual Memory Day, on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2006, I had the opportunity to participate to the initiative "A train to Auschwitz", organized by the Foundation "Ex Campo Fossoli" of Carpi, the Historical Archives "Bigio Savoldi and Livia Bottardi Milani" of Brescia, the Foundation "Memory of the Deportation" of Milan, Provincia Milano and the City Council of Copertino, Lecce. The participants were taken to Auschwitz by a train covering the same route used to take convicts from the imprisonment camp of Fossoli di Carpi to the concentration camps. A welcome speech held by the Province and City Council authorities and then by a veteran of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, Nedo Fiano, introduced us to the deep meaning of the trip.



Some Images



With its slow but inexorable movement, the train reached its destination in Poland after about 23 hours of journey over Tarvisio pass and across the Austrian territory and the Czech Republic. Once there, a series of meetings allowed us to grasp and understand the concepts of "Shoah", "deportation" and "extermination".



The first evening, after dinner, there was a meeting, introduced by the director of the Italian Institute of Culture of Cracow, with Prof. Paul Corsini, Mayor of Brescia, who explained the history and cruel logic behind the extermination camps, Auschwitz in particular, and with the director of the Museum of Auschwitz. Then there was the presentation of a video produced by a school in Lecco.

On 27<sup>th</sup> January we visited the concentration and extermination camps of Auschwitz in the morning and Birkenau on the afternoon. At the end of the day, there was a memorial ceremony and a torch-light procession. Once beyond the gate with the cynical inscription "Arbeit macht frei" ("Work makes you free"), one is immediately seized by the feeling of being in another world, where the regular pattern of the "Blocks" and of the perpendicular barbed wires and poles contrasts with the images of skeleton like convicts.



The entrance of the field



On the left the wall where deportees were executed, over it the reticulates

The Polish freezing winter seemed different within the walls that still echoed grief, desperation and the shuffling of feet with wooden clogs. Even more painful was the feeling we experienced when we entered Auschwitz 2 – Birkenau, set in the open countryside, over such a wide area that its end was not visible from the entrance. On the right the men's part, on the left the women's. Looking at the first row of barracks, carefully kept by the Polish government, it was possible to understand the inhuman conditions the convicts had to stand. Remains of high chimneys testify the presence of other barracks, now cancelled by time, which account for the dimension of the place. We walked to the gas chambers and the ever glowing crematorium with a deep sense of grief, listening to the sound of the snow under our feet, the same snow on which the poor convicts trod, often unaware, to their tragic destiny.



The entrance of Auschwitz 2 Birkenau  
The camp—woman section



On the right: The Crematorium.

The authorities' speeches could not keep us from thinking at all the people whose life was taken. A touching sight was when, at the end of the torch-light procession, close to the exit, everyone put a candle in the snow, thus flooding the early Polish night with light.

Such deep and grievous feelings need long reflection. Perhaps an ideal visit to these places should take at least two days, with a first guided visit followed by a solitary one.



After such an experience so many thoughts! But one thing that impressed me in particular was the strange contrast between the lack of an Italian memorial wreath among the many others and the scarce participation of students from other countries: the Italian delegation accounted for about 90% of the visitors. I do believe that such experiences should be better promoted, in particular among the young generations.

There is the risk that the real dimension of the tragedy might be altered, revisionism is a more and more popular word and every year the number of survivors, who can bear eyewitness to the scope of the horror, decreases. So anyone who has visited these places should testify that all this really happened!

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**As Primo Levi said: "We can't understand it, but we can understand where it comes from and watch out. If understanding is impossible, knowing is necessary since what has already happened could happen again, conscience can be misled and clouded again: even ours!"**

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A personal impression, perhaps a different one: while I was taking pictures or filming, I felt uneasy and a bit disrespectful to all the people who suffered in those places: I apologise for stealing those pictures, sometimes touching, sometimes crude, images of places of sufferings and death, now empty: maybe just for this reason I need them not to forget.