

ASPECTS OF FRANCONIA

“Life Unworthy of Life”

Residents of Erlangen are familiar with the rather comical-sounding name HuPflA, a reference to Erlangen’s former “Heil- und Pflegeanstalt”, opened in 1846 and largely demolished in 1977. The original hospital, built to “cure” and “care for” those with psychological problems, was to become – during the period of National Socialism – an institute where those deemed unworthy of life could be efficiently eliminated in accordance with the 1933 “Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring” (*Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses*). As with the Nazi Party Rally Grounds in Nuremberg, there has been much discussion of late in Erlangen on how to “manage” this dark vestige of Germany’s historically recent past.



This remaining section of the Hupfla was erected between 1874 and 1879 in a late classical style.



A view of the university hospital of which the Hupfla was a part.

Those of you who would like to know more on this subject might wish to consult the 2018 documentation “...*plötzlich gestorben – NS-Rassenhygiene 1933-1945*”, an exhibition that was shown at the Bezirksrathaus in Ansbach on the initiative of Dinah Radtke, an honorary citizen of the city of Erlangen. The information panels on display made for very sad reading, as they traced the fate of hundreds of people, very young to very old, who met their end here in Erlangen. To have such information on permanent display at the place where these acts took place would surely be a fitting statement by the university and the city on this monstrous episode in our history.

Frank Gillard

PS: Dinah Radtke has told me that the above-mentioned exhibition can be viewed online under “jcms.froschatmung.de” or “feld22.de”, and then by clicking on “exhibition”.

Dinah also pointed out that mentally ill patients were taken, for example, to Hartheim Castle (Upper Austria) where involuntary euthanasia was carried out, whereas children were transferred to the so-called “*Kinderfachabteilung*” in Ansbach. Many died in Erlangen, however, as a result of forced malnutrition in accordance with the T4 programme.

Some argue that the land on which the remaining HuPflA buildings stand could be used by the university’s hospital and the Max Planck Institute to build much needed medical research facilities.

On the other hand, there are very many who reject such ideas, believing that Erlangen owes a debt to the many thousands of patients who, within its walls, underwent “forced sterilisation”, malnourishment, and deliberate poisoning. The term euthanasia, from the Greek meaning a “good death without prior illness”, sometimes cynically referred to by Nazi policy-makers as a “*Gnadentod*”, an assisted suicide as an act of mercy, were euphemisms for the murders of the mentally impaired taking place in asylums all over Germany. Demolition of this potential “Site of Remembrance” in Erlangen would be a gross act of vandalism, they say; the creation of a “documentation centre” to research this dark chapter of medical history the only fitting solution.

I can now report that a decision on the future of this site has now been taken, following calls for some form of Remembrance Site in Erlangen. It will be in the easternmost part of the hospital complex pictured above.

Aktion T4 was a postwar name for mass murder through involuntary euthanasia in Nazi Germany. The name T4 is an abbreviation of Tiergartenstraße 4, a street address of the Chancellery department set up in the spring of 1940, in the Berlin borough of Tiergarten, which recruited and paid personnel associated with T4. Certain German physicians were authorized to select patients "deemed incurably sick, after most critical medical examination" and then administer to them a "mercy death" (Gnadentod). In October 1939, Adolf Hitler signed a "euthanasia note", backdated to 1 September 1939, which authorized his physician Karl Brandt and Reichsleiter Philipp Bouhler to implement the programme. (Wikipedia)

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