

Summary

Diana Budisavljević, née Obexer was born in Innsbruck (Austria) on 15 January 1891. She finished primary and secondary school in Innsbruck. In 1917 she married Dr Julije Budisavljević who, having graduated from the medical school in Innsbruck, worked as an intern at the local surgical clinic. When the University school of Medicine was founded in Zagreb, Dr J. Budisavljević was appointed professor of surgery and Diana Budisavljević came to Zagreb with him in 1919.

Having been informed about the suffering of orthodox women and children at the concentration camp in Lobar-grad in autumn 1941, she launched a relief drive going under the name of "Diana Budisavljević Action". She had a number of collaborators the most important of whom were Marko Vidaković and Đuro Vukosavljević.

Relief supplies of food, clothes, medicines and money were sent to Lobar-grad and later also to Gornja Rijeka through the agency of the Jewish religious community.

The collaborators of the Action were helping at the Main railway station in Zagreb providing travel supplies for transports of workers taken to forced labour in Germany. On one such occasion D. Budisavljević learned that many children in the concentration camp Stara Gradiška whose mothers had been taken to forced labor, were unprovided-for. With the help of the German officer von Kotzian the permission to take the children from the camp was obtained. Organised by the Ministry of Social Affairs, and particularly by professor Kamilo Bresler who secured the accommodation for the children in Zagreb, Jastrebarsko, and later also in Sisak, and with the help of the Red Cross nurses, the children were taken from the camp in several transports. D. Budisavljević wearing a uniform of a Red Cross nurse took part in the transport of the children from Stara Gradiška, Mlaka and Jablanac.

Some of the youngest children were placed in Zagreb in the children's home on Josipovac, and Diana Budisavljević was coming daily for several months to take care of them.

On the basis of the transport lists and other sources she made with her collaborators a card-file of the children, which by the end of the war contained data on some 12.000 children. Based on these data an extensive correspondence

was established with the parents on forced labour in Germany seeking information about their children.

When the permission to place the children from the camps in the care of families was obtained in August 1942, D. Budisavljević proposed that the action should be carried out through the mediation of the Zagreb Archdiocese branch of the Caritas organization. In this way it was possible to situate several thousand children into families, mostly in rural communities.

In July 1943 D. Budisavljević received from the Jewish religious community a list of prisoners in Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška who were allowed to get packages of food. The list was given to the Red Cross with a request that the Red Cross organize the sending of food to the camps, as that task went beyond the possibilities of the "Diana Budisavljević Action". The "Action" was giving regular contributions for those deliveries and D. Budisavljević also obtained occasional contributions from the delegate of the International Red Cross in Zagreb, in terms of food and medicines for the packages to be sent to the children in the camps.

In autumn 1943 she started proceedings to buy milk from the International Red Cross in Geneva. The milk was meant for the Zagreb children.

On the 28th of May, on request of the Ministry of Social Politics she had to hand over the card-file with data on children (a cabinet holding 25 drawers with cards), 5 notebooks for searching for unidentified children, 1 notebook-register of the children with distinguishing marks, 1 register of childrens' photographs and 5 volumes of photographs. In this way her attempts to identify small children listed in the files as "nameless" were made impossible. For those attempts she developed a detailed plan by the end of the war, together with her closest collaborator at file making, Mrs Ivanka Džakula.

The most important facts about the work of the "Action" as well as the ways of spending the collected financial contributions (during four years of work about three million kunas were collected) were recorded by D. Budisavljević in her diary.

From 1972 till the end of her life she lived in Innsbruck again, and she died there on 20 August 1978.

Translated by Ivana Čepulčić