

10 Diagnosis: "Useless"

The murder of handicapped children at the Spiegelgrund clinic
Preparations for the systematic registration and extermination of handicapped children were made from spring 1939. For this purpose, a special front organization was established at the Führer's Chancellery in Berlin: the "Reich Committee for the Scientific Registration of Serious Hereditary and Congenital Ailments." In August 1939, a secret circular obliged physicians and midwives to report all cases of "idiocy" and diverse "deformities" to the public health offices. They then ordered the person concerned to be committed to the so-called "special children's wards," which had been set up either in existing clinics or as separate institutions. There were at least 30 of these clandestine killing centers in the Reich. In Vienna, such a killing center was established on the premises of the Heil- und Pflegeanstalt "Am Steinhof" in July 1940. Initially it was part of the Wiener Städtische Jugendfürsorgeanstalt "Am Spiegelgrund," but eventually became the autonomous Wiener Städtische Nervenlinik für Kinder "Am Spiegelgrund" in 1942. The institution was under the supervision of Professor Max Gundel, city councilor for the Viennese health sector. The physicians employed there (Director Erwin Jekelius, his successor Ernst Illing, Heinrich Gross, Marianne Türk, Margarete Hübsch) examined the children using methods that were sometimes painful and reported them to Berlin if they were candidates for killing. In Berlin three experts of the Reich Committee decided over their fates. As soon as the authorization to kill would arrive in Vienna, the children were poisoned with high doses of sedatives until they died of pneumonia or other infectious diseases. Several children were also used as guinea pigs for deadly experiments: Dr. Elmar Türk of the university clinic of pediatrics experimented on them with a tuberculosis vaccine. Between 25 August 1940 and 3 June 1945 at least 789 children and young people died in the Spiegelgrund clinic.

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