

E. What Did the Neighbours Say?

The question of how the Poles generally treated the fate of their former neighbours had not yet been discussed in connection with the involvement of the Poles in the Jewish underground activities in the camp.

One day in the summer of 1943, the district governor Ernst Kundt arrived in Częstochowa. During a visit to Town Hall, he eventually found time to speak with the Polish mayor, Stanisław Rawicki. Contrary to Kundt's complaints about security matters, Rawicki claimed that Częstochowa **was much quieter** than other cities. Suddenly, Kundt threw out the question:

"Are the residents of Częstochowa happy that we took away the Jews?"

"I suppose that not everyone", Rawicki replied.

"How do you understand that?" Kundt continued. Judging by his expression and tone of voice, it seemed that Rawicki's answer surprised him and caused dissatisfaction.

"Because in our city, most of the craftsmen and small industrialists were Jews, and now their absence is felt."

Hearing the mayor's words, Governor Kundt smiled, "Well, on the other hand, from now on, the Poles will earn more."¹

It is to be presumed, that Rawicki could not find an appropriate response to this statement. And what could he have said?

Every Polish child in the city knew, that the removal of Jews from economic positions and the transfer of their property to the local population, following the deportations, ultimately led to an increase in the standard of living of a significant portion of the city's residents.

This is addressed, among other things, by the "Częstochowa" report of a Polish liaison (whose name is not mentioned), which was probably sent to superiors in mid-1943. First, the report describes the process of Germanisation of the city:

"We see many Germans. Everywhere there are signs in German. As for the living conditions of the residents, they are very difficult for the intelligentsia. But, on the other hand, they are definitely comfortable for the labourers. A labourer who works, receives an additional allowance, has long-standing ties with the village, and has the option to conduct trade with the Germans.

¹ Rybicki, Pod znakiem lwa i kruka, p. 201

“The Polish intellectual, for the most part, does not work, because the jobs are occupied by the Germans. All that remains for him is to engage in trade, in which he has neither experience nor the necessary connections with the village.”²

The researcher Jan Pietrzykowski writes about the flourishing of the black market and its destructive effect on the social structure of the city’s residents.³ But he also does not mention that this is related to the plunder of Jewish property and to businesses that were carried out jointly by Germans, Poles and Jews.

Even in the aforementioned “report”, the author does not dare to admit, as Governor Kundt did - that “we expelled the Jews, so the Poles earn more”. The celebration of plunder almost made the occupation forgettable, as is implied by the continuation of the “report”:

“The terror, arrests and kidnappings are relatively minimal. The number of arrests is negligible, not because of the relatively large number of Germans compared to the Poles, but because of **the truly cowardly stance of the Poles, who do not conduct any broad and popular activity.**”⁴

The “report” also provides some facts about the “Small Ghetto”. There are about 6,000 Jews there, whose situation is better than in other ghettos, because they go to work in factories and have the opportunity to obtain food.

“Recently, the Germans have intensified the terror. They ordered the Jews to dig pits behind the ghetto in the field. It is said, that there they will be executed and buried.”

That is the dry language of the “report” - no sorrow, no compassion, no willingness to help. All the writers of memories - Orenstein, Ajnhorn, Kromołowski, Jeszajahu Landau and others - mention the outbreak of antisemitism in independent Poland of the 1930s. But we have seen, that there were cases of assistance in organising escapes and providing information and assistance to the prisoners of Apparatebau.

The greatest difficulty was in finding a hiding place. Nevertheless, brave ones were found - Gabi Horowic tells of Waław Milowski, a former worker in a family factory (and later “Righteous Among the Nations”), who agreed to keep him and his parents in the bunker even after they ran out of money. They lived there for twenty-two months...⁵

Kromołowski admits that he knew about twenty Jews, who had found refuge with the Poles. In one case, several Jews lived in a bunker, at whose entrance the owner had set up a kennel for his dog, famous throughout the area for his sharp teeth. And that helped.

² (Sprawozdanie), Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN), Section 20/III-28, vol. I, p. 14 “Częstochowa”

³ Pietrzykowski, Cień swastyki, pp. 72-73

⁴ (Sprawozdanie), ibid. “Częstochowa”

⁵ Testimony of Gabriel Horowic, YVA 0-3/2724.

The blessed activity of the priest Wróblewski, who saved many Jewish children in monasteries and orphanages, is also well known.⁶ But generally, decent Poles, who wanted to help Jews, were afraid of their neighbours, who would inform out of jealousy.

Therefore, it would seem that, in the area of human relations between Jews and Poles, the reality at the Apparatebau factory largely reflected the general picture - the majority treated them with indifference or hostility, and the minority, saved them.

In late 1944, one thought united everyone - the Soviets were approaching Częstochowa...

⁶ Kromońowski, Wspomnienia, pp. 585-587