

C. Golden Hands Will Save Lives

As mentioned, there was also a third group in the ghetto - craftsmen with privileged rights. The main reason for their existence was the German rulers' desire to exploit every person and every opportunity for their own personal gain.

Therefore, with the establishment of the "Big Ghetto", fifteen craftsmen and their families were gathered in the "White House", located on the border of the ghetto. It was a three-storey house with a white facade (hence its name). To it were relocated Pinchas Ajnhorn's men's tailoring workshop, Baum and Gryn's uniform sewing, women's tailoring was represented by the Katz, Mincer and Orenstein families. Among those chosen was also the wife of the Jewish police chief, Mrs Parasol, an expert in sewing men's linen.¹

The competition was great and, in addition to a high professional level, favouritism was also required to be included among the tenants of the "White House". Miryam Rotfeld says:

"Before the War, my mother ran a sewing salon. She was an excellent seamstress, an elegant woman with an impressive appearance. I emphasise her qualities because, thanks to her personality and rare professional skills, we survived the Holocaust. When, in 1941 she learned about the establishment of the Craftsmen's House, she decided to enter there at all cost. It was almost impossible, because she had never worked for the Germans before and had no connections.

"At that time, we were already living in the ghetto and mother, without telling us anything, left the ghetto and went to the director of the home, Mrs Windemut. Here, she introduced herself as Mrs Schnitzer. At first, the director was convinced that she was facing a German. Mother informed her that she sewed like Dior and would like to be accepted into the home's team. So, Mrs Windemut, who was short and fat, brought two of her unsuccessful dresses and said, 'I like you. If you can mend the dresses, we'll talk.' Mother succeeded in the task and when she brought the dresses to Mrs Windemut, she was truly amazed at what she saw, and so we entered the White House".²

Four more women, experts in embroidery, hat design, etc., were added here, and several men, including Dawid Koniecpoler, the owner of a carpentry workshop. The economic situation of the residents of the "White House" was relatively good, and they were free from forced labour. Besides private work, the workshops also worked for various German factories and for the "Main Section – Commercial Sector" (Hauptgruppe Gewerbliche Wirtschaft) in Radom.

¹ Churban Czenstochow... p. 65

² Testimony of Miryam Rotfeld, YVA, 0-33/6844

The largest workshops were allowed to delegate some of the simple tasks to outside workers: the Ajnhorn firm employed 161 people and the Katz firm more than 100 people.³

Many of the Germans, who visited the “White House” became a source of information for the ghetto residents, because they talked to each other freely about politics. According to Jurek Ajnhorn, who worked in his father’s workshop,

“Once, two SS men came to the trouser department. While we were measuring, one of them turned to my father and asked, ‘Please tell me, Mr Craftsman, what do the Jews think about the situation of Germany at the front?’ I froze in my place. Pinchas pretended not to have heard the question, and continued to adjust the length of the trousers. Then the other German turned to him, ‘Don’t you want to answer?’ I was scared to death. Pinchas slowly rose from his knees and answered with complete calmness, ‘It is not only the Jews, who know that the Germany of Schiller and Goethe will never perish.’

“The Germans exchanged glances and did not say a word. When they left, I saw how Pinchas’ hands were shaking. I had never been so full of admiration for my father as I was then, for his astute answer.”⁴

The “White House” stood outside the ghetto, and its main entrance was on the “Aryan side”, while the back entrance, guarded by a Jewish policeman, was on the ghetto side. The house could be entered with permission from the *Judenrat*. Leaving it through the “Aryan” entrance was already dangerous, because German policemen were also guarding it. Nevertheless, the “House” played an important role in the underground activity that was beginning to develop in the ghetto. Dawid Koniecpoler wrote,

“At that time, comrade ‘Arye’ came to my carpentry shop” and informed me that my workshop would be a transit point from the ghetto to the train station and back. Almost every day, various young people, filled with valour, who came from the “Aryan side”, passed through it”.⁵

These men and women were the liaisons of the Jewish fighting organisation, writes Ajnhorn, who also, more than once, found a place to sleep in their apartment before setting out on their peril-ridden path.

In his book, Ajnhorn describes the atmosphere in the “White House” and the evening meetings, of youth and adults, where they argued endlessly. What did they argue about? Firstly, they levelled accusations against the *Judenrat*. Objectively, we can say that the attitude of the ghetto Jews towards the *Judenrat* had its ups and downs over the years. And it was the Jew Klug who grasped the main point:

³ “Sprawozdanie z pracy Żydów w barakach i obozach pracy i przy pracach na pozłudy”, Częstochowa, 21. 3.1942, AŻIH, sygn. 211/327, p. 43

⁴ Einhorn, Wybrany aby żyć... p. 85

⁵ David Kanietsfaler, The Workshop on Allee 14, *Sefer Częstochowa*, Publishing House “Encyclopaedia of Postcards”, Jerusalem 1968, p. 273.

“One of the Nazis’ goals against the Jews was to direct the population’s anger against its internal leaders, who supposedly enjoyed self-government, and thus to forget the source of the evil, which was in the occupation regime, and thereby to increase confusion and disorientation, which would keep the people busy with internal rebellions.”⁶

Despite all the criticism, which was often justified, the leaders of the *Judenrat* were mostly not perceived as corrupt and hated figures. In at least two areas, they succeeded - they did not die of hunger in the ghetto and epidemics did not break out.

Regarding the question of what factors were behind the easing of restrictions in the Częstochowa Ghetto (there was no wall!), Benjamin Orenstein offers an interesting explanation - even before the War, local antisemites demanded the expulsion of the Jews on the grounds that Częstochowa was a holy city and a place of pilgrimage for Catholics from all over Poland. The Jews were desecrating the sanctity of the place by trading in sacred objects, so they must be expelled. The Germans were aware of these things and, since they acted in accordance with the annoying principle of “just to spite”, they decided on the opposite policy - it was precisely in Częstochowa that the Jews would live in peace and comfort!⁷

Strangely enough, another episode is related to this explanation:

“Around the beginning of 1941, word of mouth spread in the city about the execution of a group of Polish merchants. According to the story, a delegation of ten people from this group arrived at the offices of the *Generalgouvernement* in Kraków, demanding that the measures taken against the Jewish population by the German authorities in Częstochowa, which were not effective enough, be tightened. In their opinion, the black market, run entirely by Jews, was flourishing, and thus the livelihood of the Polish population was being deprived, prices were rising and the Jews were getting richer. Therefore, the members of the delegation asked the central government to order the occupation authorities in the city to strictly enforce the restrictions imposed by law on the Jews. In Kraków, they recorded their appeal, but advised the representatives to contact the local authorities directly.”

That is as far as the story goes. From what follows, it is known that all the members of the delegation were later executed. And the reason? “It is likely that the local authorities considered their appeal to Kraków, over their heads, as a severe and impudent act on the part of the Slavic subhumans and it was not an expression of their pro-Jewish stance.”⁸

It seems that the “life of peace and comfort” of the Jews of Częstochowa had a fairly clear reason - the German governors knew that they would not last long.

⁶ Landau, YVA, 0.3/5868, p. 25.

⁷ Churban Czenstochow... p. 88

⁸ Landau, YVA, 0.3/5868, p. 25-26