

## The Formation of the “Big Ghetto”

Every regulation issued by the German government was aimed at ruining the morale and physical existence of Jewish populace and to isolate it from the surrounding world. The first directive, issued immediately in September 1939, was to take away the radios. The Jewish press and political parties ceased of their own account when the Germans marched in. The general Polish press also did not exist. The Jewish *gimnazja*, schools, religious educational institutes and all the institutions of a cultural and charitable nature were no longer active. The entirety of Jewish political and cultural life was, at once, completely disrupted when the occupying forces marched in.

Once spiritual and communal life had been destroyed, a series of regulations was issued which ruined the Jewish population’s morale and material situation. One of the directives was to wear the “sign of shame”, so as to be recognisable from afar, thus affording the Jew-haters the opportunity to make fun - and even assault, beat up and rob. This “sign of shame” consisted of a blue Star of David on white canvas, which every Jew was required to wear on the right arm. Not wearing the “sign of shame” was punishable by six months’ imprisonment. There were some Jews who had an Aryan appearance and did not wish to wear any sign. Such Jews moved to other cities and presented themselves as “Aryans”. This was the first symptom of resistance against the German authorities by sabotaging their regulations which, later, developed into an armed resistance movement.

The forthcoming regulations were regarding forced labour, deportation to camps, “contributions” and the systematic expulsion of Jews from the nicer buildings and streets.

In September 1940, the German police drove around the city in automobiles and sealed up sixty Jewish dwellings, taking prisoner all the tenants as hostages until the “contribution”, which had been imposed upon the Jewish populace, was paid. Among the hostages were Dr Jerzy Dobrzyński and his wife Renia Torbeczko-Dobrzyńska, the Dawidowicz, Bromberg, Wajselfisz and Miska families, and many others. The hostages were led into a shack at the “Brygada” sports ground and were guarded by German and Polish policemen. Conditions in the shack were unbearable. It had no roof, no windows and no doors. They slept on the ground. The hostages were held under these conditions for a fortnight.

“Contributions”, in money and in objects, were a frequent phenomenon. The magnitude of the sums differed [?<sup>1</sup>] **hostages were held under these conditions for a fortnight** [sic].

The directive to form a Jewish living quarter - meaning a ghetto - hit everyone hard. The purpose of the German authorities in this was to fully starve the Jewish population by isolating it from the rest of the inhabitants, thus causing its corporal and financial downfall. The ordinance regarding the ghetto had been prepared in advance by way of propaganda. In the streets which were densely populated by Jews, they hung up notices on canvas: “Caution, Epidemic Hazard!”. Afterwards, the Nazi newspapers, which had begun to be published in the Polish language, began to write, raising the alarm to the effect that it was necessary to isolate

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: Some text is apparently missing here, in whose place the same sentence written above was mistakenly reprinted.]

the epidemics zone. That is how the idea of forming the ghetto was prepared. The establishment of the ghetto was accompanied by newspaper commentaries to the effect that it was necessary and urgent due to sanitary reasons.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1940, all the Jews living on streets Rynek Wieluński, Staszica, Śląska, Jasnogórska, Dąbrowskiego, Kilińskiego, Aleja Wolności, Aleja Kościuszki, Focha, Aleja Najświętszej Maryi Panny, Trzecia [III] Aleja, Druga [II] Aleja up to the bridge, Piłsudskiego, and parts of Narutowicza and Fabryczna were forced to leave their houses and dwellings.

Leaving their abodes ruined many people psychologically. More than one asked himself, “Why am I to leave the house which my father built as a result of his arduous effort, toil and great expenses? Why am I to leave the dwelling where I spent my entire life, brought up my children and married them off? And the children asked themselves, “Why should I no longer be allowed to study at the same table where I have, until now, learnt and written?”

All these questions were left unanswered. The force of the bayonets, rifles and tanks, at the command of *Kreishauptmann* [District Governor] Dr [Richard] Wendler, implemented the ghetto. The streets of the ghetto were the following: lengthwise - I Aleja, Nowy Rynek and Stary Rynek, up to the bridge on ul. Mirowska, and breadthwise - Wały, Garibaldiiego, Krótka, Kawia, Warszawska, Koszarowa, Nadrzeczna, Garncarska, Kozia, Senatorska and Mostowa, [plus] the neighbouring streets - Targowa, Katedralna, Orlicz Dreszera, Narutowicza and Berka Joselewicza.

It was forbidden for Jews to leave the ghetto and also to travel on the train. In order to leave the ghetto and travel on the train, one needed to have a special permit. Such permits were issued by the police for a specific sum. As regards permits to travel on the train, one needed to make lengthy efforts and, through the *Judenrat*, write a request to the district [authorities] in Radom.

The ghetto's population began to grow, due to the newly-arrived Jewish refugees. The Jews in the little *shtetls*, surrounding Częstochowa, felt unsafe. Every hooligan and murderer could rob and kill Jews unmolested. This caused a depressive mood amongst the Jewish inhabitants in the little *shtetls*, and they fled to the Częstochowa ghetto.

They were the residents of the [towns and] *shtetls* - Kłobuck, Truskolasy, Przyrów, Radomsko, Gidle, Wieluń, Krzepice, Kamyk, Mstów, Pajęczno, Piotrków and others. A large number of Jews also came from Łódź and from the Warsaw region also. They left their old places of residence so as to avoid political repressions by the German authorities. Others came because of hunger and need in the belief that, in Częstochowa, they would find the material possibility by which to live. The *Częstochower* ghetto's attraction was based on the following rumour:

In the times when Polish antisemitism was on the rise, the antisemites had demanded that the Jews be removed from Częstochowa, because it was a sacred Catholic city. It had Jasna Góra (Mount of Revelation<sup>2</sup>), the Holy Mother (*Matka Boska*<sup>3</sup>) and numerous churches. Processions, with tens of thousands of pious Christians, streamed there from all over the

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<sup>2</sup> [TN: Usually translated as “Bright Mountain”.]

<sup>3</sup> [TN: Literally translated: “The Mother of God”.]

country, and the Jews were defiling the Christian religion by trading in sacred artefacts. The Germans, who were known for doing things purely out of spite, therefore decided the exact opposite - the Jews would live in Częstochowa peacefully and comfortably.

This and all the other rumours, which created a ray of hope in the general darkness of Jewish life during the time of German occupation, turned out to be unfounded.