

Life in the Ghetto

The growth in the Jewish population in Częstochowa was as follows:

Year	No. of people
1856/57	2,976
1897	11,980
1921	22,663
1931	25,538

These statistics have been drawn from official, accredited sources by Jankew Leszczyński¹, YIVO, 1948, p.161. By the time the ghetto was established in 1940, the Jewish population numbered about 35,000 souls. The living quarters apportioned (to the ghetto) did not fit the necessities of the Jewish populace.

Shortly before the War, 29,000 Jews lived in 9,000 houses. In the “Big Ghetto”, when the population had grown to 48,000, the number of houses was 4,520.

The housing issue was one of the most difficult problems. Some of the refugees, arriving from other towns and ghettos or who had escaped from forced labour camps, had relatives or acquaintances [in Częstochowa]. These relatives and acquaintances crowded themselves in and put them up. The *Judenrat*'s housing bureau continuously sent [new] people into these dwellings, until reaching a catastrophic sanitary situation, and the peril of a general epidemic threatened. All the premises of the communal institutions - such as the orphanage, the wayfarer's hostel on ul. Garncarska and even the houses of prayer, schools and societies - were repurposed to house the masses.

Sixteen, eighteen and even twenty people lived in a two-room flat with a kitchen. Living under such conditions made it impossible for the tenants to live together in peace. It was impossible for such a number of people to use one kitchen in order to heat up a little water in the morning or [to cook] lunch. This caused many quarrels amongst the residents.

There were ten houses for the masses, which were called shelters, but two were later shut down. In June 1940, there were 59 families, numbering 199 individuals, living in the shelters. This number later grew to 398:

Men	145
Women	193
Children to the age of 14	38
Children to the age of 4	16
Elderly people aged over 70	6
Total:	398

¹ [TN: Aka Jacob Lestschinsky; Jewish statistician and sociologist, who wrote in Yiddish, German, and English. He specialised in Jewish demography and economic history.]

The inhabitants of the shelters consisted of the poorest strata and they lived in the greatest poverty and in the worst sanitary conditions.

From Łódź	174
From Działoszyn	55
From Częstochowa	60
From Kraków	34
From Kalisz	10
From territories annexed to the German Reich and also other places	65
Total:	398

The number of arriving refugees progressively increased. In 1940, 3,252 individuals officially registered themselves: 1,453 from Łódź, 257 from Radomsko and 254 from Kraków (there were also people from Warsaw, Otwock, Lublin and other places).

It was difficult to ascertain the number of Jewish inhabitants, because many of those who arrived, in a bid to avoid forced labour, failed to register themselves. Thus, for example, in 1940, the Polish city administration registered 33,693 Jews, and their numbers grew from day to day, [whilst] the number in the *Judenrat* reached just 32,725. The statistics are as follows:

Permanent Częstochowa residents	25,836
Temporary Częstochowa residents	6,257
Unregistered	632
Total	32,275

There were 15,469 men, of whom 7,055 were bachelors and 370 were widowers. The sum total of women was 17,256, of whom 8,461 were [single] girls and 1,529 were widows. There were 13,725 couples with a marriage certificate, 514 with just a *ketuba*² and 89 divorced couples. There were 63 individuals, whose family status was unascertained. Forty-one Jews did not have Polish citizenship and there were twenty converts to Christianity.

People lived in the mass shelters like in military barracks. The beds were planks and were placed one on top of the other. The residents of the mass shelters were poor people and, in such living conditions, that they could not wash themselves or cook. Bad nutrition and systematic hunger brought about a typhus epidemic and mortality. The German authorities liquidated the glorious Jewish Hospital in Zawodzie, which had been built with Jewish toil, energy and money, and set up dwellings, tennis clubs and entertainment venues there for the German gendarmerie.

Dr Wolberg led the fight against the epidemic and set up a hospital for infectious diseases in the premises of the [I.L.] Peretz school and the Central School Organisation at ul. Krótka 23. He also set up an establishment for disinfection and a quarantine [area] in the *mikve* [ritual bathhouse] on ul. Garibaldięgo. The liquidated hospital in Zawodzie was relocated to ul. Przemysłowa 10, losing its former glory and dazzle.

² [TN: Jewish religious marriage contract which is recognised by the rabbinical courts but not by the secular authorities.]

The Germans introduced food coupons. These coupons were different for Germans, Jews and Poles. The Poles received half the rations of the Germans, and the Jews half that of the Poles. The daily bread rations for Jews were ten *deka*³. The Jewish population did not even receive those minimal rations, because the products came to the *Judenrat*, which distributed them as they saw fit and to whom they wished. Nevertheless, the Jews managed to conduct a barter business with Polish peasants. They would come to the ghetto bringing food and took out different goods, objects, clothing, linen and even furniture. In this manner, the wealthier Jews were able to procure food for themselves. It was worse for the poorer population and the homeless. They had no money or possessions and therefore suffered hunger and need. The best barometer, by which to evaluate the material situation in the ghetto, are these two figures: of the 55,000 [Jewish] inhabitants, 22,000 were registered to receive support from the *Judenrat's* social security department. This number of 22,000 included the following categories: unpaid forced labourers, the sick, the elderly, children and people from out of town.

Quite frequently, Gestapo men would come with lists and search for different Jews. Those wanted were mostly communal activists from political parties that had been active before the War. They also arrested personalities from various institutions and members of the communist unions. The detainees were never heard of again. All of them fell victim to the murderous Nazi regime.

The Gestapo obtained all this information from denouncers who thought that, by helping bring about the undoing of other Jews, their own lives would be spared.

The Gestapo [also] utilised data from the Polish political and criminal police. All those who had had political or criminal trials, and also those who had once been arrested for political or other reasons and were registered with the political or criminal police, were arrested and executed. In that respect, the Polish police, which was in the service of the German occupying forces, was very diligent. The Częstochowa Polish police force was enlarged many times over, and several platoons were sent to Minsk in the forests of White Russia [Belarus], in order to fight against the partisans, led by General Kolpakow and the Jewish commander Fajwel Plaskin, who were operating there against the Nazi invaders.

There were a great number of instances of madness. People's nerves could not take it. The ill were sent to the Zofiówka hospital for mentally and emotionally ill Jews in Otwock. The chief nurse of that hospital was Sara Kutner-Kiełczygłowska from Częstochowa, the daughter of Mordche-Josef Kutner and wife of Chumcie⁴ Kiełczygłowski.

On Monday, 19th August 1942, the bloody *akcja* of deportation took place in Otwock. All the patients in the Zofiówka hospital and also in the *Brijus* [Heb., Health] sanatorium for tuberculosis were shot in pavilion №1. The victims were buried in a mass grave. Among those shot were some twenty *Częstochower* patients.

³ [TN: One deka, or decagram, is 10 grams.]

⁴ [TN: Most likely pet-name for Nachum.]

A couple of days before the *akcja*, the nurse Sara Kutner gave her child over to the Bajlan family to be raised. He, Augustin Bajlan, a Tartar by descent, was an active member in the illegal movement. The child had a new life in his house and evaded the Nazi sword. She, Sara Kutner, on the other hand, saved herself temporarily by travelling back to her hometown of Częstochowa.

A particularly tragic phenomenon in all the ghettos, including the one in Częstochowa, was the fact that there were denouncers (informers). There were individuals who had lost every measure of conscience and logic. They put themselves into the service of the bloodiest foe in the war against their own ethnic brothers and sisters.

In their persecutions of Jews, the Germans had a method of "collective answerability". This was manifested in the following manner: each policeman had to present five people to be sent away to a forced labour camp - if not, he would be sent there himself. As a result, one could always hear, "I will not give my own head away [just] for your sake." The demoralisation increased from day to day. There were some who were officially employed in the Gestapo. Each of them had his own method for carrying out his criminal activities.

The informers wormed their way into every place and, afterwards, made their denunciations - as a consequence [of which] the Gestapo would come in the night to carry out searches and arrests, take everything and shoot the owners. There were some depraved individuals who found out who had merchandise or currency, who belonged to the underground movement, and who was conducting a smuggling [operation] or illegal business with goods or foodstuffs. Others, without any shame, would openly seek out Jewish passengers at the railway stations and deliver them into the hands of the Gestapo to be shot.

With the implementation of the ghetto, Jews were forbidden from travelling on the train - on pains of death. Despite the prohibition, Jews still travelled, because they wished to escape from the claws of death, from this or that ghetto. Liaison people of the illegal movement travelled, and also Jews with contraband, in order to earn for bread and not die of starvation. People, who had fled from Treblinka or other extermination camps, [also] travelled. Two informers, the Fiszhalter brothers, stood at the railway station in Częstochowa and looked for Jewish passengers. Whoever fell into their hands was given over to the Gestapo.

More than tragic was the little letter that Bronka Grinfeld, the daughter of a Częstochowa halachic authority, wrote from jail to the effect that she had fallen victim because of the Fiszhalter brothers. Because of them, she had been held at the station, taken away to the jail and later shot. There were many other such tragic instances. In April 1943, the nurse Sara Kutner left the "Small Ghetto" and journeyed to Warsaw. She obtained Aryan papers and accepted a position as a nurse to a sick person in the Warsaw area. At the end of April, she came to the "Small Ghetto", to her sisters Liza and Pola to get some clothes and money. On that occasion, in the presence of the writer of these lines, at ul. Kozia 19, she recounted at the main railway station in Warsaw a Jewish woman from Częstochowa stood and was relentlessly active. She sought out Jewish travellers and handed them over to the Gestapo. The detainees were immediately shot. In this manner, she caused a large number of Jewish victims. She [Sara Kutner] desperately urged all those intending to journey to Warsaw to not

travel all the way to the main station, but to get off at the eastern station in Praga and from there take a tram or a *dorożka*⁵ into the city.

Many OD men (*Ordnungsdienst*, or Jewish police) also greatly sinned in that respect. In Częstochowa, this was manifested in the hideouts where Jews were concealing themselves. The OD men showed the hideout, which they had discovered, to the German authorities and, as a result, the Jews were shot. The end of almost all the informers was that, once they had fulfilled their role as traitors to their people, they themselves were [also] shot.

The ghetto in Częstochowa was considered the best in the *General Gouvernement*, because the German administration - from *Kreishauptmann* Dr Wendler to the lowliest official - were all bought off by the *Judenrat* and, as a result, they enforced all the regulations limiting the rights of the Jews in a somewhat milder manner than in other cities. This explains the large influx of refugees to Częstochowa, which increased the number of Jewish inhabitants to 55,000.

⁵ [TN: Horse-drawn public transportation.]