

The First Days of the German Occupying Authorities

“Bloody Monday” was the first lesson which taught everyone that nothing good was to be expected from the German authorities. People began believing all the rumours - regarding unpaid forced labour, deportations to forced labour camps and that the German authorities considered the population of an occupied country to be people without rights and treated them as slaves.

That said that they believed that the German occupation regime was a temporary, passing phenomenon and that the world powers and the “world’s conscience” would react, not only with words, but also with actions and oust the regime of mass-murder.

All these were hypothetical opinions. [But] they [also] saw the German invader in his true guise - as a mass-murderer, who wished to rob and slaughter the Jews. They thought of ways to put a distance between themselves and this foe. The only way out was to leave for the eastern territories that were settled by the Soviets on the other bank of the Bug.

This was no easy feat. Ethical sentiments complicated the matter - feelings and attachments to the families. Everyone understood that they needed to travel away, but leaving their families in order to save themselves was also not simple.

In view of the approaching danger, certain groups of Jews travelled away, under the influence and by the request of their families. In the first row, there were the political and communal activists, as well as those who had completely lost their material existence.

In theory, to travel away is an easy thing. But in practice, during that period, it was a journey fraught with mortal danger. They walked for hundreds of kilometres with rucksacks. They did not stay during the day where they had spent the night. Every German hooligan assaulted the wanderers, beat them and robbed them. After experiencing all of the most bitter troubles, they arrived at the Bug, at the German-Soviet border.

There, the German border authorities murderously beat everyone and robbed [them of] anything of value. After passing the guard post, new troubles arose. They arrived in the neutral buffer zone - neither here nor there. Under the open skies, no bread, no water and no way to sleep. Many times, nature, too, was cruel and it rained. Many fell ill and died, lying in the neutral zone. Accessing the settled Soviet territory was no easy feat. The border was closed. It was opened on random days and at random hours - mostly on Soviet holidays and on the birthdays of Soviet leaders. Each day of laying in the buffer zone was like a tragic eternity. Such was the chain of troubles every person, wishing to cross over to the Soviet side, had to go through.

Upon arrival in the Soviet territory, all these wanderers enlisted for different jobs, each according to his profession. They voluntarily joined the Soviet army. Trained metalworkers, mechanics and electricians from the vocational schools were immediately admitted to the air force. A small number engaged in commerce during the first period after crossing over, and a

few individuals went back [to the German side]. [Some] Częstochowa Jews also relocated to other cities [in occupied Poland], such as Kraków, Tarnów, Rzeszów and others.

Economic life in Częstochowa was completely paralysed. Shops were closed, factories were idle and everyone's main concern was how to obtain food. A new class arose - village-goers, who brought provisions from the peasants into the city. The peasants demanded different goods and objects. In this manner, the barter business was established.

The German authorities did not rest. Firstly, they began seizing Jews in the streets for various arduous, unpaid jobs and, in addition to that, they beat them. Freight vans drove up to the Jewish shops and the Germans took away all the merchandise, without paying any compensation. New orders were issued on a daily basis, the purpose of which was to decrease the rights of the Jews. Jewish buildings were requisitioned, and even the owners were forced to pay rent. German commissars ("Treuhänder"¹) were placed into all the large Jewish factories.

All radios were seized from the entire population. It was prohibited to go out onto the street from eight in the evening until five in the morning. A deluge of regulations was issued, and all the walls were filled with placards and official notices.

A new class rose to the surface - the "*Volksdeutsche*", [or] Poles of German descent. These [same] people, who carried on during the time of the Polish [independent] state as 100% Polish patriots, [suddenly] discovered that their grandmother or great-grandfather had been of German descent and, on those grounds, took over Jewish businesses and factories as "trustees".

The Częstochowa Polish citizen Belcke also discovered that he had this merit and, as a result, became mayor of the city.

What was effervescent Jewish communal life was totally destroyed. The Jewish *Kehilla*, with its numerous institutions, and all the societies and clubs were liquidated. The Germans set up their labour bureau in the *Kehilla's* newly-built *gimnazjum*, and a house for sexual orgies in Professor Axer's *gimnazjum*.

After the German army's military operations in Poland were completed, the attitude of the German authorities towards the Polish and Jewish population was made clear. This happened through two notifications - the first one was from the German military authorities and the second was General-Governor Hans Frank's manifesto. The notice from the military authorities stated that the German army had marched into Poland on the orders of Field Marshal [Walther] von Brauchitsch [and that] the German forces had come to Poland in order to liberate the Poles from the ruling Mościcki and Rydz-Śmigły clique. The German authorities requested the cooperation of the Polish populace and, on their part, guaranteed them their freedom, rights, work and bread.

¹ [TN: Ger., "trustees".]

In the Hans Frank's manifesto, he listed his entire "*ani maamim*"², promising the Poles golden, good fortune. At the same time, it was the first general onslaught on the Jews - putting to use the entire perfidious German lexicon, to the effect that the Jews had desired the war and had agitated for it. The Jews were parasites and, therefore, they would be excluded from economic and political life - there would be no place for them in Poland. The subsequent notifications regarding social security ended with the sentence, "The Jews are excluded from these rights".

From the moment Hans Frank took over the office of General-Governor, Jews were officially stripped of their rights.

² [TN: Heb., "I believe"; ref. to Maimonides' "Thirteen Principles of Faith", each of which begins with the words "I believe".]