

Speech by Estera Epsztajn



In a solemn atmosphere, the convention was opened by the lawyer, Estera Epsztajn, General Secretary of the Central Administration of the *Częstochower Landsmannschaft* in the American Zone.

In her speech, she said the following:

(Summary of the speech held on 20th October 1946 in Landsberg)

Four years have passed since we lost our dearest and most beloved. Four years ago, Hitler's beasts affected the annihilation of the Jews in Częstochowa. The period from Yom Kippur to Simchas Torah is the period when rivers of Jewish blood flowed.

The Nazi rulers, in the city of Częstochowa continuously fed the "Judenrat" with hopes that nothing bad would happen in the ghetto. They let themselves be paid well for these sweet words. Each one of the Nazi occupying authorities saw to his own material interests. On that tragic Yom Kippur, at eight o'clock in the evening, the Stadthauptmann¹ received a delegation from the "Judenrat" and, from them, accepted 100,000 złoty which was to guarantee that nothing would happen. At ten in the night, the chief of the German gendarmerie, Hauptmann [Captain] Degenhardt, telephoned the headquarters of the Jewish police [and told them] that the tense atmosphere in the ghetto was unfounded, and that he assured with his 'word of honour' that nothing would happen.

That same criminal mouth issued a command to the effect that, at five² in the morning, all the Jewish policemen were to report for a general rollcall. That was the sign that the 'akcja' was about to take place. From twelve midnight, the ghetto was heavily guarded by squads of black uniformed degenerates in the service of the SS. These were Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Latvians, 'Volksdeutsche' and an entire array of other scum.

In view of the impending tragic moments, there was an atmosphere of panic. People sought ways and means to save themselves. Those, who had work registration cards, believed that nothing would happen to them. They thought about the children and the elderly. Bunkers and hiding places were built in order to conceal those most threatened. There were also some who scrambled across to the "Aryan side" through the roofs.

¹ [TN: City Captain Dr Frank, as stated above in the chapter "Yom Kippur – The First Resettlement" (p.89).]

² [TN: Four o'clock, according to said chapter.]

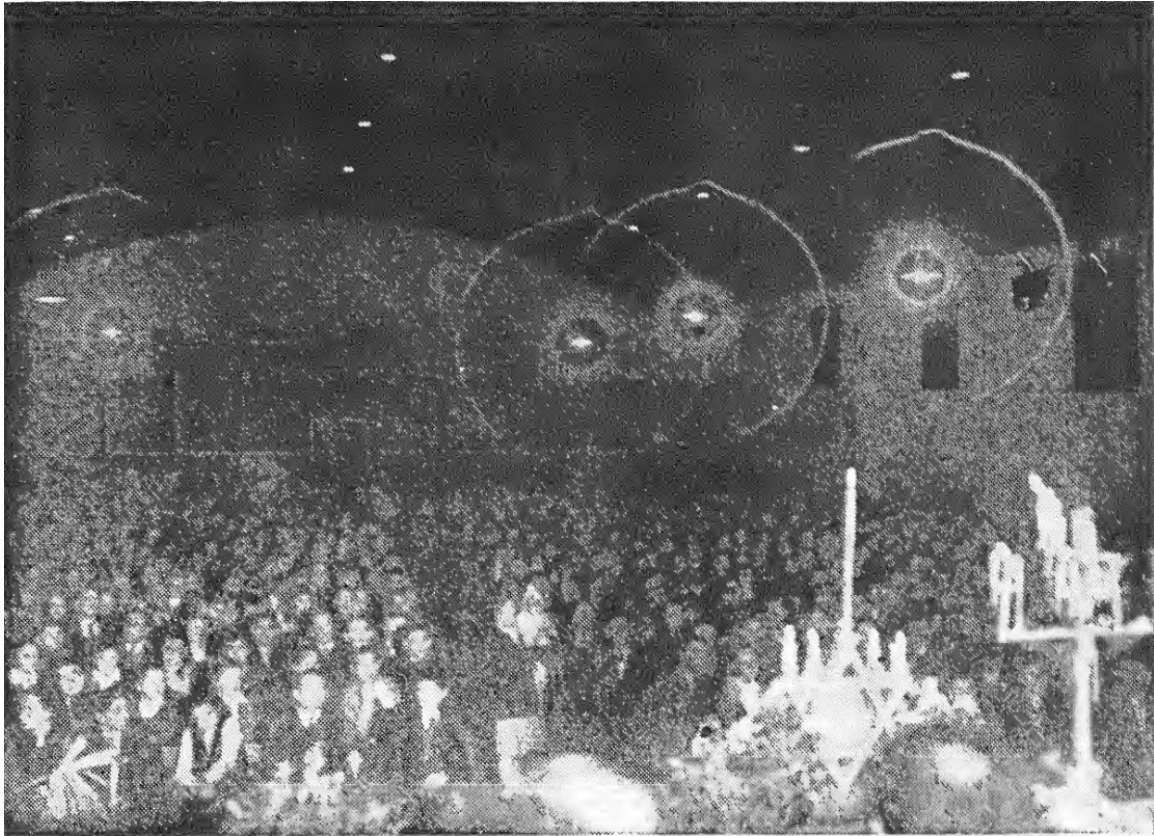


Photo № 45: The Częstochower landsleit, numbering 1,200 people, in the theatre hall.

On the following day, at six o'clock in the morning, the first group, marching out to work, was stopped and they were not permitted to leave the ghetto. Shooting was heard from all sides, which was the signal for the beginning of the "resettlement". Every couple of days, from Yom Kippur to Simchas Torah, there were resettlements and thousands upon thousands were sent away in railway wagons to Treblinka.

On the day of Simchas Torah, a group left "Metalurgia" to clean the ghetto, like on every other day. The women found cabbages in the cellars. Regardless of the tragic moments, they rejoiced in their "find", for it is a tradition to eat cabbage on Simchas Torah. But bitter destiny did not wish for them to eat that cabbage - their joy was for nothing. At lunchtime, when the Jews were at work, a rollcall was held at ul. Nadrzeczna 64, and Oberleutnant Rohn carried out a selection in the blink of an eye. In that selection, my unforgettable, dear parents were lost.

I am one of those who suffered along with all my folk brothers and sisters and who went through all the most horrifying experiences, until I lived to see the fall of the cruel Nazi regime.

It is for our slain fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, children and spouses that, today, we hold this memorial Yizkor³ service."

³ [TN: Prayer for the souls of the deceased.]