

## VI

### “Aryans”

Once more a new day arrived. A beautiful, bright sky greeted us, when we were led out from our imprisonment hall, at eight o'clock in the morning, to take the breakfasts that our wives had brought us. From our wives, we learned news of the city - among other things, that a Jewish representative body had been formed, with a chairman named Lajbisz Kopyński. This representative body was called the “*Ältestenrat*” [Council of Elders] or “*Judenrat*” [Jewish Council], and its duty was to transmit the orders of the German authorities to the Jewish population and to see to it that these orders were carried out meticulously. Besides this, the *Judenrat* was tasked with collecting money from wealthy Jews and creating a kitchen and a hospital for the poor.

In the afternoon, once again, we were suddenly taken out to the tennis court. We were left standing for a long time in uncertainty, until several officers came to us and ordered us to line up in rows. An elderly military man set up a camera and took a photograph. After that, he asked each one as to his occupation. The old officer treated us in a civil manner, which emboldened us a little and gave us the courage to approach him, clarifying that we were there by chance, and requesting him to set us free. The officer, first of all, responded by lecturing us on the War. “Who’s to blame for the War?”, he asked, and immediately answered the question himself, saying that it was the English. “The Poles would never have dared wage a war against Germany”, he said. “But”, he continued, “our military are already standing at the gates of Warsaw and the War will soon be over”.

Moving on to our own issue, he told us that he had come from the city of Radomsko. There, too, hostages had been taken. But, there, they were changed every three days - because the same people did not always have to suffer for the entire city.

We later discovered that he was the commandant of the city’s military garrison and that the city [itself] was also under his command. We decided to write him a petition, to be delivered him by a delegation of our wives. We wrote the petition on behalf of all the hostages - the Jews and Christians – but, when we approached the Christians for their signature, they declared that they had already written their own petition, because “in these days, Aryans should not present any petitions together with Jews”. We therefore signed the petition by ourselves, which was handed over to the commandant’s aide-de-camp on the following day.

When, on the next day, we were about to go out onto the grounds as usual, the soldiers ordered us to take all our things with us, as we were being released.

Beside ourselves with joy, we quickly prepared to leave and soon lined up in a military style - three men in each row.

Once more, we were on the familiar tennis court. We did not wish to take the food that our wives had brought us because, after all, we would soon be back at home. The time, the wives

were permitted to be with us passed, and they had to leave us. They would wait for us at the barracks' gate. After a long wait, the barracks commandant arrived and ordered us to line up to go home. [When] all of us were standing ready, he turned to us and said that he had received orders to set the hostages free - but only the Aryans, whereas the Jews would continue to remain in the barracks as hostages.

We remained standing in the rows as if petrified, no one budged from his place. Even when the commandant had left, we still stood in our places with our heads bowed in disgrace.

The "Aryans" left. Some of them, who were our friends, told us in secret that a delegation headed, by the bishop, had intervened for them. They promised to make efforts for us, if it would only be possible.

Slowly, we returned, sorrowful and downcast, to our imprisonment hall and, once more, began to sit - who knew for how long? We started thinking about our situation. How could we comprehend this? In a city of 120,000 inhabitants - 95,000 "Aryans" and 25,000 Jews - were we, precisely these thirty-five Jews, to be the hostages? Which means, to be answerable with our lives that nobody among the entire population should do any harm to the Germans? Could we then expect the whole populace to be so loyal to we thirty-five Jews?

Meanwhile, day after day passed. Each day, they began bringing groups of captured Polish military. We heard that the Germans had already occupied large territories of our country. Things became peaceful in town, and we decided that our wives should once more approach the old garrison commandant with a petition regarding our release.

A few days later, we were ordered to get our things together and leave the barracks. The barracks' commandant explained to us that we would still be the hostages for the city, but that we would be in our own homes. After twenty-seven days of torments, we were finally released from the imprisonment in the barracks, but we continued to bear upon ourselves the answerability for the peace in the city.