

## XIX

### Extermination

The Gestapo people rummaged through the remaining archives and researched all the materials from which they could discover the names of “political suspects” or anti-fascists, be they Jews or Poles. They primarily sought intellectuals. There were arrests every day and every night. People were put in prison and, a short time later, completely disappeared. The inhabitants of the village of Olsztyn, not far from a forest, were able to tell that, in the early morning hours, people were taken from prison into the woods. There, they were forced to dig pits, into which they were then flung and shot there.

Food brought by the relatives of the arrestees was accepted twice a week at the prison. The delivered food was often returned to the family, with the explanation that their relatives were no longer in jail. The wives of those men, who disappeared, then began going from one office to another in order to learn the fate of those suddenly missing. Finally, they would receive a harsh response, to the effect that they should stop taking an interest in their husbands’ whereabouts. Always, therefore, when women or children came to the prison with food for their husbands or fathers, they would stand in fear and wait - would the food be brought back or not? The secrets of the Olsztyn forest were already no longer a secret, and returned food meant the relative was no longer alive.

A heart-rending lament was, therefore, often heard on the prison alleyway. Wives and children or parents of those who had suddenly disappeared threw themselves on the ground in despair, tore at their hair and screamed in wild voices. Immediately, the gendarme would chase them off with his gunstock. The arrestees’ family members would wait entire nights for the vehicles that took their dearest away to the Olsztyn forest. From afar – because one was not permitted to go near – they would stand and see how, before daylight, the prison alley was suddenly encircled by Gestapo men, and people were loaded onto the vans that had pulled right up to the gate. When the vehicles drove by, where the relatives of the detainees were standing, wailing would break out and the family members would accompany the vans in the manner in which a funeral procession is followed.

Every few days, people would also be sent from jail to the concentration camps. After every transport, the prison would again be filled with new arrestees, and thus the procedure of arrests and deportations constantly continued. [After some time,<sup>1</sup>] we found out that, in the town of Oświęcim [Auschwitz], not far from Kraków, there were concentration camps to which thousands of people were continuously transported and, shortly afterwards, killed. The families of the people sent there would receive telegrams, from there, that their relative was “*verstorben*” [deceased<sup>2</sup>]. After a while, the family would be called to the Gestapo, where they were given some of the deceased's clothing.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: We have added these words from the Hebrew-language version printed in *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol II, cols.62-66.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: In German in the original.]

The relatives of those sent to Oświęcim made efforts, in various offices, to rescue their relatives from Oświęcim, but we quickly became aware that those, for whom efforts were made that they should be freed, were annihilated [even] more rapidly, and the family immediately received a telegram "*verstorben*".

Nevertheless, in our city, there were two or three people who had returned from the Oświęcim camp. Special efforts had been made for them by people with great influence. How they had been freed, and what was actually happening there in the camp, remained a secret – because they did not say even one word about all that. They had been warned that, if they said anything, they would be sent back.

In the summer of 1940, all the Jewish lawyers in our city were arrested. They were put in the cells, where those designated to be sent away to Oświęcim would be put. The families of the lawyers made every effort to save them. The *Judenrat* also tried to do something and Wajnryb intensely occupied himself with the affair. At first, the operation was conducted jointly, [with the purpose] of saving them all. Later, each family began doing what it could on its own lest, in the meantime, they would be sent away and the assistance would come too late.

A few days later, it became known that the Gestapo had arrested more Jews from various echelons. Their families also raced to the *Judenrat* and to Wajnryb to plead that something should be done for them. They were willing to give away everything that they possessed, but no one was prepared to do anything for them. Within several days, they were sent to Oświęcim.

Shortly thereafter, the lawyers were freed. There was a suspicion that the lawyers had been saved at the expense of the other arrestees, for whom no one had been willing to intervene. Whether this was truly thus has remained a secret. In any case, the families of those sent to Oświęcim went about with heavy hearts and rage at the *Judenrat*, whom they suspected of having had made this horrifying exchange. The suspicion was also strengthened by the fact that the lawyers had paid the *Judenrat* a very large amount of money that had been required for the release. Meanwhile, however, ever more new arrests continued to be made. New transports continued going to Oświęcim, and women continued receiving telegrams from the Oświęcim camp that their husbands were "*verstorben*".