

## VII

### The First Decrees

A tense atmosphere reigns in the city. Soldiers stand on guard in front of the finest buildings - that is where the Germans have set up their offices. The tenants of these houses have simply been evicted from their dwellings.

The streets are full of military. Large flags with swastikas flutter everywhere. Aeroplanes fly, motorcycles and streetcars drive speedily down the streets, narrow strips of paper are glued onto the windowpanes. Few civilians are seen and, those who do show themselves, run hurriedly down the street, as if desiring to be back home as soon as possible.

When, on the day following my release, I was about to go out into town, I was stopped at the gate by an unknown woman. She told me that the Germans were seizing Jews for work and beating them also. Every German was permitted to do what he liked with Jews. When Germans alighted from the train, they stopped passers-by on the street and asked, "Jew?" They sought out precisely those better dressed and ordered them to carry their luggage. In the buildings where the Germans had infiltrated, Jews were forced to put everything in order. Jewish women - and they deliberately selected those wealthier and more intelligent - had to wash the windows, doors and floors, clean the stairs, wash the toilets, cook and perform all the dirty jobs. During the work, they were bullied by the soldiers and insulted using the filthiest expressions.

Poland was divided. Russia occupied the eastern territories and the Germans had annexed, to their country, a large part of the western territories. Thus, the Polish land, which had numbered thirty-five million inhabitants, was reduced to a population of twenty million. This country was now given the name "Generalgouvernement" ["General Government"], and a government was appointed, headed by the governor, Dr Hans Frank. The capital was Kraków, and Dr Frank and his government settled there.

General Governor Frank issued a decree to the effect that every Jew and Jewess, from the age of twelve and upwards, was required to wear, on the right arm, a white band, on which a Star of David had to be sewn. The band needed to be ten centimetres wide. Converts to Christianity were also considered Jews. Aryans, who had a Jew in the family within three generations, were also required to wear the bands. All the Jewish shops, factories, craftsmen's workshops and all firms, which worked if only partially with Jewish capital, had to hang large white plaques with blue Stars of David in the windows, entrance doors and also inside. Doctors were also required to paint a Star of David on their signs. This law came into effect on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1939.

The *Judenrat* had to ensure that the bands were ready on time. And, all at once, on one fine morning, all the streets were whitened. Jews felt very demoralised, above all upon meeting the "Aryans". As for the Germans, this was very convenient - they no longer needed to take

the trouble of asking the passers-by “Jew?”, but seized a person, with a white band, for work and treated him like a slave.

Jews were punished for not wearing the band. The first time, the Jew had to go either to the police or to jail. There, they reminded him of his childhood years - his trousers were lowered and he was given twenty lashes with a whip and, after promising that he would never again forget the band, he was released. A few weeks later, the penalty became harsher - six months in prison. And, even later, if they came upon a Jew without a band, he could be shot on the spot.

That same month, the General Governor issued another decree - that no Jew was allowed to leave his place of residence and was forbidden from travelling on the train without a special permit from the authorities. Jews stopped coming from other cities.

Produce and goods became ever dearer, as the Jewish businesses had to send Aryans to carry out their business matters. Some of them stole the money along with the merchandise.

The local authorities also issued anti-Jewish laws. While the non-Jewish populace was permitted to move about in the city from five in the morning to eleven at night, Jews could only be in the street from six [in the morning] until eight in the evening. A few minutes later, vehicles appeared in the Jewish streets with gendarmes, who captured Jews who were “running late”. They also burst into the courtyards where Jews were living and, if they did not find any Jews, they dragged people out from their dwellings and filled up the vehicles, to show their superiors that they were working diligently.

The Jews were taken over to the police station, where each had to pay a fine of 100 złoty and 20 złoty for the trip in the streetcar, in addition to which they had to sit all night in a cellar. Those, who had no money, were forced to sit until someone came and bailed them out.

The city’s German commandants gave the power over to a civilian city administration. The police general, Dr Richard Wendler, was appointed *Stadthauptmann* [City Captain].

The *Stadthauptmann* handed authority over all the Jews in our city to the *Judenrat*. His first demand from the Jews was a “contribution” of 400,000 złoty.

The *Judenrat*, forced to carry out this order, sent out requests to the wealthier Jews to put a certain sum into its coffers and, when the funds raised were insufficient, they demanded more money, until the “contribution” was paid.

The *Judenrat* became a power that could do with the property of every Jew as it saw fit, and with the person himself as well - just like with his furniture, linen and dwelling - sending him to work wherever the German authorities indicated. The *Judenrat* grew into a large administrative apparatus with various departments. Lawyers, doctors, intellectuals, half-intellectuals and just common Jews made efforts to be given [even] an unsalaried position in the *Judenrat*, because a *Judenrat* official was safer on the street, while they were capturing people for work. This Jewish authoritative body was set up by Hitler’s regime in the whole of the *Generalgouvernement*, in all cities and *shtetls*, so that the Germans could receive, into

their hands, all the Jewish possessions with ease, starting from furniture and ending with gold, diamonds, businesses, factories and the workforce, along with all its life and limb.