

## XX

### Ghetto

Rumours began to spread that, in our city, a ghetto would be established, with separate city areas for Jews and for Aryans, as had already been implemented for some time in Warsaw and in other cities.

These rumours caused a panic and people ran to the *Judenrat* to find out about this matter. The *prezes* and the other members of the *Judenrat* calmed and reassured [them] that, "This can never happen here, as we give the Germans all that they demand of us". But the rumours very quickly turned out to be true.

In our city, there was a German office called "*Quartieramt*" [Billeting Office], which was tasked with providing the Germans, who came here, with lodgings. The manager of this office was a German named Lindermann. This Lindermann was a frequent visitor to Jewish craftsmen, who would do all sorts of work for him and his wife for free or at half price, as they did for other German officials, from whom they could expect some "favour".

On one occasion, while a Jewish tailor was measuring the manager of the *Quartieramt* for a fine suit, he cautiously asked him what the state of affairs was with us concerning the ghetto. The German replied that "things are going very well", [and] that a meeting would shortly be held in the *Stadthauptmannschaft* regarding "arranging a special living district for you Jews".

When this news became known, the panic grew more. People wished to provide a roof over their heads, while there was still time. Small carts, laden with different types of furniture and things, began transiting the city streets, from the more elegant streets to the poorer parts of the city, where the Jews assumed that the ghetto would be established. Yet other wagons travelled from the Jewish streets, with things, to the Polish neighbourhoods - these were some of the Jews, who were taking their belongings to "Polish friends" to hide "until the times should change".

However, the *Stadthauptmann* quickly issued a decree that no furniture or other objects could be transported from one place to another without special permission. It became even clearer, from this decree, that the ghetto would soon be instituted. Therefore, the alarm intensified even more. People wished to save whatever they could of their possessions - men, women and children went back and forth dozens of times to the Jewish streets, taking away, to relatives, garments which they wore on themselves and other objects which they could take with them. And, in this very same manner, others would take things away from the Jewish neighbourhoods to the Polish ones, to Poles of their acquaintance.

Jewish carpenters received an order to make large wooden signs on which inscriptions were to be made to the effect that Jews were forbidden to proceed further, on pain of death.

It soon became known that, at the *Judenrat's* housing office, residences would be allotted to the Jews, who were to move from the "Aryan" parts of the city into the "Jewish living quarters". The Jewish ghetto had already been designated, and a deadline of five days was given for the move.

Polish policemen were stationed at the exits of the streets that were designated as the ghetto. Jews were no longer permitted to go out onto the Aryan streets. A record was made of the number of dwellings in the ghetto streets and of the number of Aryans who were to leave the ghetto. For the Polish populace from the ghetto streets, a housing office was created, which gave them lodgings in the Aryan part of the city, in buildings where, until then, Jews had lived.

There was a great crowd in front of the Jewish housing office. Those driven out of the "Aryan side" wanted a piece of roof over their head. The allocation of apartments was conducted very sluggishly. One young man, by the name of Kolenbrener, was appointed manager of the Jewish housing office. This Kolenbrener had come here from Gdynia and had been able to establish contacts with German officials here, who ordered the *Judenrat* to give the young man employment. Thus, he became "*chef*" [chief] of the housing office and the allocation of residences lay in his hands. This "*Herr Chef*" had no set office hours and he never hurried when Jews stood in long queues, waiting to receive some little piece of roof over their heads.

The ghetto was eventually established. Jewish workers dug holes in all corners of the ghetto and erected large yellow-coloured signs, at which Jewish painters stood and painted the following notice in German, Polish and Yiddish: "*Jews leaving the Jewish housing district will be punished with death. Aryans entering the Jewish housing district, for the purpose of trading with or buying from Jews, will be imprisoned*".

In April 1941, two days before the Christian holiday of Easter, all the Jews in our city of Częstochowa began living together, in the ghetto, without "Aryans". Yet, our ghetto was different from the ghettos in other cities. There were neither walls nor fences. [Although] the Polish population was not permitted to trade with Jews, they were allowed to pass through the ghetto. Our city was thus built such that the 40,000 Jews could not be enclosed in such a manner as to prevent the "Aryan" population from accessing the ghetto streets. This gave us hope that our ghetto would not be completely closed in and that we would, therefore, not be exposed to hunger as in other cities.

Once all the Jews were already living in the ghetto, for a short time, a few Jews still remained on the "Aryan side". These were the selected Jewish craftsmen, who worked for the Germans. As it was just before the Christian holiday, the Jewish craftsmen were heavily snowed under with work for the Germans. They had to finish garments for the holiday and moving to the ghetto would have held up the work. Therefore, they continued to permit the Jewish workshops to remain, temporarily, on the "Aryan side". This was obviously done for the Germans' convenience and not for the benefit of the Jews.

When a gendarme entered the "Rena" fashion boutique and ordered that the premises be shuttered, just like all the other Jewish shops in that neighbourhood, the lady who owned it wished to immediately obey the command. But the German women, who were there waiting for their hats, went to their husbands, high-ranking officials in the *Stadthauptmannschaft*,

and made a commotion – “What do you mean by that? We won’t have our hats ready for the holiday!” An order therefore arrived: the shop was to remain open until the Germans provided different premises. This solitary Jewish shop, with large Stars of David hung in the window, continued to remain open in the city’s finest neighbourhood. It soon became known that the authorities had allocated a separate house, near the ghetto, for the selected finest Jewish craftsmen, who were working for the Germans, so that the German clients would not be forced to enter the ghetto.

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The first morning in the ghetto:

Quite early, we go out into the street to survey our environs. People begin to walk about in the streets, but there is little free space. There are boundaries everywhere: large signs with inscriptions, at which Jewish “*Ordnungsmänner*” [policemen] stand, wearing red caps with shiny visors, the white “*Judenband*” on their right arm and the “*Ordnungsband*” on their left arm, and armed with rubber truncheons - like real constables. Many passageways to the various streets do not belong to the ghetto, and we begin to orientate ourselves as to where we may and may not go. Transit intensifies and the streets become more crowded. People push one another walking on the pavements, and the policemen do not permit us to walk in the middle of the street. The workers rush to their gathering points. With their wooden clogs, they clatter on the cobblestones, making noise. They march in groups, with their brigadiers, to the new boundaries of the ghetto. With his rubber baton, the Jewish constable indicates to them to stand still. The brigadier with his group remained standing and are not let through as always. The same happens at all the borders of the ghetto. The Jewish Employment Office gives out temporary passes for the labourers to be let through, outside the ghetto, to the workplaces. The constable counts each group and lets it pass.

The Polish populace goes in and out of the ghetto and the Jewish policeman cannot give it any orders. The Poles are not allowed to stop in the Jewish streets which, for them, are only a sort of transit. They contemplate the new situation and catch brief chats with their Jewish acquaintances. One still has something to settle with the other - here and there, a Jew asks a Polish acquaintance a favour, that he should procure something for him from the “Aryan side”.

Jews stand by the ghetto boundaries and look across to the “Aryan” streets, to the happy people, who may circulate freely, go wherever they please and travel anywhere that they wish by trains and motorcars. The Polish population also look over to us with strange gazes. They stare with such expressions, as if we were infected with an epidemic disease and needed to be isolated, or as if we were half-savage people. We sense to what extent the Germans have demeaned us in the eyes of the Poles.

Jews transport bricks, lime and sand through the streets in order to wall up the courtyards that belong to the “Aryan side” up to the halfway line. Walls and gates are breached in order to create new passageways. People crawl through holes and over mounds to be able to access their dwellings.

Long queues of people stand in front of the housing office. They are dissatisfied with their new dwellings. Others cannot get along with the new neighbours. [Space] is tight, the house is damp, it rains inside - [these] and other similar reasons have brought the people here. Merchants, who have lost their business premises in the "Aryan" part of town, stand for hours at the *Judenrat* and try to obtain premises which the "Aryans" had left behind inside the ghetto. The *Judenrat* demands a great deal of money for premises. Shouting ensues, [there is] a commotion – "How can this be?". A merchant yells, "From where will I take [money]? You know that I am ruined - I have given up my business, I now live in a small room, with no furniture and no economic means, I have to pay your taxes - and now you demand new thousands for a shop! If I do not have a small shop, do you not see that I will also not be able to pay the taxes?" But, being already accustomed to such arguments in the *Judenrat*, they no longer responded to them. A second and a third immediately came up - the number of shops was limited, and there were many eager takers.

Soon, small shops were opened in larger premises which had previously housed large businesses. Now, there was a little haberdashery, buttons, electrical items, some food products, sweets [etc.]. The once-great merchants became accustomed to the tiny shops, for which the *Judenrat* took large sums of money.

Deeper in the ghetto, further down near the Old Market [Stary Rynek], there is noise, a tumult - Jewish children, boys and girls, with throats that have already become hoarse, proclaim their wares: saccharine, *Ersatz* tea<sup>1</sup>, thread for sewing, soap, etc. One child tries to outshout the other. Jews and Poles, passing by, purchase while walking, because trade is not allowed here. A Jewish constable stands [there] and gently disperses the "merchants". When a Polish policeman approaches, the Jewish one becomes more energetic. The traders quickly run away into the nearby gates and the Poles continue on their way, as if they had not bought or sold anything here. Some of the buyers take the opportunity to depart with the yet unpaid for goods. The little merchants chase after them, [but] meanwhile a gendarme comes up and chases the traders. Commotion and running ensue from all sides. Everyone escapes, but the gendarme still catches one - he seizes all the merchandise and "pays" for it with a good thrashing.

However, as soon as the gendarme goes away, "business" begins once more. The "merchants" are not deterred by anything. They are driven by need and hunger, and there is no other possibility of earning enough for a morsel of bread. Children, who know every gendarme and Polish constable, even when they are dressed in civilian clothes, are stationed at all corners of the trading grounds. Each of the policemen and gendarmes has a particular nickname among the children. Here the boy, who is "standing guard", suddenly yells, "Throat's coming - push off!", by which he means that the tall gendarme, who has a long neck, is coming and we have to "push off", viz. escape. After such a signal, the whole square is vacated within seconds. A little later, the "merchants" once again shuffle out from their hiding places. But, before long, another signal is heard, "The Keg's coming!", meaning that the short gendarme with the fat belly is approaching. Later, another danger signal is heard, "The White Head – become a hare!", meaning that the gendarme, with the white head of hair is coming, and one must "become a hare", viz. run away. After that, another alarm, "The Red

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: "Tea" made of local plants was among the many "Ersatz" (substitute) products consumed during wartime.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: "Pull off" in the original Yiddish, which is used in the same manner as "push off", viz. go away, in English, as follows.]

*Fox – move your feet!* “The Red Fox” is the epithet for a Polish policeman with a red face. The Jewish children have great troubles on his account. He beats them with his rubber truncheon and then takes them to the police station, where they are tortured anew by other murderers like him.

Among many others, there is one gendarme about whom the boys shout, “*The murderer is here!*”. This is a plainclothes fellow with a truly murderous appearance. He seizes one peddler with one hand and another with the other and kicks both of them with his feet, while the others run away.

These were the ways by which Jewish children, in our ghetto, protected themselves from their persecutors.