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Hunger in the Ghetto

After the second *akcja*, 25,000 Jews still remained in the ghetto, awaiting their uncertain fate.

The hunger became more acute. The poor populace, who lived on their daily earnings and had no reserves, immediately upon the second day after the *akcja* had nothing to eat.

In some of the buildings, they collected the food products from all the residents and cooked in a common cauldron. In the buildings, where the richer people did not agree to this partnership, they were forced to do so by the poor.

In the Craftsmen's House, which bordered on other ghetto buildings, we noticed through a window how the Jews there were indicating, with gestures, that they were suffering hunger. The craftsmen at once set upon organising any aid that was possible.

In the Craftsmen's House, there was also a lack of food, due to the fact that the building was under lockdown - but there were several poor Polish women living in the building, who understood how to take advantage of the situation and they purchased food products on the "Aryan side", which they brought bit by bit into the building and then sold for high prices. Every craftsman bought food from these women and threw some of it over to the neighbouring building, where the Jews were suffering hunger. The craftsmen expanded this support and ordered that the food be thrown from the neighbouring house also over to the houses further down the ghetto.

The Jewish policemen, who lived in the Craftsmen's House, also purchased bread and other food products and carried them off into the ghetto and to the quarantine or the shop and saved those closest to them there from hunger.

Other ghetto Jewish policemen also came to the Craftsmen's House and bought food products, later selling them in the ghetto for high prices.

All these means only slightly alleviated the need of individuals, but not for the 25,000 souls.

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Just as after the first *akcja*, after the second *akcja* also, people in the ghetto employed all means to get into the shop, in order to be saved in this manner. *Hauptmann* Degenhardt understood how to take advantage of this, in order to squeeze, from the Jews in the ghetto, the last [possessions] that they still had hidden somewhere. He notified the *prezes* of the *Judenrat* that, if there were Jews in the ghetto who possessed money or valuables, they could enter the shop [in exchange] for their possessions. The *prezes* received permission from the *Hauptmann* to take the valuables from the Jews, and note them down and the names of those

who had given them up. The news soon spread behind the closed gates of the ghetto buildings and each person, who only owned anything, was prepared to give away his last in order to save himself. Moreover, the *prezes* took three of his friends to help him, and all of them went out into the ghetto, each one separately, under the escort of Polish policemen.

The *Hauptmann* also had several people in the Jewish police to whom he gave the same task. The policemen visited the Jewish houses in the ghetto - including the poorest - and took from anyone whatever they had. They issued receipts for the items taken, with assurances that the people would be transferred to the shop. The *Hauptmann* would drive up to the Jewish buildings in his car and take the collected gold and items.

The Gestapo men, hearing that Jews were giving money and valuables, also began making the same deals. They, too, found some fellow in the Jewish police who ran this "business".

Later yet, other Jewish policemen took to this same "business" and put themselves in contact with gendarmes, with whom they conducted these deals as partners. The Jewish policemen carried through the transactions with the Jews, and the gendarmes led the people into the shop. Taking people, from the ghetto into the shop, entailed great risk. The gendarmes were frequently stopped by their non-commissioned officers [viz. sergeants] or officers. In such cases, the gendarmes declared that they were taking the Jews to clear out corpses, or looked for other excuses. However, at times, it happened that a gendarme was leading a Jew or two and came upon another gendarme, who had an inkling of what was going on. He would then pull out his revolver and shoot the Jews in the middle of the street. The gendarme, who was taking the Jews, usually did not make a great fuss about it. The gendarme had already taken the money or valuable objects up front. At the most, he settled the account with the gendarme, who had shot "his" Jews at the opportunity when he found him leading Jews - whereupon he shot "the other's" Jews. After that, they were reconciled over a bottle of schnapps and remained friends.

On the same street, where the shop was located, there were several Jewish factories, run by "*Treuhänder*" [trustees], in which the owners were employed as professional workmen. One day before the *akcja*, Jews hid there, in the hope that the terror would not last long and that, afterwards, once "things quieted down", they would be able to come back out from the hideout. In those places, where nobody knew about those in hiding, the Jews were protected. In contrast, there where the "*Treuhänder*" found out, he informed the gendarmerie and the Jews were shot on the spot or, in the best case, they were taken away to ul. Katedralna, where the Aid Committee's Jewish communal kitchen had formerly been and, there, they were placed under arrest, under a heavy police guard, until the nearest *akcja*, to then be send away.

In the Ickowicz & Guterman firm's metal factory, the "*Treuhänder*" was a Pole named Tiszewski [sic Cieszewski¹], who presented himself as a former Polish Sejm deputy [viz. MP]. He conducted quite good business deals with the owners and was also in good relations with them. But, when he found out that they were in the factory during the *akcja*, he drove them out and warned his Polish [office] employees and labourers that Poles, who hid Jews, would after the War be prosecuted for hindering the solution to the *Jewish Question* in Poland.

¹ [TN: See forthcoming paragraph; the spelling "Cieszewski" is the more likely of the two.]

The owners were shocked at Cieszewski's brutality. This character had been driven out of Posen [Poznań] by the Germans and had come to Częstochowa a poor man, who did not have with what to survive for a day. With them, he had become wealthy. For three whole years, he was the "best friend" and, now, he had actually removed the mask and shown his true character.

The owners barely had time to leave the factory, and they went barefoot into the carriages with the first deported Jews, in order not to be shot in the middle of the street.

Cieszewski remained alone in the Jewish factory as manager, believing that he would already be able to lead the enterprise on his own. But he very soon received payment for his wickedness. After a short time of running the factory, he was arrested and deported to Oświęcim.

On that same street, there were two other Jewish factories - the Horowicz & Co. metal factory and the Landau Bros. spoon factory. In both factories, the "*Treuhänder*" was a German, who had previously lived in Poland. This German actually helped the Jews to hide and they lived through the hard days of the *akcje*² in safety.

² [TN: Plural form of the word "*akcja*" (operation).]