

XVII

The Liquidation of Jewish Factories

The large Jewish factory known as “Gnaszyńska [Jute] Manufaktura” in Częstochowa which, before the War, had employed several thousand people, was outside the city, on the road leading to the German border. On the second day of the War, when the German military marched past the factory, a longstanding, high-ranking factory official came out with flowers and greeted the Germans. This same official, who had been known as a Pole for many years, suddenly became a *Volksdeutscher* and was appointed, by the Germans, to run the factory.

The Jewish foremen, factory officials and the head engineer lived in the factory’s houses. All these Jews were no longer allowed to continue working and the new manager evicted them from their dwellings, not permitting them to take with them even the smallest trifle of their belongings. This newly-baked German also denounced the engineer, accusing him of taking money from the cashbox. The engineer was forced to endure [much trouble] from this and was eventually forced to leave town.

All the other larger and smaller factories and houses of business were seized in the same manner by the Germans and, everywhere, new managers were appointed, who had the title “*Treuhänder*” [trustees].

The same happened with the factories owned by foreigners – French, Belgians and others, with whom Germany was in a state of war. The “trustees”, taking over their positions, began their activity by inspecting whether the former owner had left everything in “order” – if the cash box matched the books, if money had not been withdrawn from the banks and if the stock of raw and manufactured goods was in accord with the ledgers. If something appeared not to be in order, the Jewish owner was summoned to the “trustee” in the factory, where he was beaten murderously, after which he was taken to be interrogated and had to answer the questions that were put before him. Manufacturers, who several weeks before the War had sent goods deeper into the country to safeguard themselves from any contingency, were forced to report everything to the “trustee” and bring the goods back at their own cost.

The greater part of the “trustees” had previously been officials of the same factories. They were even worse than outside “trustees”. Not wishing to meet with the owners and former work colleagues anymore, they immediately laid off all the Jews and hung up a sign at the entrance: “*Vor Juden ist der Eintritt Verboten*” [“Entry is Forbidden to Jews”]. A former official, who had been sent by the owners at their own expense to England to study the craft of weaving, became “trustee” at the Jewish “Warta” factory. After taking over the management of the factory, he immediately drove out the Jews on the very first day. This same fellow also took over a jute¹ factory, which he liquidated, selling off all the goods and machines, thus making heavy millions. The previous Jewish director of the factory, who had been left without

¹ [TN: According to the Hebrew-language version of this chapter in *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol II, cols.55-56, the factory manufactured not jute but linen. At any rate, it was a textile firm.]

means of livelihood, asked him for aid. But instead of helping him, he even took his watch from him and laughed.

This was how all the Jews were handled all the Jews – be they the owners, [office] employees or the labourers at the factories which had been seized by the Germans. A small exception was in some of the smaller factories and businesses, where the owners themselves were professional workmen and ran the enterprise. The new managers, the “trustees”, did not feel capable of running the enterprises themselves and, therefore, they retained the owners at work. Of course, working under such conditions was embittering for the Jew, but neither could he refuse, besides which, if not for his [own] factory, he would have been forced to perform forced labour in some forest or in water.

However, the earnings of those Jewish workers, who remained working at their workplaces, were 25% lower than what the non-Jewish labourers earned. Besides that, the non-Jewish workers received certain products, which the Jews did not receive.

The Jewish factories worked for a long time, using the raw materials that the owners had left behind. Some factories had raw materials for two years. The new money, which the Germans had introduced, did not win the trust of the population, so everyone had wanted to insure themselves with goods. Polish merchants paid any price for a little merchandise. The “trustees” were supposed to sell merchandise at pre-war prices, but they took prices ten times higher and, in the books, set down normal prices, so that these people made millions in a short time.

Those Jews, whose factories had been seized and who had not even been kept on as workers, turned to the central authorities requesting support from the factory’s proceeds, because they had no means of livelihood. After a lengthy period, the authorities informed the “trustees” that they were to pay out 200 zloty a month to the owners, but on condition that the enterprise was earning this “surplus” expenditure, because that support was not to be taken from the capital. Thus, the payment of these 200 zloty depended on the “goodwill” of the “trustees”, who always found a motive not to pay even though, all in all, this sum could [only] suffice for three days’ sustenance under the prevailing conditions. Hence, these 200 zloty - with small exceptions - were not paid. There was only a small number of “trustees” who “thought about the future”, once the War ended and, in any event, wished to remain on good terms with the owners of the enterprises. They also understood that the cooperation of the former owners would be of better use than that of the new personnel, who were clueless as regards to the work. These owners, even though they worked as simple labourers, factually stood in close contact with the “trustee”. They showed the “trustee” the entire mechanism of the business and shared in the profits.

In time, the raw materials, which the Jewish owners had prepared, were depleted. The government apportioned very few fresh materials or none at all, because everything was supplied to the munitions factories. The enterprises gradually came to a halt. The authorities ordered several firms to be united into one enterprise. But this, too, did not last long and the new firms had to be liquidated due to the lack of raw materials. The machinery of the Jewish factories was taken away somewhere and a large part went to be smelted in the ironworks, where they were made into cannons or other weapons.

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Not only businesses and factories, but also all the buildings were seized from the Jews and were placed under a "trust" administration. An office was created, under the name "*Treuhandenschaft für Jüdischen Grundbesitz*" [Trusteeship for Jewish Real Estate]. A specialist in housing management, who had for many years been an administrator for Jewish homeowners in Dortmund, was brought from Germany. This fellow immediately demanded that he be called "Doctor", and he settled down in complete comfort, like all other German civilians and military men in our city. Firstly, he ordered that a villa be prepared for him, which the *Judenrat* had to furnish beautifully, after which they had to provide him with large, well-ordered and appropriately furnished offices with several rooms - he then commenced his "activity". His deputy and the rest of the personnel were Poles from Posen [Poznań] - these are particular sorts of Poles, who have always had the reputation for their antisemitism. The administration over the Jewish buildings was given over to *Volksdeutschen* and Poles. Each of them was given [control over] whole streets of houses, and they began collecting rent. The ledgers of the buildings were inspected and the overdue rent, from before the War, had to be paid by the tenants to the last grosz. The Jewish building owners were forced to pay rent just like all the tenants.

The press began to write about the bad state of the Jewish buildings that had been taken over by the German "trustees" and their assistants. The buildings were to have been renovated under the German administration – but the result was the exact opposite. The new administration only extorted as much money as possible from the tenants, and the houses were truly neglected for the first time.

The administrators - the *Volksdeutschen* - searched the Jewish dwellings and seized everything that had any worth, on the pretext that it fell under requisition [orders]. In this manner, they would take out machines from small factories as well as merchandise. They did this after eight o'clock in the evening, when it was forbidden for Jews to be in the street and so they could not see where everything was being taken. One bold Jew, from whom the administrator had taken away all his possessions at night, reported this to the [Polish] police and indicated a Polish firm to which everything had been taken. The Polish police conducted the investigation and ascertained that everything was exactly just as the Jew had reported - the Pole had purchased, as stolen goods from the administrator, all the merchandise and machinery of an entire factory. All these things had been sealed up and, considering that the administrator was a *Volksdeutscher*, the Polish police was unable to decide the matter and it was referred to the Gestapo. A few days later, the Jew and his son received a summons to report to the Gestapo. They went there with light hearts, in the complete assurance that no blame could be proved [against] them.

But, as soon as they entered the Gestapo offices, they were welcomed with murderous blows and flung into a cellar. After lying there for several hours, they were taken out to the second floor, to a room where their administrator was already waiting for them. He, along with another Gestapo character, once again beat the father and son in such manner, that they were left lying unconscious. Once they had been revived with a bucket of cold water, it was

explained to them that “Jewish swindlers may not accuse persons of the German people of anything at all”.

After some time, it was just barely possible to extract these two Jews from the Gestapo. They lay in bed for a long time, until they recovered from the murderous blows. This was already a lesson for all the Jews not to complain about any German or *Volksdeutschen*. The administrator continued in his position and the Jew paid him rent for his dwelling inside his own building.