

## XXV

### The Masses Starve

In the winter of 1941-1942, the Jewish population's situation in the ghetto became even more difficult. The greater part of the population was badly clothed and they no longer had any means to buy coal and potatoes. Hundreds of half-naked, poor people stood in the streets, begging for alms, but no one looked at them.

This winter turned out to be very harsh. There were great frosts and deep snow. In the early morning, thousands of ragged workers would run, in their wooden clogs, to their workplaces. Bits of naked flesh peeped out from their torn clothes. The young ones - still children - who worked all day in the frost and wind, bound up their heads with ragged kerchiefs. The parents, wives and children of the labourers, stayed at home in their hovels, where they hungered and froze. In the shelters, the homeless folk sat on their dark cots, covered with sacks and old rags. In the streets, the peddlers were freezing, without seeing any customers for their meagre bit of goods, in addition to which they were persecuted by various harassers, civilian informers, and German, Polish and Jewish policemen.

The aid committee made every effort to alleviate the need, but the necessity was so great that it was impossible to help everyone.

In the nights, gendarmes would storm Jewish houses, take out all the men, give them a beating and take them away, outside the city, to clear the highways of snow. They were held there all day, without food, and only late at night did they return tired, famished, bloodied and dejected. The attacking of people at night and dragging them [away] to clear the snow continued all winter long.

Besides this, new troubles emerged. The houses, which were on the very edge of the ghetto, were raided at night by German gendarmes, who drove out the Jewish residents in such haste that they barely had time to get dressed and take something with them. Thus, the houses, that had been made "*Judenrein*" [clean of Jews], were annexed to the "Aryan side" and the ghetto was made smaller. Once again, hundreds of newly homeless people arrived, who had to be crammed in among the Jews in the already sufficiently crowded ghetto. Every time, a new list of poor people requiring aid would arrive, and it was constantly necessary to pour another few litres of water into the kitchen's cauldron.

The TOZ<sup>1</sup> played a great part in bringing aid. This society, under the leadership of the well-known Częstochowa activist [Jakow] Rozyner, aided by the *Judenrat*, tried to receive permission from the authorities to hold several theatrical performances in the ghetto. After many difficulties, they finally succeeded in carrying out these theatrical activities, which brought in a certain sum for the aid fund. Amateurs, who had once acted in the theatre, took part in the performances. The [newly] homeless cantor from the Poznań region organised a

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia Ludności Żydowskiej (Society for the Protection of the Health of the Jewish Population).]

mixed chorus from [amongst] the former music lovers, with solo singing. The poor, Jewish children from the orphanage also performed. Much effort was spent so that the wardrobe of the participants and the décor should be as beautiful as possible. The Jews rushed to the theatre. Firstly, everyone wanted to contribute to the aid fund and, secondly, the theatre was truly an attraction in the ghetto because, for already three years, the ghetto inhabitants had been forbidden from attending a cinema, a theatre, [or] listening to a radio. Therefore, the hall was jam-packed each time a performance was held, and each programme had to be repeated many times.

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On the day of *Weihnachten* [Christmas] in 1941, gendarmes were stationed at all corners of the ghetto streets. They stopped every Jewish man, woman and child, stripping them all of their fur coats – in fact, any coat that had a just a little fur on it. Mounds of fur were quickly accumulated at all corners of the streets - expensive Baghdads<sup>2</sup>, karakuls [astrakhans] and foxes and other cheaper varieties of fur. All this was later taken away in freight trucks. The Jewish women and children were left standing in the harsh frost, without coats and in light clothing. They quickly ran home. The men were also left in light suits, some also without caps, if they had had fur on them. For many people, this fur had been their last item of value, which they had retained for a dark hour.

On the following morning, notifications from the *Judenrat* were pasted, all the gates of the ghetto, to the effect that the German authorities demanded of all the Jews, to present, over the course of the day, all the furs in their possession. If furs were found with a Jew after this deadline, he would be shot.

This notification caused a great commotion. Many Jews sold expensive furs to the Poles for a truly small amount of money. They reckoned that something was better than nothing. Others, on their part, gave the furs to their Polish acquaintances for “safekeeping”, until the bad times passed. But the greatest part of the populace was afraid of the threat and presented the furs to the Germans. In each building two people were appointed to gather the furs from all the tenants and to present them to the *Judenrat*. The *Judenrat*'s large rooms were soon filled with sacks of the collected furs, and German and Polish policemen were put on watch. From the *Judenrat*, the items were later taken over to the “Aryan side” to a large premises, where all the Jewish furriers, whom the *Judenrat* was forced to provide, were seated. For months, the Jewish craftsmen reworked the furs into different garments for the German soldiers, who were fighting on the Russian front in great frosts.

The Germans were very pleased with the work of the Cześćochowa Jewish furriers, and large transports of Jewish furs arrived also from other cities and were reworked in our city.

However, the Jews went about in their light summer clothing. On some garments, from whose collars and sleeves the fur trimmings forbidden for Jews had been removed, the lining could be seen peeping out and, later, people sewed on some bit of material that they had. Thus,

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<sup>2</sup> [TN: We have as yet been unable to ascertain what type of fur or fleece this was.]

over the course of one day, there was not a single Jewish man, woman or child to be seen in the ghetto with the least bit of fur on them. If, during the various searches that were made of Jewish homes, some small piece of fur was found, the owner, along with others who knew about it or had some connection to it, were taken away to the cemetery and shot there.

During this same period, whilst need and want reigned in the ghetto, several experts in gastronomy set up a restaurant in the first house near the ghetto border, where one could obtain fine, delicious foods, almost like in pre-war times. It was incomprehensible how the owners were able to prepare such tasty dishes with products that were nowhere to be found. The prices were high and the locale was visited by those Jews, who were able to allow themselves to spend large sums of money. Poles, wishing to meet their Jewish acquaintances, to set various affairs in order, also began to come in. Jewish policemen would pass time in the locale's little side-rooms, but always after eight o'clock in the evening, when all the Jews had to remain at home, and when they alone had permission to go about in the streets. There were also other Jews, who had night passes - members of the *Judenrat*, several higher officials of the *Judenrat*, and other young Jewish people with privileges, which no one knew how they had been acquired. All these people would spend large sums at the new restaurant and the locale owners' business flourished.

In due course, the locale also became known on the "Aryan side". One received such meals at the ghetto restaurant that were not even available on the "Aryan side". Therefore, Polish guests also began to come. They sneaked in at night, through back doors, and ate and got drunk there like in the old times.

Very soon, in front of the restaurant, a new café opened, where one could obtain the best pastries and finest cakes with good coffee. This locale was also very well visited and, over time acquired regular guests. The gendarmerie would also occasionally burst into these Jewish locales and, from them, take away, in their vehicles, roasted geese and chickens, other foodstuffs and alcohol and wine. When doing so, the owners were cursed and beaten. The Germans could not comprehend from where the Jews were getting all these delicacies. They [therefore] arrested one of the owners and put him in prison. It was only after several weeks that his partners and close acquaintances succeeded in bringing about his release. Also, after the arrest, the restaurant continued to exist. The police would also seize Jews for labour from these locales. But this did not intimidate the people and, immediately after people were taken away to work, other guests would arrive at the locales.