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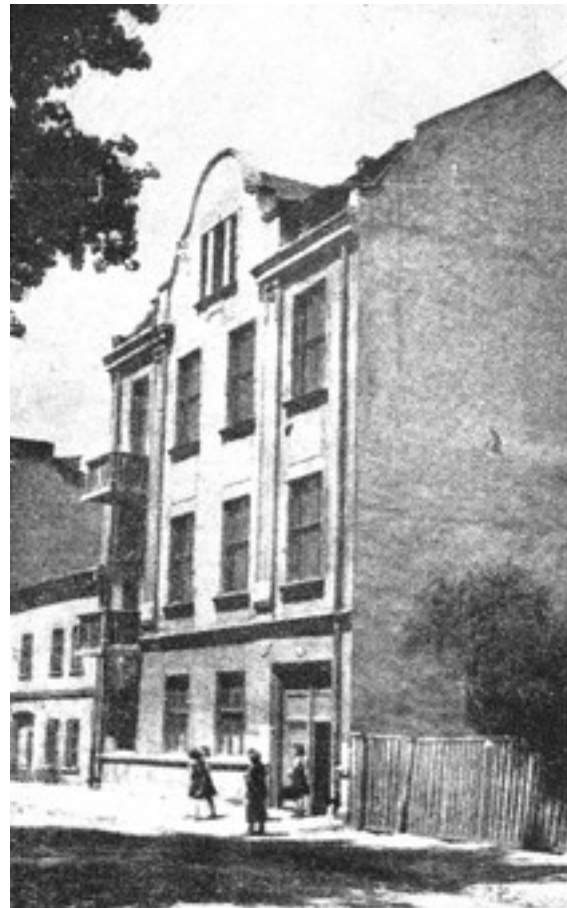
#### Under the Nazi Yoke

The Germans first entered our stable only late at night. The older men were permitted to go home and the younger ones, like terrible criminals, under heavy military guard, were led hungry, tired and thirsty down the dead streets of the city. No one was allowed to utter a single word, but we marched in silence until arriving at the Zawada military barracks. For a long while, we were held at the shooting range so as to scare us that we were going to be executed. Finally, we were led down to the cellars under the barracks.

When we descended into a cellar, we felt ourselves pushed up against the other, in a compressed mass going down the stairs. It was pitch dark and we saw nothing. Upon arriving downstairs, we heard human voices, which was a sign that there was somebody else there.



*The "German" [New] Synagogue*



*The [I.L] Perec Building*

*(Photographs by A. Kacyzne)*

Through the small cellar windows, from the yard, we heard how the Germans were leading in more people, beating and cursing them in a vulgar manner.

The cellar, where we were, was very low and our heads touched the ceiling. It was terribly stuffy and we could not catch our breath. As a result, everyone pushed their way to the open window-holes. Old and sick men collapsed on the ground, half fainting and groaning. After some time, someone chanced to be pushed up against a water tap that was in the cellar. He turned it on and sprayed us with water. The joy was indescribable. The crowd pushed their way to the tap with [cupped] hands, caps and hats to refresh their hearts with a little water, until it, finally, began to dawn. People looked at one another and began to speak amongst themselves, calculating the number of victims of "Bloody Monday". We estimated that 5,000 innocent human lives had been annihilated.

At dawn, the Germans immediately made us feel that Jews belonged to an inferior category of the human species. The soldier, who was guarding us at the door, called out loudly, "*Four Jews out to sweep the yard!*", adding that, from now on, all the Jews would have to work and that he, therefore, requested that Jews should present themselves voluntarily for the work. Seeing that no one presented himself voluntarily, the soldier declared that we were not to be afraid - nothing bad would happen to anyone. Only then did a few Jews volunteer for the job and, a while later, we saw them, through the little windows, sweeping the yard.

Time in the cellar dragged on and the hunger let itself be felt intensely. At about eleven o'clock, the German soldier began calling some of us by our surnames. As it turned out, the wives and relatives of the detainees had been looking for us throughout the whole city, wishing to give us something to eat. Sadly, there were many women who were forced to go back home with their food parcel, because those for whom they were searching were already dead.

It was only at one o'clock in the afternoon that I finally heard my name called out. I ran upstairs quickly and saw my wife and child. We wept with joy to finally see each other, but the happiness was short-lived. At once, the soldier drove me back down into the cellar. The mood here was a bit more cheerful for, after all, we had seen those closest to us and we were able to eat our fill. Relations in the cellar were comradely. We shared the food with those whose relatives had not come with any parcels.

On the following day, at eleven o'clock, we were ordered to stand in rows in the yard. We were immediately taken to the large training grounds next to the barracks and, there, we encountered a huge mass of people, who had been brought there from other cellars.

For several hours, we stood in this manner, under the blazing sun, until we were given the good news that all of us would be released, because the factories would be set in motion, the shops needed to be reopened and the economic life in the city would once more be renewed. Therefore, they ordered all the industrialists, higher officials, *gimnazjum* professors, lawyers, doctors and anyone, generally, who was of consequence for the public life to step out of the lines. These people would be the first to be released and, only afterwards, would the rest be freed.

A large number of those present stepped out of the lines and presented themselves at the place indicated. I, too, reported there, awaiting our imminent release.

The officers looked at our papers and selected fifty individuals, who were told to stand to one side. The rest were sent back to their previous places amongst the great mass of people, with the rebuke that it was not they whom they had meant, but actual industrialists and learned individuals. I remained among the fifty who had been chosen. We were taken to a tennis court which was fenced all around with a tall barbed wire fence. An armed soldier was stationed at the entrance, who did not allow anyone in or out of the enclosure.

The large multitude envied us. Some of them actually tried to be let in with us. They went up to the soldier on guard, showing their documents - this one was a lawyer, this one a doctor and the other a high ministerial official from Warsaw, who was stuck in Cześćochowa by chance. Tailors claimed to be manufacturers of *konfekcja* [ready-made clothing], cobblers said they were shoe manufacturers and traders, with their registration cards from the Tax Bureau, tried to pass themselves off as great merchants - everyone wanted to join our group.

A friend of mine, an engineer and a well-known labour activist, stood on the other side of the fence and begged me to have mercy on him and see to it that he should be let into our group, because he was ill and would not survive were he not to be released immediately. I approached the soldier and attempted to convince him that my friend, the engineer, was an important specialist - but the soldier replied to me that the one who needed to be consulted regarding the matter was the lieutenant, who would arrive shortly.

My friend was not satisfied with this answer and began to dig the soil under the barbed wire with the aid of a piece of iron. I helped him in this work from the inside of the enclosure and after twenty minutes, my friend was able to crawl, on his belly, inside to me.

When the officer arrived at the grounds, he allowed a few individuals to join us in the tennis court. The new arrivals, just like myself, felt elated, being sure that, in a while, we would be going home.

Meanwhile, we saw how several officers arrived at the grounds, [whereupon] the large crowd was lined up, once again, in rows. Through an interpreter, the officers told the crowd that there was no resisting the Germans. We were to remain peaceful, carry out all the orders, work well and not engage in politics. A sign was [then] given and the entire assembly marched, in rows, past the group of officers and, taking their caps off before them, everyone had to say, "We thank you, we thank you".

We stood by the barbed wire of the tennis court like animals in a cage, watching the multitude get further away from the barracks area. Yet from each departing group, an officer took out a tall man and put him in with us.

Seeing that everyone was going home, yet new people were being put in with us, we became very uneasy - particularly as the new arrivals had neither a connection to industry nor to the free professions. Our entire group gathered at tennis court's guarded entrance, waiting for them to also permit us to go home.

The hours wear on - it is already six in the evening. The enormous grounds around us which, hours ago, were flooded with thousands of people, are now completely empty. My friend, the engineer, becomes terribly nervous. What has he done? He could actually have been home by now and, here, we do not know what is going to happen to us next.

We suddenly perceive six German officers, one civilian and one wearing the uniform of a Polish non-commissioned officer approaching us. They come in to us inside the fenced-off tennis court. We regard them with frightened gazes and await our imminent fate. A command is heard to the effect that we are to form two lines, and the Polish non-commissioned officer goes up to each one of us and registers us in a book.

While this is happening, a new group of fifty Jews is led into the tennis court. They are heavily guarded and are holding up their hands. When the non-commissioned officer is done with us, he also writes down the names of the new arrivals and then our group is divided into separate groups of Jews and Christians.

Once these formalities had been completed, the man dressed in civilian clothes approached us and, with a facial expression filled with hatred, he delivered the following harangue in Polish:

“I and my colleague (here he pointed to the Polish non-commissioned officer), as well as other Poles, other colleagues, have for many years seen what everything looks like here, when you Jews (here he already addressed us directly) and your governments have neglected this country. You did not give the Polish population the possibility of living. Workers and peasants lived in misery and poverty, while you conducted your businesses with the greatest profits for yourselves, paying labourers and employees starvation wages. You paid your people’s way<sup>1</sup> to the state’s highest offices, in order to carry out your plans through them. You influenced the government to implement laws that would be in your favour. And when we, Aryans, spoke up in the Sejm, in order to defend ourselves against your rule, you immediately raised an alarm throughout the globe [saying] that we wanted to exterminate you. You sent delegations to America that they should not give us any money. You did everything to hinder the development of the Polish state.

All those people who were assembled yesterday and today, here on these grounds, were forced to work for you for decades. They were your slaves. We, the true Polish patriots, could no longer look on indifferently at your rule of the Polish people and we, therefore, prefer to have the Germans here.”

Then he addressed the assembled Poles:

“You, Poles, have failed to understand all this. You helped the Jews in Poland and also in other countries, to work out together, with their governments, plans of how to

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: The term used in the Yiddish original is “*protegieren*”, which means to sponsor or afford patronage or favourable treatment.]

encircle modern-day Germany from all sides. You did not wish to comprehend that a man has finally appeared in the world, who is leading the German people in the name of justice and with the right programme - a man who has beaten the Jewry in Germany and who, hopefully, will do the same here.”

And, once more, he turned to us:

“You, *Zhyds*, have portrayed the great leader of the German people, Adolf Hitler, as a pig in various playthings and made fun of him.”

Upon hearing the name Adolf Hitler, one of the German officers, at once, turned to the speaker and asked him what he had said. The speaker told the officers, in German, that in many streets of the Polish cities, the Jews would sell a type of plaything in the form of a painted handkerchief which, when folded together, portrayed Hitler in the caricature of a pig.

The officers were beside themselves and approached our group with clenched fists, shouting with rage, “*We will already show you who we are! Don’t think that we’re the Germans who came here in 1914*”.

The eldest officer did not permit the Polish civilian to finish his tirade, but declared to us, in a sharp and categorical tone, “As of now, you are our hostages. Should anything bad happen to a German - a civilian or a military man – from a part of the local population, you will be summarily shot and all this rubbish will be burnt down!”, he concluded, pointing in the direction of the city.

While the Polish civilian was holding his venomous speech, two young men fell unconscious. The soldiers did not allow them to be lifted off the ground. One officer exclaimed angrily, “Let them die!”

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With heavy hearts and so exhausted that we could barely move from the spot, with downcast heads and not saying a single word to each other, we let ourselves be led by the military guard deep into the yard of the barracks, then into some dark corridor, until they brought us into a hall and locked the door from the outside.

The hall was a spacious one. It was an ammunitions repair workshop. Long tables and large cupboards stood around the walls. There was also a water tap.

Besides our group, which had been brought from the tennis court, there was also another group of Jews in that hall, who had been brought directly from the city. In the second group, there was a [Chassidic] Rebbe from our neighbourhood. He was dressed in his long silken caftan and a wide hat. Religious Jews shuffled over to him, gave him *pidyon*<sup>2</sup> money and asked for aid<sup>3</sup>. The Rebbe told each Jew to make a vow and to fulfil it directly upon being released. He also told them to recite Psalms and to atone. He comforted everyone and told them to

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<sup>2</sup> [TN: Heb., “redemption”; money given to the Rebbe for his charity needs, which in Chassidism is likened to bringing an offering at the Jerusalem Temple to atone for one’s sins and thus redeem oneself.]

<sup>3</sup> [TN: Viz. through his intercession by prayer.]

trust in the Master of the World, who would and must help. The religious Jews were encouraged and strengthened by these words of comfort. It was, without doubt, easier for them than for the non-believers.

On the following morning, the Polish non-commissioned officer came in with two German officers, ordered us to line up in a row and called out the names of one group and freed all of them. A few individuals, who had complained about their bad state of health, were also released. There were [both] Jews and Poles among those freed. Upon releasing them, the German officer declared that, should anything occur in the city, all of us – all the hostages – would be immediately shot.

Fifty of us remained – thirty-five Jews and fifteen Poles. We, at once, summed up clearly the great risk that had fallen upon us, and that our lives hung on the happenings in town. The atmosphere was a pessimistic one because, after all, we knew well that it sufficed for the merest provocation to take place in the city and the Germans would kill us. The only thing that we could not understand was why the number of Jewish hostages was so large in proportion to the Polish ones, while the Jews made up barely twenty percent of the city's population.

Our musings and conversations were interrupted when a military guard appeared and ordered all of us to go out, because the women had arrived with food. The meeting with our closest ones caused great joy. They had already been waiting for six hours by the barracks before they were let in to us. We wanted to inform ourselves as to the situation in town and of the fate of our relatives and acquaintances. Fortunately, things were peaceful in the city. The military guards went about among us holding loaded revolvers. They meticulously examined the baskets with the food that they had brought us and, after a short while, the women were ordered to go home.

When we returned to the large hall, it emerged that the Christian hostages had been separated from us. That is what the commandant had ordered - that the Aryans should not be together with any Jews.

In the middle of the night, we are awoken by loud noise in the yard and the glare of floodlights. We quickly abandon our uncomfortable sleeping places and run to the window to see what is happening.

A row of freight trucks, packed with people, appears before our eyes. The soldiers force the people off the trucks, beating them with their rifle butts. We also hear shooting. The herded and beaten people call the names of Christian saints in Polish. Many of them are half-naked. There is a great movement of these freight trucks. The unloaded vehicles drive off and new ones arrive, fully packed with people. The shooting becomes more frequent and the screams louder. The herded people run one behind the other, lit from all sides by the strong floodlights. They are beaten and driven on from every direction.

Only in the morning did we discover that the people who had been brought had been captured on the highways, where they had been wandering, fleeing the war operations.

Eight Jews were taken from our group and they were led out to the yard. At first, we were very uneasy as to their fate, but we later saw, through the window, that they were clearing the yard of the dead corpses of those shot. Dozens of victims were carried out, on plain boards, to somewhere behind the walls of the barracks.

This work took several hours. When our comrades returned, they were fatigued from the labour and shattered. We gave them the nickname "*Chevra Kadisha* Jews".

Three days went by in perpetual waiting and constant unrest. Our families, who would bring us food and of whom we would inquire regarding what was happening in town, were our only consolation.

On the third day, before nightfall soldiers came in to us and led ten young men out. This cast a fear upon us. Two hours later, however, they returned and told us that they had been hauling straw for the soldiers. Thus, we emerged with just a fright.