

# XI

## Persecutions and Thievery

The German authorities issued a notification to the effect that all the Polish officials were to return to the posts that they held before the occupation.

The Polish officials were very quickly restored to their offices. There was a German in the leadership of every office, and his closest co-worker was a *Volksdeutsch*.

The city's administration operated under the leadership of the well-known local Polish merchant, Paweł Belke<sup>1</sup>. This same Belke had been a German agent back in the First World War and he again became one as soon as the Germans entered our city.

As a merchant, he had many Jewish acquaintances who, now, tentatively tried to ask favours of him. Belke did not refuse them, but did not do anything either. He was neither good nor bad.

Very soon, a Polish newspaper began to appear, which published the ugliest defamations of Jews and attempted to prove that it was the former Polish government, along with the Jews, who were to blame for the War. This inflammatory work became ever more frequent and venomous – and, as this paper was the only source of news, it had many readers. The editors had no trouble finding contributors, as we had never had a lack of Polish antisemites.

An announcement by General Governor Dr Frank to the Polish population was also not lacking in venomous incitement against the Jews. The former Polish police also contributed its share to the persecution as regards the Jewish populace. The German authorities regrouped the former Polish police force, leaving them in the same uniforms they had before the War. The constables received the same salary as before. They carried out their police functions together with the German gendarmes. The Polish policemen knew every person in town and each one's occupation. Consequently, such pairs were formed - a German gendarme and a Polish constable. Among other duties, they were also tasked with monitoring the prices in the shops. Needless to say, they first and foremost kept an eye on the Jewish shops and always found some type of transgression. The Polish policeman and the German gendarme divided the "work" between them - the constable would come up with some "crime" from under the earth and point it out to the gendarme, who would beat the Jew until drawing blood, after which they took whatever they wanted and shared the spoils.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: Mayor of Częstochowa for a short time in September 1939.]

The poverty among the robbed and tortured Jewish populace continued to grow. Street peddling arose - children and also adults stood in the streets and conducted a pathetic trade with merchandise that they kept in their pockets - soap, saccharine, string and other trifles. The policemen persecuted the small Jewish children who engaged in this "trade" with particular viciousness. The constables would change into civilian clothes in order to be able to set upon the little "merchants" unexpectedly. They flung these children to the ground, beat them murderously and took away their bit of goods and money, after which, furthermore, the children had to go home with them to their parents, where the rest of the things found there were seized.

Besides the Polish police and the German gendarmerie, the Jewish population had to endure another evil calamity who was called the "pinchers". The "pinchers" were Poles of various backgrounds, who made a living by "taking pinches" from Jews. Every Jew, who had some type of business, was forced to maintain several "pinchers", who attached themselves to him like leeches. The "pincher" spied and found out where the Jew had hidden merchandise. Then he came to the Jew and demanded money or part of the goods. If he was refused, he fetched the police, who not only confiscated the merchandise, but also beat the whole family and arrested them.

The number of these parasites, who lived at the expense of the Jews, grew from day to day. They stood at the gates of the buildings and observed each person who went in or out and scrutinised the packages that people carried in and out. They visited the bakeries, food shops and other businesses, inspecting everything.

And as if all this were not enough, a new affliction immediately appeared. These were Polish women, who established close links with Germans. Such women, who had Germans as "friends", would enter a Jewish shop, choose the best things and inquire as to the price. The merchant would usually ask for the normal price. Then the woman would exit and immediately return with a German soldier or gendarme, who took the parcel of goods and flung a small coin on the table, which usually represented about 5% of the value of the merchandise. In doing so, the German would give the Jew such a look, that it already sufficed for the Jew not to utter one word in protest.

The Jewish shops were filled with such "customers". If a tradesman claimed that he did not have the things that they desired and the German, with his girlfriend, found them with him, this merchant was already not at all to be envied.