

XXXIII

The Subsequent “*Akcje*”

On 1st October 1942, the fourth *akcja* took place, which transpired in the same manner as those previously. This *akcja* also included all the Jews who were in the *Quartieramt*, which was supposedly under the protection of the *Stadthauptmann*. *Hauptmann* Degenhardt gave the order to drive out of there, into the marketplace, not only all those who had snuck in there surreptitiously by climbing over walls and fences, but also the labourers and professional workmen. *Hauptmann* Degenhardt did this to spite the *Stadthauptmann*.

In the fourth *akcja*, like in those previously, a selection was made and about seven hundred boys and girls were retained, who were subsequently sent to various [forms of] slave labour. Thus, the Polish municipal management authorities received an allocation of some of these “selectees” for highway work and to pave streets. Others were led away to the HASAG firm’s munitions factory, where they were first stripped naked and everything which only had a value was taken. They were then were let into a hall with a stone floor. That was the place where they were to sleep, but there was not even a bit of straw there to put under oneself. In this factory, they were forced to work twelve hours a day and received a chunk of bread, with a little soup, to eat. If anyone managed to escape from there, the escapee’s two neighbours, meaning those who slept next to him on the stone floor, were shot. For the smallest trifle, the hapless slaves were beaten by the *Volksdeutschen* until they bled.

A third group was sent to the “Raków” ironworks, which belonged to the same HASAG firm and where the same conditions, as in the munitions factory, reigned.

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Early one morning, the tailor Gryn notified the craftsmen of Aleja 14, where *Hauptmann* Degenhardt would visit all the workshops in the Craftsmen’s House. All the men and women, who were in the Craftsmen’s House, were seated with the tailors, cobblers, corset-makers, hatters, linen sewers etc. They received needle and thread, an iron or other implements and applied themselves diligently to the work. All the workshops became active - everything was working, for better or for worse – that was not important. The main thing was that nobody should hang about idly without work.

The master craftsmen pinned the red order tickets, with the name of the German client, onto every piece of work. Suits, furs [and] military garments were hung up in the tailors’ workshops. Boots and ladies’ shoes were arranged at the cobblers’, the red order tickets fastened to all of them. At the ladies’ seamstresses, blouses and dresses hung on special hangers, adorned with the red tickets. It was the same in all the other workshops - at the milliners’, linen seamstresses’ etc. All the craftsmen’s assistants were wearing their aprons, the masters their best suits and everything was tensely awaiting the guest who, until then, had already sent away eighty percent of our city’s Jews in cattle wagons.

Eventually an automobile drove up to the Craftsmen's House, from which Degenhardt emerged. Accompanied by his loyal chauffeur Onkelbach, he went up to the former tailor and current policeman Josef Gryn, who began taking the two Germans through the craftsmen's workshops. He made his first visit with the ladies' tailor Kac and looked at the beautiful furs and coats. He read out the names from the order tickets and, recognising that these were women whose husbands were employed in the *Stadthauptmannschaft*, he made ironic and biting remarks at their expense. After that, he went in to the men's tailor Einhorn and, with a policeman's gaze, observed the women and men at the machines or holding needles and thread. Upon perceiving the tailor's thirteen-year-old boy with a needle and a piece of work in his hands, he inquired, "What is this Jewish excrement doing?" The tailor, confused, replied that this was his son, an apprentice boy. In this manner, he went from workshop to workshop, spearing everything through with his policeman's eyes and casting ironic remarks and evil jokes everywhere. At the milliner's, he took up a light ladies' hat, weighing a few grams, in his coarse paws and tried to blow it away. The *Hauptmann* also visited old Fajgenblat's embroidery [workshop] and he was shown antique items which this workshop, that had fifty years of existence behind it, had produced. It was also brought up that the expensive *paroiches*¹, that the *Hauptmann* had taken from the synagogue before the its burning and sent away to Berlin, had also been old Fajgenblat's work.

But the *Hauptmann* was not impressed with anything. He displayed disregard and cynicism towards everything and everyone. And, after inspecting all the workshops, he left.

The *Hauptmann's* visit left an uneasiness in everyone's heart.

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The Polish leader of the Jewish police received an order, from *Hauptmann* Degenhardt, to compile a list of fifty Jewish policemen, who would remain in their posts, and the others, numbering about two hundred, would be sent away with all the other Jews on the nearest transport.

A panic ensued within the Jewish police. Each one ran to the police leader and to the Jewish deputy in order to promote the merit of remaining amongst the fifty who were to be retained. One sought to outdo the other with large monetary sums in order to save himself from being sent away barefoot in the cattle wagons.

The Polish leader of the Jewish police compiled a list of fifty names - it is obvious that, when making the list, the leader took into account the sum of money he could expect from each one.

But, when the *Hauptmann* saw the list, his policeman's nose sniffed out what was concealed under all that, and he ordered that all the policemen, with their wives and children, be lined up. Then, he personally selected fifty and commanded the rest to take off their boots and

¹ [TN: Heb., ornate curtain veiling the Holy Ark containing the Torah scrolls in a synagogue.]

police caps with the bands. He told [them] to gather their wives and children and, under strong guard, sent them off to the vandalised synagogue in the Old Market Square [Stary Rynek], where they were to wait until the next *akcja*.

Some of these people sent notes, from their arrest, to their former colleagues, who had remained in their positions and threatened to reveal secrets should they not bring about their release. But their colleagues were not frightened, and they left their professional colleagues without an answer.

Therefore, there was nothing left for them but to sit in the synagogue and await their bitter fate, just like all the other Jews, who had been chased and beaten by them over the course of three years under Degenhardt's rule.

On 4th October 1942, it became known that Jewish policemen - those remaining - had been booked for the following day, at daybreak, for the *akcja* which was to take place - the fifth *akcja*.

The fifth *akcja* began like the earlier ones, but it was at once apparent that a special plan had been prepared for it. Firstly, it was conducted at a faster pace than all the previous ones. The Jews were driven into the New Market Square [Nowy Rynek] at daybreak, earlier than all the [other] times. This time, more Jews were shot in the streets than during the previous *akcje*. The *Hauptmann* directed more energetically and savagely with his baton, and the clubs and braided [leather] straps fell upon the Jewish heads more often. The aides did not permit anyone to stop in front of the *Hauptmann* and to beg for mercy. The railway wagons were filled earlier than during the earlier *akcje*, and the thousands of pairs of shoes grew more quickly into a mountain.

After the march of the thousand Jews to the wagons had concluded, Degenhardt ordered his chauffeur to take him and his close co-workers to the ghetto. There, first of all, he visited the assembly point on ul. Katedralna and ordered that all the Jews be taken from there to the wagons. He then ordered that the Jewish policemen, who were being held under arrest at the synagogue, be led there with their wives and children.

Finally, the *Hauptmann* went, with his servants, to the Jewish Hospital and had all the doctors and nurses, who had remained at their posts throughout all the previous *akcje*, summoned to him.

The *Hauptmann* ordered the assembled doctors and nurses to inject all the patients in the hospital with poison, in order to make their end come as quickly as possible. The physicians tried to save the situation with pretexts to the effect that they did not have the appropriate injections - to which the *Hauptmann* replied that, if everything was not carried out within two hours, he would order the patients, along with the entire hospital personnel, to be shot.

Following a long and painful deliberation, the doctors decided to put the patients to death by injections.

The first order was issued by the hospital's head physician - the surgeon Dobrzyński - to his mother to poison her mother, that is, his grandmother. His mother, who lived on the hospital's premises, put poison in a glass of tea and gave it to her mother to drink. When the old lady began writhing in agony, the doctor, her grandson, gave her an injection which immediately put her permanently to sleep. Her daughter's eyes welled with tears and she wished that her hands be punished, had she committed an error by poisoning her own mother.

The patients were forced to be poisoned and allow the injections to be given. Those, who struggled, were poisoned by force. The doctors and nurses worked with tears in their eyes at hastening the patients' deaths and, when all of them lay dead, the physicians and the entire hospital personnel stood over the people, who had just now been alive and were now dead, and wept for them. They wept for their deeds and for themselves.

The *Hauptmann* was informed that, in the hospital, there were no more patients – only dead people. He replied, "*Ja, ist gut!*" [Yes, it's good!].

He chose a large number of the personnel and sent them away to the train wagons. The doctors and the rest of the youngest and prettiest female personnel he sent away to quarantine.

After that, the *Hauptmann* visited another hospital - [that] of infectious diseases. The director of that hospital, Dr Kagan, made efforts to put the patients on their feet throughout the duration of the *akcje*. But now, during the fifth *akcja*, all the patients and the greater part of the hospital personnel were sent away to the railway wagons. Only some of the personnel was led off to quarantine.

After having finished with the hospitals, the *Hauptmann* turned his attention to all the Jews who had close contact with the Germans. He sought out the well-known, elegant, young man Kolenbrener, the director of the Jewish housing office, who had been hiding for several days in a factory, and ordered him to be taken away into a railway carriage. After that, he ordered a search for the well-known *Judenrat* member, Wajnryb, who had been well known amongst the Gestapo men, who had actually hidden him. But the *Hauptmann's* men found him and brought him to be led [away]. The *Hauptmann* then ordered that all Jews named "Wajnryb" be fetched - women, men and children - and soon Wajnryb's entire family was brought: his wife and children and his brothers and sisters with their families. All were sent away to the railway wagons.

Besides them, all the other less well-known men and women, who had any connection with the Gestapo, were also sought out and all of them were deported.

At the very end, the *Hauptmann*, with his chauffeur and close aides, went to [the] Craftsmen's House [at] Aleja 14. There, they first created a great commotion in the courtyard and bellowed that all the Jewish residents were to quickly come down to the courtyard and leave the dwellings open. The craftsmen descended with their wives and children, each one with his papers in hand. The people were ordered to line up according to the separate workshops; each master with his family and his people registered in the *Stadthauptmann's* note stood

separately. But the *Hauptmann* did not look at the papers. He inquired of each one how old he was and what was his profession. He ordered the very young men and women to stand separately and the older ones and children also separately. I, with my wife and child and three women, who were inscribed in our note, stood together.

The *Hauptmann* asked me how old I was. "Forty", I replied, "a factory foreman by trade".

Then, he looked at my wife and child and said, "You must separate".

My wife was so shocked that she could not say a single word. In her place, I said, "But my wife is the leader of the hat workshop", to which he exclaimed, "*Das geht mich jetzt nichts an!*" [I don't care about that now!]

He went on to another family and my people were put, by the gendarmes, into the group of older people and children. We saw that he was singling out the quite young people and that the mass of the craftsmen, with their families, would be sent to the wagons.

"Ihr kommt weg! Die alte Leute kommen in Lager und und ihr, die Jüngere, wird arbeiten. Ihr müsst nicht gerade bei eur schneiderei und usterei beschäftigt sein. Ihr wird andere arbeit leisten kennen." [You are getting out (of here)! The old people are going to a camp and you, the younger ones, will work. You need not necessarily be employed in your tailoring and patterning. You will be able to do other work.]

After interrogating and sorting the old and young, he said to everyone², *"Ihr kommt weg! Die alte Leute kommen in Lager und ihr, die Jüngere, wird arbeiten. Ihr müsst nicht gerade bei eur Schneiderei und Usterei [sic Schusterei] beschäftigt sein. Ihr wird andere arbeit leisten kennen."* [You are getting out (of here)! The old people are going to a camp and you, the younger ones, will work. You need not necessarily be employed in your tailoring and shoemaking. You will be able to do other work.]

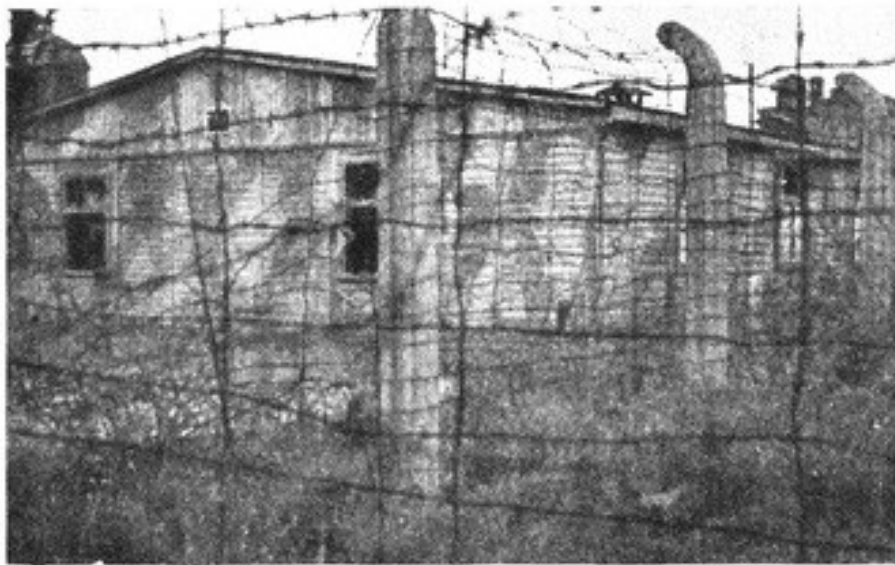
Everyone's face turned pale and no one could utter a word. It became dead silent. But, at that same moment, steps were heard. We saw Mrs Moszewicz arrive. She remained standing awhile, until the *Hauptmann* approached her. They remained standing at a distance for several minutes and conversed. After that, the *Hauptmann* returned to us with slow steps and began looking for elderly people in the rows. These were tense, tragic seconds. We realised that fate had fallen only on the old people.

After selecting the elderly from the rows, he once more turned to everyone and said, "Return to your quarters, help these people get dressed and, ten minutes from now, they should be here in the courtyard with their things. They are travelling away."

He told the younger men and women, who had been selected earlier, to return together with everyone to their dwellings. Everybody dispersed and only the gendarmes, with their *Hauptmann*, remained in the courtyard.

² [TN: This statement appears in the original in German written in Hebrew characters and not in Yiddish.]

Heartrending scenes were played out in the dwellings of the old people, upon whom the bitter fate had fallen. We saw, through the windows, that the *Hauptmann* was looking at his watch and then at the windows. A gendarme immediately yelled, "*Herunter!*" ["Down!"], and we saw the first two elderly people go down to the yard - the master of the embroidery workshop, Fajgenblat, with his wife. They wiped their tears and waved to the windows of their dwelling, where their two sons were standing with their wives and the beautiful grandson, who was crying out, "*Zaydeshi! Bubbeshi!*" [Granddaddy! Granny!] *Stay here with us! Don't go away!*". With his shrill, little voice, the child cut through the gruesome silence of the courtyard, where the *Hauptmann* and his servants were ambling about.



The fenced-in HASAG labour camp



The elderly couple was soon joined by the tailor Brandlewicz, with his wife and their ten-year-old grandson, whose parents had already been sent away in a previous *akcja*. They, too, were looking up to the second floor and stretching their necks out to their dear³ daughters and beautiful grandchildren. From another exit, the pious seamstress arrived, wearing her *sheitl* [wig], with her husband, the son of the Rabbi of Kłobuck, with their packs on their shoulders. They were walking and weeping. They were, after all, still young people. What did the murderer want from them? He had not liked their appearance?

The old Frank, who had come here to his sons, approached the group of unhappy people; also, the mighty, tall fellow of about fifty, Wolfowicz, the husband of the corset-maker. The *Hauptmann* had asked him what his profession was. He had replied, "My wife makes corsets." Everyone knew that he was a locksmith. It appears that he had become startled and did not know what to say. His answer had not pleased the *Hauptmann* and he designated him for deportation.

A little later, we saw, through the window how in front, from the third floor, the tailor Gryn's father-in-law and mother-in-law [and] the furrier Goldsztajn and his wife, were descending with packs on their shoulders. This means that it had not helped that their son-in-law, the tailor and policeman Gryn, was such a good acquaintance of *Hauptmann* Degenhardt.

The group of people in the courtyard grew ever larger. The tailor Lenkiński and his wife arrived, and the ladies' tailoring workshop's best tailor-journeyman, Chaimke – an elderly Jew with his pack on his toil-worn shoulders. Everyone lined up in a row. Their children wanted to continue speaking with them, but the gendarmes did not allow it. The children were only able to hand their parents money and the food that they had forgotten to take with them.

All of a sudden, a commotion broke out. Several gendarmes ran down into a cellar and yelled. A while later, from there, they led up four women and a boy aged about twelve. The captives were led to the group, which was standing ready to depart. As it turned out, the women with the child had come into the house after the list of additional people had been closed and they could no longer be added. Due to the fear of remaining during the *akcja*, they had hidden in the cellar. At the last minute, someone must have denounced them and they were found. The gendarmes had wanted to shoot them immediately in the cellar. However, since the mother-in-law of the assistant leader [viz. deputy] of the Jewish police was also there, and she strongly begged the gendarmes to spare her life, making reference to her son-in-law, the gendarmes agreed to lead the rest of them also up to the courtyard and to send them away with the group.

The group consisted of nineteen individuals. The gendarmes counted them and ordered them to leave the building. In all the windows, their sons, daughters, grandchildren, relatives, friends and all the craftsmen stood. Everyone bade them farewell from afar, with tears in their eyes.

³ [TN: The word used in the original is טרייע, which means "loyal" but, from the context and also from the Hebrew version of this chapter in *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. II, it appears that this is a misprint of the very similar word שיריע, or "dear".]

On the following day, Mrs Moszewicz told the craftsmen that the *akcja* had gone through “for the best” in the Craftsmen’s House. She assured them that only in the courtyard, at the last minute, had she managed to convince the *Hauptmann* not to take more than ten percent for deportation. Seeing that as 190 people were registered, he took nineteen. Had she not arrived, he would have taken ninety percent and he would have sent [the] ten percent of young people to the *Metalurgia* workshops, so that the Craftsmen’s House would have had to have been liquidated. She had explained this to him at the last minute and pleaded that the Craftsmen’s House should continue to function.