

IX

Taxes and Evictions

The German administrative apparatus worked rapidly. The various offices were quickly set up, including the Taxes Office. Suddenly, everyone received demands to pay all taxes from before the War. As no one wished to come into conflict with the German authorities, every Jew paid anything that was demanded of him.

It so happened that the German financial inspector was a man with some insight and he took into account that people could not pay all the taxes from previous years all in one go, or such as had been long since annulled by the Polish Tax Office. If someone petitioned him, he made concessions on the payment of the stipulated tax debt. There were, however, Polish functionaries, who “enlightened” the inspector to the effect that Jews were wealthy, and that they would pay if they were forced to do so. A Jewish woman, lacking the means to pay the taxes, wept before the German inspector. A Polish functionary laughed and said to the German that Jews did not weep with tears but with water. He denigrated the Jews in the eyes of the yet untainted German inspector. Officials of this type also had a hand in digging up the old, long-ago annulled tax debts. In this manner, besides the Germans, we also had enemies from within our own home, who made our lives difficult at every step.

In our city, the Germans already felt as if in their own home and began bringing over their people from Germany in order to settle. German officials arrived with their wives and children and they had to be provided with flats, furniture, linen, bedclothes and similar things. This would be resolved very quickly in the following manner. Quite early, when it was just dawning and people were still asleep, German gendarmes surrounded a house, several houses or even a whole street of houses. At the same time, other gendarmes entered the dwellings and ordered the Jews to leave the house within ten minutes. Each person could only take a small pack with the bare necessities, and [they were] to wait in the courtyard, until the packs were inspected. In the courtyard, half of the contents of the packs were removed and, after receiving a few blows, the Jews were thrown out into the street.

The families driven out – men, women, children and old people, who half an hour earlier had been in a well-established home, set out slowly into the street, homeless and robbed of the bare essentials. Weeping, they go to those closest to them and to acquaintances who, tomorrow, could already meet the same fate.

The evictions from the dwellings caused panic. Jews sought means to safeguard themselves against being left utterly destitute over the course of a few minutes. People sought out Polish acquaintances and asked them to take home furniture, furs, garments, linen and all the better things, so that they should not fall into [the hands of] the Germans. The Poles did their Jewish acquaintances the favour and took in their things, until the bad times had passed for their good Jewish friends. Some Jews also sold their best belongings to Poles at half price, in order not to be compelled to watch the greatest foe rob them altogether.

Apart from homes for the officials, the German authorities also required large and beautiful premises for their offices. One day, the *Judenrat* received orders to send workers, with horses and carts, to the Jewish *Gimnazjum*. Germans were already waiting there, and they commanded the Jews to take away everything that was in the building to the German storehouses, where the property, which was looted from the Jews, was being accumulated. The *gimnazjum* building was appropriated to set up the Employment Office. Soon, Jewish workers drove carts, loaded with school benches, tables, cupboards, desks and other furniture, down the streets. Another Jewish building had been destroyed.

The following day, orders arrived from the *Stadthauptmann* to renovate the Jewish *Gimnazjum* building. Jewish engineers from the *Judenrat*'s technical department, with Jewish labourers and professional workmen, immediately began freshening up the building. Day after day, Jewish labourers toiled at the German Pithom and Raamses¹ works and, in the evening, one could see them coming back exhausted, holding their tools, their heads bowed down to the ground, the white bands of shame on their arms, embittered because they were being forced to demolish a Jewish cultural position with their own hands - with Jewish hands - and prepare it for the sake of the greatest enemy of the Jews.

The Jewish Hospital shared the very same fate as the Jewish *Gimnazjum*. One day, the telephone rang at the *Judenrat* - it was the *Stadthauptmann*'s deputy. He ordered Kopiński, the *prezes* [president] of the *Judenrat*, to report to him immediately. The *prezes* drove off in great haste to the *Stadthauptmann* and, soon, returned dejected. Immediately, he called a meeting of the *Judenrat* and announced that he had received orders from the *Stadthauptmann* to vacate all the buildings of the Jewish Hospital, remove all the things from there and to turn over the premises to the gendarmerie. This had to be carried out quickly, because the command was given with a short deadline.

Quite early next morning, Jewish tenants could be seen being thrown out of a house. Under the orders of the German gendarmes, Jewish workers took away the furniture from there to the German warehouses. It was into this same house that the Jewish Hospital was to be moved.

The Jewish Hospital was located past the bridge, on the banks of the Warta. It was made up of ten very beautiful edifices. In spacious halls, with walls lacquered white, stood white beds for Jewish patients. In the other buildings the kitchen, washroom, offices and living quarters for the doctors and employees were set up. The buildings were surrounded by a large garden with benches.

Our city's Jewish populace had built this hospital and had already maintained it for decades. Wealthy Jews had donated large sums of money and all the Jews had paid monthly contributions to the hospital. Częstochowa Jews were proud of their hospital. And, now, they were forced to relocate the entire hospital to a few grimy rooms, somewhere on a backstreet. Everything had to be done in such haste, that there was no time to take in what was happening.

¹ [TN: Ref. to the two Egyptian cities which, according to Scripture (Exodus 1:11), were built by the Israelite slaves: "Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses."]

Painters are already going with their ladders to whitewash, with lime, the few rooms there, from which yesterday the Jewish tenants had been evicted. A small hospital needs to be quickly set up. Scrawny little Jewish horses with rundown carts drive up, bringing the Jewish Hospital's beds, tables, benches and other furnishings. Everything is temporarily dumped in the small courtyard, until the little rooms were whitewashed with lime.

It is a gloomy day. A fine drizzle of rain is falling from the heavens, and it settles like beads of perspiration on the white hospital beds, the scrawny little horses, the rest of the hospital equipment scattered about in the dirty courtyard and on the Jewish doctors, who have come here to see what the hospital will look like in this new location.

The work is done quickly. Everyone hurries to meet the deadline which the *Stadthauptmann* has set for moving.

Even before the fresh lime had dried on the walls, the beds, tables and all the other things were thrown into the rooms.

On the following day, the seriously ill were transferred. Those, who could still put their feet on the ground without assistance, were discharged from the hospital.

That is how the Germans robbed the Jewish population of their hospital building.

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The German occupation authorities also did not forget to provide the military even with brothels and, to this purpose, the Jews were also to supply premises.

That is the fate which befell the city's only Jewish hotel - the Hotel Kupiecki at Aleja 18. In the middle of one bright day, German gendarmes fell upon this same Jewish hotel. They threw out the old owner and his family, gave them a good beating and installed the women for prostitution there. Guards were stationed at the entrance, who checked the entry cards to the women.

This brothel was busy day and night and the surrounding neighbours had no peace from the constant brawls and scandals that were always playing out there. After some time, this locale turned out to be too small and the authorities found another Jewish building for this same purpose:

In our city, besides the Jewish *Gimnazjum*, there was also a middle school for Jews, which was owned by Dr Axer. He had constructed the building with his own money and was also headmaster of the school. This school was located on a quiet street, near the central post office.

It was this building that the German authorities chose for the military brothel. One day, Dr Axer and his wife were thrown out of their home and from the entire premises. They were not allowed to take the merest trifle with them - they were even forced to leave their personal

linen behind. Jews had to take the school's furniture and all the things from the dwelling to the German storehouses and, when all the rooms had been vacated, the *Judenrat* was ordered to deck the house out with luxury, in order that the military men should have all the comforts with which to "entertain" themselves.

The *Judenrat* supplied the necessary workers and materials and large halls, corridors and chambers were created in the building. The *Judenrat* seized the finest furniture, only to be found with the most opulent Jews, for this military "entertainment house". The floors were covered with Persian carpets, the walls were festooned with Kilims² and expensive pictures and the halls and chambers were lit with the most beautiful lamps and girandoles³ that could only be acquired. Luxurious settees, beds, duvets, bedclothes and everything that was needed in this type of "locale of leisure" were put in place.

Dozens of the best Jewish professional workmen were employed in this project for many weeks. The *Stadthauptmann's* deputy paid frequent visits to the building over the course of its renovation. He always took a *Spitzrute*⁴ with him, with which he flogged the Jewish labourers, urging them to work faster.

Once the venue had been set up, the *Judenrat* received further orders to supply the most expensive silken lingerie for the women. And, when everything all around had been finished, the *Stadthauptmann's* deputy, holding his *Spitzrute*, gave the command, "*Juden – macht, dass ihr wegkommt!*" ["Jews – now get out of here!"]. From that day on, no Jew was allowed to appear there in front of the house.

² [TN: A Kilim is a flat tapestry-woven carpet or rug with patterns consisting of narrow coloured stripes containing very small geometric designs which was traditionally produced in countries of the former Persian Empire.]

³ [TN: A branched support for candles or other lights, which either stands on a surface or projects from a wall. (Oxford Dictionary)]

⁴ [TN: Ger., lit. "pointed rod"; pointy stick used in the military for flogging.]