

## XXVI

### Traitors

The ghetto spewed out from itself a scum of Jewish swindlers and “*machers*”, who would undertake, for money, to accomplish different matters with the authorities. They would promise to get out people arrested by the Gestapo, meanwhile extorting from the family of the arrestee large sums, which supposedly had to be given in order to carry through the release. After receiving the money, the “*macher*” found a way to wriggle out of it – and the money remained with him.

A young outsider, named Besser, appeared in our midst. He and his wife opened a small restaurant, where these dark deals were conducted.

These things would be done in the following manner:

When a Jew, who still had some property, was arrested, there were already such people to be found who were able to put themselves in contact with the family or wife of the detainee and, in a chat, “incidentally” recount that there was a very honest man named Besser, who had already extricated many people from the Gestapo and only he could help here. Those closest to the arrestee knew that, if someone was not freed directly in the first days after the arrest, that person was sent away to Oświęcim, from whence they did not return. These unfortunates, therefore, clutched onto every glimmer of hope and, in this manner, fell into the hands of the swindlers.

There was another conman “active” here, one by the name of Szeftel - a resident of Częstochowa, by the way. He had been an informer already back in the times of the First World War. According to what people said, he had legitimised himself with Hitler’s men with those old papers, but this time his “activity” took on a wider scope. Now, he was denouncing, in order to, later, “set it right”. In this manner, he had twice as good a deal with every “transaction”.

This is how the “deal” would transpire:

Jews were not permitted to have gold, foreign currency and various other goods. The main foreign exchange bureau in Kraków organised an inspection brigade, which made a whirlwind tour of cities where they expected to find something while, at the same opportunity, also inspecting the local foreign exchange offices. The informer Szeftel had his German acquaintances in this commission, and he showed them who they were to burst in upon to search.

The searches, upon Szeftel’s indication, were made so thoroughly, that they did not leave the raided residence until something was found. They simply turned the dwelling upside down - ripping up the floors, taking apart the ovens and ransacking every corner numerous times, until they had found something. If Szeftel had pointed it out

– that meant that it *had* to be found! The owner of the residence was arrested and tortured for as long as it took, until he gave away his associates, who were also detained. Such a bit of work was recognised as Szeftel's and he was, therefore, the only one who could "set it right".

The wives and relatives of the arrestees would then run to Szeftel, who was immediately prepared to do these unfortunate people a favour. He would promise that if he, himself, would not be able to resolve the issue, he would send his son - and if his son would also be unable to assist, he would send his daughter. Szeftel's "setting things right" would usually end in thus - for the considerable sum that he extricated from these hapless people, some were freed and the others sent away. Szeftel gave to understand that this could not be otherwise, because if the commission members carried through a search, afterwards, they needed to show that they had found guilty parties.

A further array of other swindlers was rampant among us in those bitter, black days. This lasted until, one day, Gestapo men stormed the swindlers, took from them a great deal of money, gold and other valuables and, afterwards, arrested them and sent them away to Oświęcim. As it later became known, the Germans cleared them away because they knew too many secrets and had become awkward to the Gestapo people.

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An ordinance from the authorities was issued, to the effect that all non-German inhabitants of the *Generalgouvernement* had to report to receive *Kennkarten* [identity cards].

The *Kennkarten* for Poles were grey in colour and for Jews and gypsies - yellow. Besides that, immediately on the first page of the Jewish *Kennkarten*, there was a "J" for "Jude" [Jew], so that immediately upon taking the document in hand, they would know with whom they were dealing.

Polish officials were employed in the ghetto in the preparatory works to issue the *Kennkarten*. They collected the payment and sent the Jews to be photographed. For not complying with the ordinance, one faced a large fine. All Jews - men and women from the age of twelve - fell under this law, and it was implemented just like all the previous laws.

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The German Labour Office issued an ordinance to the effect that all Jews aged between twelve and sixteen were to report to the Labour Office with all [their] documents. There, each were questioned and they recorded their employment since childhood. Everyone received a notice stating that he had been recruited by the German Labour Office for forced labour.

After some time, the *Judenrat* received an order to renovate a premises for a Jewish division of the German Labour Office. The premises was renovated and, above it, was hung a sign with

the word “*Judeneinsatz*” [Jewish (Labour) Deployment]. Immediately afterwards, an announcement appeared in the ghetto to the effect that all Jews were to report to the new office of the *Judeneinsatz*. There, everyone received a work booklet, which was called a “*Meldekarte*” [registration card], where one’s place of employment was registered. This *Meldekarte* also served as a document with which to legitimate oneself.

Once the issuing of the *Meldekarten* was completed, the *Judeneinsatz* division of the German Labour Office took the Jewish workers under its supervision.

The leader of the *Judeneinsatz* was a German of about fifty by the name of Frentzel - a big drunk. All ordinances, regarding Jewish workers, were addressed to him, and Herr Frentzel had the authority to command that Jews be seized in the streets for work and could generally create great trouble - if that was what he wished. The Jewish Labour Office was completely under his authority. Therefore, the officials of the Jewish Labour Office would often treat him to a good drink, thus making him “their own”, as they would call it.

Early one summer morning in 1942, Jewish policemen woke up all the men in the ghetto and ordered them, in the name of the German authorities, to report to the large New Market Square [Nowy Rynek]. Whoever hid would be shot. Everyone went out to the marketplace, where already higher German officials - the *Stadthauptmann*, German managers of the ammunitions factories, the leader of the *Judeneinsatz*, Frentzel, and officials of the Jewish Employment Office - were standing on one side holding papers.

Frentzel called out names of Jews who were employed in German munitions factories and in other enterprises. Those [whose names were] called out were immediately led off to their workplaces. The Jewish officials constantly slipped Frentzel new lists of names. The purpose of this gathering soon became clear. The German officials were conducting an inspection to see whether all the Jews were employed in a job and if Frentzel was carrying his duties out properly. It emerged that from the number of fourteen thousand Jews [assembled there], only two thousand were left in the square as unemployed. It seemed that the inspection had gone well. The two thousand Jews were taken away to a factory building that was standing empty and a group of Polish policemen was stationed to guard them. No one knew what awaited these men. Days went by and the men still remained under arrest in very bad conditions. They slept on the bare ground, only receiving food from the *Judenrat* kitchen and nobody was allowed to visit them.

The *Judenrat* worked on Herr Frentzel to intervene for the people to be released, saying that he needed the people for work. After many days and long efforts, it ended with paying several hundred thousand zloty for their freedom.

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The *Judenrat* received an order from the authorities to form *Gemeinschaftswerke* [community works], meaning a shop, where various craftsmen’s workshops were to be set up to carry out work for the military. For the privilege of being able to set up such workshops, the *Judenrat* had to pay, into the coffers of the *Stadthauptmannschaft*, half a million zloty. The premises

for the closed Jewish *Metalurgia* factory was allocated, for which they had to pay the Germans 20,000 złoty a month in rent. All the Jewish craftsmen, with their machinery, were required to place themselves at the shop's disposal.

In order to receive the required money, the *Judenrat* opened a registration of people, who wished to work in the shop, where work would be done for the German military and where the most secure positions were. Every Jew wanted to have a document which stated that he was employed and was a useful person. For the privilege of being registered as an official, professional workman or labourer in the shop, every person had to pay several thousand złoty. A special commission evaluated how much each one had to pay. People chased vigorously after a place in the shop, and a word was invented - each had to be "covered", viz. to have a workplace. Everyone was seized by a panic - everyone wanted to be "covered". Large sums flowed into the *Judenrat*. People sold everything at home and on their person in order to be "covered" in the shop, which was being organised. Each person, who emerged from the *Judenrat* with a note, to the effect that he had been registered in the shop, felt fortunate. The registration of shop workers never ended. The *Judenrat* saw that the registration was a good source of income, and there were always fresh people eager for shop positions.

Finally, the organisers proceeded setting up the shop. Former owners of factories were appointed as directors of the shop. Respected engineers became leaders of the individual workshops. For the offices and storerooms, commercial engineers, former large entrepreneurs and great merchants were appointed. In order to receive these highest of positions in the shop, these people also paid large sums.

The newly-organised shop's first activity consisted of taking the machines from the craftsmen. The shop's smaller officials drove about, with horse and cart, from one craftsman to another, and above all from one tailor to another, in order to take the machines away. As this was done, terrible scenes were played out - there were fistfights between the officials and the craftsmen. After all, the tailor's machine was his source of livelihood. Over the course of his whole life, he had become accustomed to it like to his right hand - he could not part with it. He knew that being "covered" still would not bring him any livelihood. If he was to work in the shop all day for a bit of soup from the kitchen, his family would be forced to starve along with him.

The *Judenrat* had no other way out. It could not put itself on the side of the Jews. It existed, after all, to carry out the German orders - and the German orders aimed to ruin Jewish life [down] to the ground. The tailor, from whom his machine was taken, was doubly embittered, because it was precisely a Jew who took it from him. It was like that in similar cases. The fact that Jewish officials took from them the last [things they had] by orders of the Germans caused the Jews particular agony. The pain was much greater than if it had been done by the Germans themselves. The German, we knew, was our enemy - but that a Jew should stoke the fire for the Germans with his [own] hands! But, in fact, it was precisely in that, that the refined malice lay, to organise things in such a manner that one Jew should take, from the other, his last [possessions] and bring [them] to the enemy.

The Jewish policemen managed to cope with the stubborn craftsmen by using their rubber truncheons. They took away the machines and delivered them to the shop.

The furriers' workshop on the "Aryan side", which reworked Jewish furs for the military, was also moved into the shop. Other workshops of metalworkers, carpenters etc. were [also] set up there. In the middle of the summer of 1942, the shop began to work.

Most of the people, who paid large sums to get into the shop, were not craftsmen at all, so the workshops could not have been able to exist with them alone. As a result, the craftsmen, from whom the machines had been taken by force, were asked to come work in the shop. They simply forced them to work. A number of non-working people were put around every craftsman, but, despite that, they were still unable to employ the thousands of people from whom the *Judenrat* had taken money. A system of preferential treatment ensued - wives of *Judenrat* members and other privileged people sat in the shop by the table and supposedly handed something over to the tailor, whereas actual working women remained outside the shop with the receipts for the paid sums. The *Judenrat* managed to placate them, too, with the explanation that it sufficed for one to have a receipt, and it was not necessary to actually work in the shop.

Many German officials visited the "*Gemeinschaftswerke*" frequently and observed the organisation, the people and the work. They let the shop leaders give them explanations, who endeavoured to present everything in the best possible manner. The Germans winked at everybody, "*Gut...Gut...*" Those employed in the shop were glad that the Germans had been convinced of their usefulness, whereas those who were left outside the shop envied those who were "covered".

The application of all means to be "covered" took on a frenzied character, when news reached us from other cities regarding the existence of a "*Juden Ausrottung Kommando*" [Commando for the Extermination of Jews], which was tasked with sending away all those Jews, who had no employment, to extermination camps.

The Jewish Labour Office was besieged by men and women. Everyone wanted to receive work. But the Labour Office did not have places to employ so many people. There began a trade in workplaces, which were called "*placówki*" [posts]. People began paying very large sums for a *placówka*, to the point at which they began pushing out people who had already paid for their workplaces. Great scandals took place based upon the grounds of seizing workplaces. Everyone was governed by one panic-stricken desire: "*One must be covered!*" People paid large sums for a *placówka* in the munitions factories or for a position as an official in the *Judenrat*. The foremen of the Jewish Labour Office sold *placówki* and made a great deal of money from this.

The prices for *placówki* rose steadily and it got to a point where one paid thousands for a "broom". A "broom" meant the work of the street sweepers. Every morning and evening, groups of Jews with brooms on their arms marched to the great municipal squares and in front of the governmental offices and cleaned the streets there. This was the lightest work and, after great efforts, it was assigned to the intellectuals. Professors, lawyers, former directors and others marched in files, twice a day, under the leadership of a foreman with

brooms on their arms. In this way, they passed through the finest streets of the city, until arriving at their workplaces. There, they cleaned and collected the muck that people, horses, other beasts and Germans had left behind them. While marching through the “Aryan” streets, they often encountered their former Polish friends and acquaintances. Some looked on with sympathy. Others, on their part, would laugh loudly and scornfully. The “street sweepers”, however, were glad that they had certification from the municipal management to the effect that they were employed and, in this manner, were safeguarded from being sent away to who knows where.

Everyone’s primary concern was to be “covered”, viz. protected by getting into some workplace. When acquaintances met, the first question was whether they were already “covered” and if they were working in a “*Betrieb A*” [Operation A], meaning an enterprise that was carrying out work directly for the war effort, which was considered the surest means of protection against “resettlement<sup>1</sup>”.

When I found out that the “resettlement” was firstly in effect on elderly people and children, I became very much afraid for the fate of my parents and began seeking ways to save them. As my wife was considered the best milliner in town and made hats for German women, she explained to her clientele that it was impossible to obtain hat materials in the colours that they requested. There was, however, a way out - there was an old man in our city who was a good dyer and, if she could receive this man as her employee, it would be possible to have hat materials in every colour.

Due to his advanced age – seventy-one years – it was very difficult to attain a workplace for my father. But, nevertheless, after long efforts, we succeeded in receiving the permit to install him, as an employee, with my wife as a dyer of hat materials. For my mother, I was already unable to secure such a position, because a lady of seventy-four cannot be employed in a fashion salon. Therefore, for her and also my brother, I acquired posts with an administrator of Jewish buildings. My brother became a [rent] collector and my mother a concierge. All my acquaintances were envious of me that I had managed to “cover” my family.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: Viz. deportation to a death camp.]