

On the Eve of the Liquidation

The life of the Jews in the ghetto was hard. Every couple of days, the *Judenrat* issued announcements, demands and regulations, which commenced with the [same] refrain – “By the orders of the authorities...” Such notifications and ordinances always brought unease. The disquiet could be particularly sensed when direct decrees from the occupation authorities appeared which, invariably, began with threats of persecutions or the death penalty.

With the arrival of the year 1942, an uncertainty, which everyone wished to shake off, was added to the stressful atmosphere. Some rumour was being passed from mouth to mouth* that, in some places, they were gassing Jews while they were being transported in vans - that this was the manner in which the Germans were killing the Jews in the small *shtetls*. People said that a Jew, who had fled to Częstochowa from a small *shtetl* near Łódź, recounted in great secrecy how he himself had buried his wife and child, who had perished in such manner. Many repeated all these reports, yet they all added that, “Somehow, I cannot believe such things could happen”. People also said that the young Częstochowa doctors, who had been sent away to the Lublin region, had been deported somewhere along with all the Jews of those *shtetls*, and that all traces of them had disappeared. But they comforted the families and relatives of those doctors by saying that they had surely been relocated, together with those Jews, to the destroyed *shtetls* and villages in Ukraine, where they were only being forced to perform hard labour.

The atmosphere became oppressive and acts of suicide began to be noted. A certain Awner, a former schoolmistress, left the ghetto on purpose in order to be shot - which is exactly what happened. One Nuchem Majmon hanged himself in the bathhouse at ul. Garibaldiego 18⁸⁸.

In the spring of 1942, the news of the deportation from Lublin hit us like a bolt of lightning. The destruction of Lublin - regarding which the Germans themselves recounted - was talked about in every home, and this caused the Jews to begin thinking more about the fate of the Częstochowa [Big] Ghetto. Meanwhile, the Gestapo intensified its terror and murdered with greater frequency. On 18th June 1942 the Gestapo shot three Jews⁸⁹. On 7th July 1942, Gestapo men entered the shop of Becalel Wolberg, which was located at ul. Orlicz-Dreszera, and shot the proprietor⁹⁰. We found out about these cases in the ghetto. There were other shootings about which people did not become aware.

At the beginning of July 1942, all the men aged 16-60 were driven out of their dwellings and lined up in the Old Market [Stary Rynek], New Market [Nowy Rynek] and the First Aleja, where they were held for several hours. The Jews interpreted this to mean that General Böttcher from Radom and *Stadthauptmann* Dr Franke had, in this manner, conducted a kind of “test selection”. The agitation was, therefore, constantly increasing. The unease intensified even more when the news, regarding the deportations in Warsaw, began to arrive. During this same period, the German *Sondergerichte* [special courts], which had customarily sentenced

* [TN: “From ear to ear” in the original Yiddish – an expression which is obviously not used in English in this context.]

⁸⁸ Daily report in the police ledger.

⁸⁹ Daily report in the police ledger.

⁹⁰ Daily report in the police ledger.

Jews to death for exiting the ghetto, began sentencing people to imprisonment and relocation for that same offense. Concurrently, Jews were being shot without any court verdict for leaving the ghetto or for some other “transgression”. It was thus that, on 12th August 1942, the thirty-three-year-old Anszel Renkszowski and Izrael-Mordche Sitowski were shot outside the ghetto⁹¹.

The terror within the ghetto itself vastly intensified. On 3rd August, gendarmes attacked the Jewish hospital on ul. Przemysłowa, smashed up the furniture, beat the Jewish policeman, Birenholc, who was on duty there, and robbed various objects of value. In the ghetto streets, *Luftwaffe* [Air Force] soldiers assaulted not only Jewish civilians, but even the Jewish constables who were on duty⁹².

As a result, everybody already perceived the threatening peril looming over the Jewish community. Anyone, who had the possibility of establishing contact with Poles of his acquaintance, made efforts to do so and, first and foremost, saw to [securing] a hiding place for his children. In this manner, some procured a hideout for the entire family.

Meanwhile, the *Stadthauptmann* announced that he would be setting up “shops” in *Metalurgia*, on ul. Krótka, which would be working for internal German needs and all those employed there would not be liable for relocation. For the Jews to be able to work there, he demanded of the *Judenrat* machinery and a payment of one and a half million *gilden* [złoty]. Between 31st July and 13th August 1942, the *Judenrat*, through its officials who had been specially appointed for this purpose, aided by the Jewish police, confiscated from Jews the machines that were needed for setting up the workshops and, concurrently, tried to “soften” the heart of the *Stadthauptmann* as regards the monetary fee. Following lengthy negotiations, *Stadthauptmann* Franke acquiesced to accepting the payment in three instalments, immediately collecting the first payment of half a million. The confiscated sewing machines, brush-making machines and furriers’ workshops were set up in *Metalurgia*. Jewish managers were appointed to each individual workshop and also a special manager who was responsible for all the workshops.

The hopes of those, who were not employed at the so-called “secure *placówki*”, were now turned to the “shops”. Every worker made efforts, at his “*placówka*”, to receive the little red book and have it stamped by the German Employment Bureau. Such a booklet was to certify that the holder thereof was a useful person. The queues in front of the German Employment Bureau became longer by the day. In the courtyard of Aleja 12, where the *Judenrat* enrolled labourers in the workshops. It became dark every single day from the thousands of people awaiting here for the “luck” of being accepted. Doctors, lawyers, teachers, professors, students, Fröbelians*, musicians and actors, directors, merchants, manufacturers and simple tradesmen, who had hitherto always bought their way out of work or had striven to wriggle out of heavy labour, now turned into cobblers, tailors, furriers, locksmiths and brush-making workers (only these “shops” had been organised).

⁹¹ Daily report in the police ledger.

⁹² Daily report in the police ledger.

* [TN: Kindergarten teachers, named after Friedrich Fröbel (1782-1852), who created the concept of the kindergarten and also coined the term.]

There were also gigantic queues in front of the premises of the *Judenrat*. Here, hundreds of wretched skeletons, draped in rags, their hands eaten by leprosy, pushed their way to the little windows of the *Judenrat* officials and did everything to convince the *Judenrat* members and their officials that they - the starving, depleted Jews, who had been driven out of [their] towns and *shtetls* - were also not so impoverished anymore, did not need anyone's aid, had enough strength to work and, as a useful element, they, too, had the full right to continue to remain in the city. And the officials, also, who were employed in the *Judenrat*'s department for social aid, again began destroying the cards in the card indexes with the names of those who had come for aid [in the past]. The underground political parties, in view of the great peril, now began negotiations regarding a joint operation against the occupier.

Meanwhile, the Germans were ceaselessly preparing themselves to carry out the deportation. Already, on 10th July 1942, the *Schutzpolizei* ordered that, on all street corners, the curb of the pavement be painted white, that the buildings on every street, where the ghetto ended be painted white to the height of two metres, that the entrances to all cellars in the ghetto be painted white, and so on. The Jews interpreted these orders to mean that the Germans wished every last one of their men to find his way in the ghetto with ease. But, in order that these ordinances should not arouse any suspicions among the Jews, it was also commanded that the squares at the New Market [Nowy Rynek] (it is here that the selections subsequently took place) be sown with grass⁹³.

During this same period, it was announced that, in the Jewish holidays, Jews had the right to congregate in the houses of worship and that the managers and commissars of all the "*placówki*" were permitted, at their own discretion, to free the Jewish labourers from work on those holidays⁹⁴. This order, which presumably had the purpose of anesthetising the alertness of the Jews, had the exact opposite effect. The lack of trust in the German reassurances was growing constantly and, together with this mistrust, increased the unease, which reached its culmination with the approaching of the High Holidays, when the *Stadthauptmannschaft* began to interfere less in the internal affairs of the ghetto. (This happened following Böttcher's visit, at the beginning of September, when the secret meeting of the prominent Germans was held in Częstochowa). Whereas the *Schutzpolizei* began to show itself even more in the ghetto. They relocated all the Jews, who were still living on ul. Kawia. (This is where the large mass grave was made for the thousands of Jews, who were shot over the course of the five weeks of the duration of the deportation). The *Schutzpolizei* also threw out all the Jews, who were living on ul. Garibaldi in the buildings at 26 and 28. (Here is where, during the *akcja*, they set up their storerooms of plundered Jewish property and goods.).

Gestapowces, with Szabelski at the head (Szabelski was the terror of the ghetto - merely his name always inspired dread), began conducting more frequent searches, beating and robbing. (Following liberation, Szabelski was sentenced to death in Częstochowa by the Polish court.) Those who distinguished themselves [the most] for their cruelty were Frankowski, Dzierzan, who always had a huge dog to help him, Laszynski, Köstner, Hantke ("White Head"), Opitz ("Throat"), Schott ("Gypsy") – who, as we have been told, back in March 1942 had shot

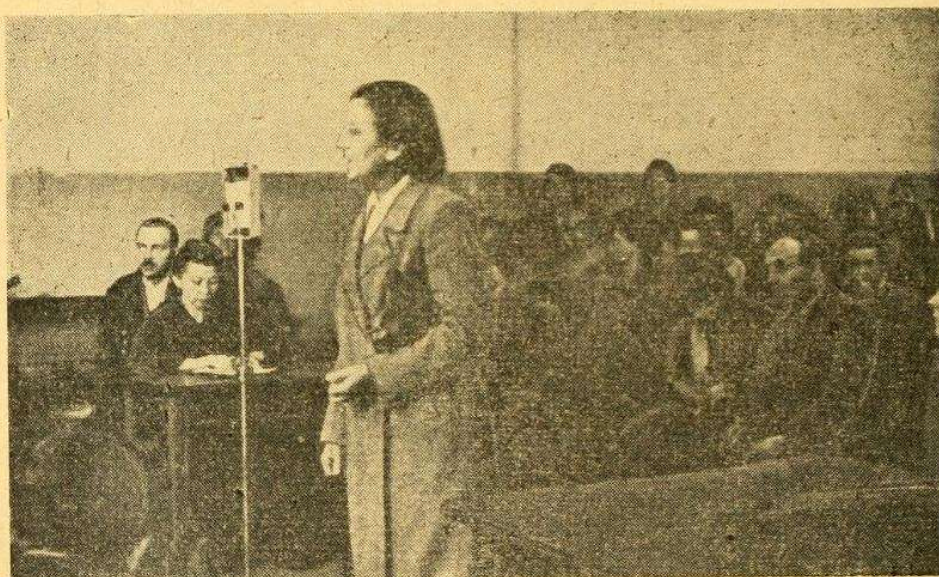
⁹³ Letter from the Polish commander of the Jewish police to the *Judenrat*.

⁹⁴ Letter from Degenhardt to the *Stadthauptmann* from 10th April 1942 with an attachment of this order.

the twenty-six-year-old Jesionowicz for crossing the ghetto's boundary at the Katsap* bridge on ul. Wilsona, Schmidt ("Cyrkowiec" [The Circus Performer]), Kirsch ("Keg"), and also Klipsch and Schlosser, who were the closest confidants of Degenhardt's deputy, Lieutenant Werner. Also Onkelbach, Degenhardt's chauffeur, made frequent visits to Jewish homes, beating [people] and robbing anything that pleased him.

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Bekanntmachung</h2> <p>Betrifft: Änderung der Sperrstunde. Für die Zeit vom 20. 6. 1942 bis 31. 8. 1942 wird die Sperrstunde in der Stadt Tschenschtschau</p> <p>1. für Polen von 23-5 Uhr. 2. für Juden von 21-5 Uhr</p> <p>festgesetzt.</p> <p>Wer das Stadtgebiet während der Sperrstunden ohne Passierschein betritt, wird bestraft.</p> <p>Gleichzeitig wird die Polizeistunde für die polnischen Gaststätten pp. auf 22.30 festgesetzt.</p> <p>Tschenschtschau den 16. 6. 1942.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Der Stadthauptmann Dr. Franke</p>	<h2 style="text-align: center;">OGŁOSZENIE</h2> <p>Dotyczy: Zmiany godzin policyjnych.</p> <p>Na okres od 20. 6. 1942 r. do 31. 8. 1942 r. ustala się w mieście Częstochowie godzinę policyjną</p> <p>1. dla Polaków od godz. 23 do 5-ej. 2. dla żydów od godz. 21 do 5-ej.</p> <p>Kto przebywać będzie na terenach publicznych miasta w czasie godzin policyjnych bez przepustki, zostanie ukarany.</p> <p>Jednocześnie ustala się godzinę policyjną dla polskich restauracji na 22.30.</p> <p>Częstochowa, dnia 16. VI. 1942 r.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Starosta Miejski Dr. Franke</p>
--	---

[Translation on the following page.]



Szabelski before the Polish People's Court in Częstochowa. Mrs Langer is testifying.

* [TN: Pejorative used mainly by Ukrainians and also in Yiddish in ref. to a Russian – thus, the "Russian bridge"; the bridge in question is the old railway bridge across the Aleja, which was built before the First World War by the Russians as part of the Warsaw-Vienna train line.]

Notification

In regards to:

Change in the curfew.

For the period from 20th June 1942 to 31st August 1942, the curfew in the city of Częstochowa is set

1.) For Poles from 23:00-05:00

2.) For Jews from 21:00-05:00

Anyone entering the city area during the curfew without a permit will be fined.

Concurrently, the police curfew for the Polish restaurants is set at 22:30.

Częstochowa, 16th June 1942

The *Stadthauptmann*

Dr Franke

By Yom Kippur Eve, the atmosphere in the ghetto was already one of terror. It was passed, from mouth to mouth, that there was a “*Vernichtungskommando*” [extermination squad] in town. Over the course of the day, the anxiety rose. At sunset, people began to light the Yom Kippur candles and the ghetto turned into one great lament. On Yom Kippur morning, the Jews officially had the right not to work. Few, very few Jews exercised these rights now.

Rumours spread to the effect that the Jewish “friends of the government”^{**}, such as Gnot, Jarzombek, Hermann “Kulbajke” [Fish-pie], Besser, Szeftel, Mechtiger and others, had left the ghetto and hidden on the “Aryan side”. People [also] said that “the Cantor” Paul Lange, the German manager of the *Möbellager* [furniture camp], had discretely advised the Jewish workers at this “*placówka*” not to go home after work, but to spend the night at their workplace. The workers of the *Möbellager*, Braland, Rawa and of the Horowicz & Partners factory, quickly prepared bunkers at their workplaces and smuggled their nearest family members into them.

A rumour spreads that the chairman of the *Judenrat* was summoned to the *Stadthauptmann*, and hours have already passed without seeing him return.

Yom Kippur at twilight - a tense movement for the Jews in the ghetto. Everyone seems to be rushing about. People run, casting uneasy glances to all sides. One asks the other what is the news and runs on, without waiting for a reply. Degenhardt threatens the greatest repressions

^{**} [TN: The Hebrew term used in the original (מקורבים למלוכה), which is borrowed from rabbinical literature, translates verbatim as “intimates of the (ruling) monarchy”.]

for spreading “false” rumours. Degenhardt demands of the *Judenrat* and Jewish police to make an end to the agitated atmosphere in the ghetto. *Judenrat* members and constables attempt to fulfil the orders of the Chief of Police. They go about in the ghetto streets until late into the evening, trying to convince everyone that the rumours, regarding a “resettlement”, are just made up*. They add that it was only just today that the *Stadthauptmann* and other German dignitaries had taken a good “payoff” in the form of money and valuables, by which the *Judenrat* had received an assurance that nothing bad would occur to the Jews in Cześćochowa.

Notwithstanding this, all attempts at pacification brought no changes to the atmosphere prevailing all around. It turns late, and the movement in the ghetto streets becomes no smaller. The curfew is not strictly kept and nothing happens to anyone. For some reason, the police van - which had usually appeared so punctually every evening in the ghetto - was not seen today. The privileged craftsmen, living at the selected building at Aleja 14, which is located at the boundary between the ghetto and the “Aryan side”, take their closest family members in there. The tailor, Pinches Einhorn, advises the former contributor to [the newspaper] “*Haynt*” [Today], Zytnicki, who is at the moment in Cześćochowa, to move over to him at Aleja 14, where he will become a “tailoring worker” and be insured against deportation. Zytnicki does not accept this favour, as he wishes to share the same fate as all the Jews.

Whoever is able to, at least sends out his children to Poles of his acquaintance. Meanwhile, the *Gestapowces* and gendarmes go on rampage outside the ghetto and seek out Jews who are hiding there. Rumours spread that there are already many victims amongst those who were caught outside the ghetto. Among others, the Gestapo captured the daughter of the well-known Labour activist in Cześćochowa, Dudek Szlezinger, who was hiding out with a Polish worker. She was brought home to her parents at ul. Garibaldiiego and shot there along with her father, before her mother’s eyes. Night falls. The streets are emptied and a dreadful stillness begins to reign - the quiet before the storm.

On the night after Yom Kippur, on 21st September 1942, Ukrainian fascists and Latvian auxiliary policemen, under the leadership of the Gestapo and *Schutzpolizei*, were stationed throughout the ghetto streets - and the “deportation *akcja*” began. The horrific tragedy of the great Cześćochower Jewish community had commenced.

* [TN: The expression used in the Yiddish original is “sucked from the finger”.]