

Forced Labour

The *Judenrat* was forced to provide a certain number of labourers and professional workmen for various “*placówki**” every day. Apart from this, Jews were captured in the street and taken away to different works and Jews would be taken out from their homes to that same end. In order to manage this matter, at the end of 1939, the *Judenrat*’s “Employment Bureau” was established.

On the basis of the ordinance of the General Governor from 26th October 1939 regarding forced labour for Jews, on 9th March [1940] the *Stadthauptmann* ordered that all the Jews (including converts to Christianity), born from 1914 to, and including, 1923, register themselves at the *Judenrat*⁴⁷. On 2nd April 1940, another order came, signed by Wendler, to the effect that Jews, born between the years 1879 to 1925, must also register⁴⁸. On 11th May 1940, yet another order appeared from the *Stadthauptmannschaft*, signed by Kadner, that on 6th May the summoning of Jews to forced labour had commenced⁴⁹.

In July 1940, the German Employment Bureau, using ten Jewish officials, took over the organisation of forced labour for Jews. This bureau already had in its possession the card indexes of all the Jews aged 12-60⁵⁰. The Employment Bureau in existence at the *Judenrat* was subordinate to the German Employment Bureau. The *Judenrat*’s illusions, that that the Jewish department for forced labour would take control of the chaotic state of affairs of seizing people in the streets and thus alleviate the situation, were soon dashed, because this department was only turned into a tool for every German office in town and, from time to time, the *Judenrat* and its Employment Bureau actually sent out the Jewish policemen, across the ghetto, in order to supply the number of Jewish workers that the Germans demanded.

Over the course of the two registration deadlines 8,330 men were registered. Among the registered were men who had no children - 38.3%; fathers of one child - 32.7%; fathers who had two children - 19.1%. The rest had three, four, five, six, seven and eight children each. There were six fathers of seven children and one of eight children, who was thirty-nine years old⁵¹. Those registered were split up into six groups:

- the first group included merchants, businessmen, manufacturers, unqualified labourers, students and private officials;
- the second group - craftsmen;
- the third group - construction workers, plumbers, concrete workers, bricklayers, painters, tinsmiths etc.;
- the fourth group - agricultural workers and gardeners;
- the fifth [group] - doctors, lawyers and teachers;
- the sixth [group] - technicians with a higher education.

* [TN: Pol., lit. “facilities/institutions”; as Dr Benjamin Orenstein explains in his book “Churban Czenstochow” (p.220), “Every inhabitant of the ghetto had to have employment. Every sort of work position was referred to as a “*placówka*”, which is derived from the term “workplace”.]

⁴⁷ Statistics Book of the *Judenrat*, Vol. II, pp. 182, 189 and 190.

⁴⁸ Statistics Book of the *Judenrat*, Vol. II, pp. 182, 189 and 190.

⁴⁹ Statistics Book of the *Judenrat*, Vol. II, pp. 182, 189 and 190.

⁵⁰ Statistics Book of the *Judenrat*, Vol. III, p. 291.

⁵¹ Statistics Book of the *Judenrat*, Vol. II, pp. 195, 203 and 206.

The sum total of those registered was as follows: merchants - 50.4%; craftsmen - 40.96%; liberal professions - 3.97%; construction workers - 2.67%; agricultural workers - 1.07%; and technicians - 0.93%⁵². 64.3% were fully fit for work; less fit - 22.5%; half fit - 9% and completely unfit for any work - 4.2%. The largest number of healthy individuals were in the second and fourth groups⁵³.

In the beginning, the workers were sent to forced labour in local "*placówki*". There were 120 such workplaces. The largest "*placówki*" were: German police swimming pool and sports complex; *Stadthauptmannschaft*; military; German schools; railway; Town Hall; Polish police; delousing facility; airfield; District Office; Immigration Centre; municipal theatre and post office.

At first, everyone was required to work one day per week. Those, wishing to free themselves from the work, had to pay four *gilden* [i.e. złoty]. No one was permitted to provide his own substitute. Replacements were appointed by the *Judenrat's* Employment Bureau from amongst those who had reported for work due to reasons of profit. Such labourers received twenty-four złoty for six weekly workdays, from which four złoty were deducted for the day of work in the week which each of them had to give as forced labour. The motive the *Judenrat* gave for this handling was that every Jew must bear equal obligations⁵⁴.

For the designated workday, everyone received a written summons indicating when, where, at what hour and with which tools that person had to present himself. Due to the great necessity which could increasingly be felt more and more, even more Jews than what the Germans demanded reported to the *Judenrat's* Employment Bureau for paid labour. As a result, no difficulties were made for those who wished to pay for their day of forced labour⁵⁵.

In the year 1940, an average of 2,624 forced labourers were employed on a daily basis; in 1941 - 4,798 and, from 15th December 1941 to 22nd September 1942 - 7,595 people were employed every day in forced labour at local *placówki*⁵⁶.

Besides providing workers for the "*placówki*" in Częstochowa itself, the *Judenrat* was also forced to provide a certain number of workers for the labour camps in Przyrów (near Częstochowa), Cieszanów and Wereszyn (near Lublin). In June 1940, 300 workers were sent to Przyrów, where they had to regulate* the river there and drain swamps⁵⁶. Every person, who was chosen by the Jewish Employment Bureau to be sent out to Przyrów, received a summons, which stated:

"Summons to forced labour in the management of Wasserwirtschaft [water management]. On the basis of the ordinance dated 26th October 1939, you are required to report to the assembly point at ul. Piłsudskiego Nos. 13-15 at thirty minutes past five o'clock in the morning. You must take with you a blanket, a small pillow, a spoon, a deep bowl and a small pot."

⁵² Statistics Book of the *Judenrat*, Vol. II, pp. 195, 203 and 206.

⁵³ Statistics Book of the *Judenrat*, Vol. II, pp. 195, 203 and 206.

⁵⁴ Statistics Book of the *Judenrat*, Vol. III, pp. 317, 319 and 324.

⁵⁵ Statistics Book of the *Judenrat*, Vol. III, pp. 317, 319 and 324.

⁵⁶ Statistics Book of the *Judenrat*, Vol. III, pp. 317, 319 and 324.

* [TN: Viz. change its course, or maintain its channels.]

⁵⁶ Statistics Book of the *Judenrat*, Vol. III, pp. 317, 319 and 324. [TN: Both this footnote and the previous one are numbered 56 in the original.]

It was signed by the Jewish Forced Labour Service Team. The group of 300 individuals consisted of men aged between eighteen and thirty-five. They lived there in [former] study-halls and barracks. They worked ten hours out of twenty-four and received food three times a day - in the morning 30 *deka* [300g.] bread and coffee and, during the day, a little stew.

The first transport of workers was held in Przyrów for two months. Following this term, some of them stayed on voluntarily due to necessity, and the number that was lacking to make up 300 men was, once more, provided by the Jewish Employment Bureau by force⁵⁷. At first, the *Werkschutz* [work security guards] would vigorously abuse the labourers. During work, they would beat anyone who came under their hand. The labourers were also forced to sing while marching to and from work. They gradually managed to “soften” the hearts of the guards with money, and life in the camp there became bearable. The Jewish inhabitants of Przyrów also did everything to make the lives of these forced labourers easier, aiding them with food and by arranging better living conditions.

At the start of August 1940, the *Judenrat* was ordered to supply a thousand workers to be sent away to Wereszyn and Cieszanów (Lublin region), to the labour camps there. The first transport consisted of 450 men and the second of 460. Both transports were made up of men up to thirty years of age⁵⁸. The transports were taken away to Lublin in freight carriages, escorted by gendarmes. In Lublin, they were encircled by SS men, who, immediately upon alighting from the carriages, treated them to blows and led them off to barracks, in which there were already, from earlier, thousands of Jews from other cities. During the march to the barracks, their escorts took one [man] from the transport, clapped a brass fireman’s helmet onto his head, gave him a trumpet and ordered him to march at the front and play. All those, marching behind him, were forced to sing to the rhythm of his playing.

The entire transport from Częstochowa, along with the Jews who were already there from earlier, was afterwards transferred from the barracks to barracks in Bełżec, where there were already other transports of Jews and gypsies. From there, everyone was, once again, driven on foot to Cieszanów. One of the survivors from this transport, Mordche Lewkowicz, recounts:

“We were forced to run uphill and then walk slowly downhill. Whoever stopped on the way was immediately shot. In the village of Ruskie Piaski, we were taken into a ruined building, where dozens of Jews lay shot. From there, we were then driven, on foot, to Cieszanów, where we were harnessed to murderous labour...”

Besides beatings during work, they were [also] subjected to abuse after work. The SS men liked to make a “spectacle” during work. They would often take one out, from among the workers, give him a stick to hold and make him climb up a tree. From the top of the tree, he had to direct with the stick. All the workers then had to stand around the tree, looking up at the “director”, and sing or moo like cows. A certain German major, Dolf*, would on a daily basis ride on a horse around amongst the crowd of workers, beating with a whip or shooting anyone who dared straighten his back during work or relax for an instant.

⁵⁷ Statistics Book of the *Judenrat*, Vol. III, pp. 317, 319 and 324.

⁵⁸ Statistics Book of the *Judenrat*, Vol. III, pp. 317, 319 and 324

* [TN: Although often mentioned in Yiddish sources as “Dolf” with an “F”, his actual surname was **Dolp** - SS-Sturmbannführer Hermann Dolp.]

Lewkowicz (He is now a factory worker, who lives in Częstochowa. He went through the Cieszanów labour camp), related:

"During work, we were sometimes forced to stand up to our waist in water and, with our bare hands, dig out sand from the bottom. Once, upon returning from work, one of us - Kohn was his name - asked the SS man, who was guarding our barrack, to permit him to go out to answer the call of nature. The man smiled and allowed him. As soon as Kohn crossed the threshold, a rifle shot rang out. Kohn ran back in with a shot through the arm, from which blood was gushing and hid. SS men immediately arrived and started looking for the one who was no longer fit for work. We wept and pleaded with them to spare his life.

It was to no avail. Kohn crawled out from his hiding place and he wept and begged to be left alive for his elderly mother's sake. It was in vain - they dragged him out of the barracks and shot him. That same night, three more Jews were shot. They ordered us to bury them and to put up a wooden cross on their grave. The following morning, as they took us to work, they shot at us. I do not know how many fell. A young man from Radom - his name was Lifszyc - fell then next to me. Afterwards, I buried him myself.

On Sukkos Eve, we were brought to Radom. From the outskirts of Radom, they sent some of us to a camp in Oszczów, near Hrubieszów. I, too, found myself among those who had been sent back [to the Lublin region] and fell into an even worse misfortune than that which had been until then. Along the way, one of us committed suicide. In Oszczów, we worked in draining swamps, levelling out the roads and building highways. On one occasion, a Werkschutz forced us to bury alive a boy from Częstochowa - the son of the war invalid Kawan. He was saved by the coincidence that, just then, some German arrived accompanied by the prezes of the Hrubieszów Judenrat and Bernard Kurland from Częstochowa."

In Częstochowa, we soon became aware of the horrific state of those who had been sent away, from fathers and mothers who, risking their lives, had travelled, following after their children. A parents' committee was formed which, meanwhile, began seeing to food parcels for the deportees. The food parcels would be handed over to the Jewish police, and they would send the parcels over to the camp. Every single day, crowds of parents and relatives of the deportees besieged the *Judenrat's* building, weeping, pleading, shouting and demanding that their children and parents be rescued. The *Judenrat's* office was bombarded with written petitions from parents who, in this manner, vocalised their agony. In a plea to the *Judenrat*, on 14th November 1940, a certain Pantofel writes:

"...I am a tailor by trade. I am eighty-three years of age and my wife is blind. We had been supported by our two sons, the twenty-seven-year-old Abram - a barber - and the twenty-year-old Mojsze - a locksmith. They were sent out with the first transport. Abram was seized in the street as he was walking home from work. Our plight is catastrophic and without a way out. My son Mojsze is seriously ill there and they do not let him go to any doctors' commission. He was already ill upon returning from Przyrów. Therefore, I turn [to you] with the burning request to save us and to make efforts that, at least, the ailing Mojsze should be released."

The parents of those sent away did not rest. They elected a delegation from amongst themselves which, on its own account, travelled out to Cieszanów and Wereszyn, in order to bring something about for their children on site.

The situation of the deportees worsened day by day. People there fell from pain. They fell from exhaustion and they fell because the *Werkschutz* men and the camp leader, Dolp, fancied playing a “game” with the prisoners. People died of dysentery and abdominal typhus. Many, having nothing to lose, escaped from there. Parents and relatives did not stop with pleading and getting into fights at the *Judenrat*. Nor were they satisfied with their delegation’s meagre achievements. Selling the last of what they still had in their possession, many of them, risking their own lives, made their way into the camps in order to buy off their children from the Germans.

Still no peace of mind came, and the fracas of the sufferers - of the fathers and mothers - at the *Judenrat* were constantly being repeated. In a letter, dated 22nd November 1940, Dawid Borzykowski (presidium member of the *Judenrat*) writes to the emissary of the *Judenrat*, Bernard Kurland:

“...Having sent you, in a previous letter, a list of the persons in regards to whom their parents, many times, make daily rows at the Judenrat, I have come to the conclusion that it is pointless. Notwithstanding, in order to appease them and reassure them that I have written regarding their issue, I had to prepare such a list. Sadly, I must also now do the same...”⁵⁹

From this letter, it emerges that, although the *Judenrat* was actually trying to do something for the deportees, it was, however, opposed to individual efforts on the part of the parents. In that same letter, Borzykowski further writes:

“...with pain, I must share with you that, yesterday, yet another large group [of parents] set out for Hrubieszów. Unfortunately, we were unable to check this impulse. We shall take all necessary steps for this abnormal state of affairs to cease...”

As regards checking the impulse of the parents to rescue their children, the *Judenrat* was truly weak.

Several dozen labourers were actually ransomed and brought home. But the vast majority continued to remain [there]. After two months of pain in these camps, which had already swallowed up dozens of victims, following endeavours on the part of the *Judenrat*, after superhuman efforts from the parents and relatives, they managed to, after all, pluck those who were still left from these camps. On the way back to Częstochowa, however, three carriages with workers were held up and they were taken away to another camp in Oszczów. As it afterwards turned out, the German leadership of the Oszczów camp filled with these detainees into the vacancies which they had after Jews from Radom, for a great sum of ransom money, had been released from the camp there. The abuse of Jews in the Oszczów

⁵⁹ Letter from Borzykowski to Kurland (typewritten), with a handwritten postscript by Adv. Pohorille.

camp was much more terrible than in the camps in the Lublin area. Some escaped from there, risking their lives both while fleeing homewards and upon attempting to get into Częstochowa and, even once they were already inside Częstochowa, where they were already wanted as deserters from the work even before their arrival.

Abram Pantofel, one of the poor Jewish workers upon whom the lot fell to experience every calamity that the decree of forced labour brought with it, and was also led out to the labour camps in the Lublin region, recounts:

“In Oszczów, they held us seventy men to one barrack. The first days, we would undress for bed - but as soon as the ‘pobudki’ [reveillés] started, and for being a couple of minutes late one was grievously flogged, we began sleeping in our clothes, and even with our boots on. The ‘pobudki’ would take place between two and three o’clock in the morning. As soon as we heard the bellows of our hangmen, we had to immediately go outside and line up in rows. As soon as everyone was already lined up, they started chasing us. We had to run in this manner until five o’clock in the morning. At five o’clock, they gave us bread and coffee. No one could drink the coffee, but it served us for washing ourselves. We became terribly lice-ridden. Each of us would conduct the delousing in the open field upon answering the call of nature. Everyone would then spread out his shirt, trousers and jacket in front of him and scrape off the lice from them. Our garments became absolutely tattered from the work, and we were given no others. As a result, we were forced to work naked and barefoot. Some went about completely naked, only covering their extremities with some piece of rag. One - a certain Niedziela from Wieluń - who did not even have a bit of rag, went about stark naked. Our foreman, the Ukrainian Taraschenko, would keep us at work until late in the night and beat us at every opportunity. After work, each of us received a plate of soup. If Taraschenko caught someone with a second portion of soup, he made him take a pickaxe into his hand and jump about with it like a toad.”

And Pantofel goes on to recount that, just in his barrack, where there were seventy men, more than fifty contracted typhus. (Pantofel lives nowadays in Częstochowa and works in the barbers’ cooperative.)

The fact that the *Judenrat’s* Statistics Bureau hinted [at them] in the *Rocznik Statystyczny* [Statistical Yearbook] characterises the conditions in this camp. On p.320 of that book, among other things, this is written:

“...At the new site, Oszczów, the working conditions were much worse than previously in Cieszanów. They lay a clinker road in marshes. The situation was made even worse by the fact that the workers, being exhausted from the two months of work, had no strength for further labour.”*

Only in the second half of December [1940] was the last group of workers, physically drained and sick, released and sent off, in groups of five, to Częstochowa, where they once more fell under the decree of forced labour.

* [TN: As Professor Jerzy Mizgalski has informed us, “Before the War, roads in Poland were constructed using clinker bricks, as they were, during the War, by the Germans. It was a very, hard brick, which was durable, frost-resistant, but relatively expensive. Therefore, clinker roads were built only on major thoroughfares or in exclusive neighbourhoods.”]

On *Yom Kippur* 1940, Germans, led by the municipal inspector of the scholastic system, housing and sport, Fritz Griesshammer, attacked the Jewish houses of prayer and drove the Jews out in their prayer-shawls to the sportsgrounds at ul. Puławska, where they were forced to work, until late into the night, cleaning the sportsgrounds.