

Social Aid

Already, back in June 1939, following the notorious visit of Goebbels to Gdańsk, when the rumours of the proximity of war were intensifying, business in Częstochowa - and Jewish business in particular – began to be seriously shaken. The first, who began to feel this situation most [acutely], were the Jewish transport workers (carters, haulers with handcarts and porters [who bore the loads on their] backs), who lost the possibility of earning for their daily subsistence. Two months later, one already saw that the factory workers and the poorer craftsmen, who had no savings and were always exposed to drawing their livelihood from day wages, had been left without means of life. The poverty among these same echelons was noted even more in the first days of the outbreak of the War.

At the end of September 1939, thanks to the initiative of Jakow Roziner (a long-standing leader of TOZ) and Mendel Asz (son of the late Rabbi of Częstochowa, Nachum Asz), success was met drawing interest in this matter to a large group of former communal activists, who with true devotion applied themselves to alleviating the need of the great number of Jewish families, who were threatened with starving to death. Icek Rzasinski (alias “Doctor”), who was the first to donate the largest sum of money to this cause, worked in this field in a particularly active manner. Natan Rodal, Ciesia Kozak and, later Jakub Tempel also devoted much energy to this cause. Many Jews responded to the first appeal to aid the starving and the fire victims, and this made it possible for every family in need to receive ten *gilden* [złoty] and a [cubic] metre of coal.

The aid activity of this group of activists steadily broadened, because every upright Jew, who had even the smallest possibility, gladly donated to this cause on his own account. At the beginning of 1940, a Social Aid Department was formed in the *Judenrat*, which took over the actual management of the aid work. At the head of this department were Natan Rodal and his co-workers Ciesia Kozak and Jakub Tempel.

Holiday and winter aid campaigns were conducted in the ghetto and six kitchens were also created, where lunches were given out for free or for a small fee.

- The first kitchen was created on 31st January 1940 in a house of prayer at ul. Nadrzeczna 30 [the Old Synagogue]. Here, an average of 825 lunches were given out every day, for a payment of ten groszy per lunch.
- The second kitchen was opened on 19th March 1940 at ul Katedralna, in the former premises of Makabi [sporting organisation]. Here, a thousand lunches were given out every day, also for a fee of ten groszy.
- The third was opened, on 5th April 1940, in the *mikvah* building at ul. Garibaldiiego 18 and distributed up to 1,025 meals every day absolutely for free.
- The fourth kitchen was opened on 7th April 1940 at Aleja 12, in the former premises of the Craftsmen’s [Union]. Here, up to 1,030 free lunches were given out every day.
- At the same time, the fifth kitchen (the “intellectuals’ kitchen) was opened at ul. Piłsudskiego 11. This kitchen catered to officials and certified intelligentsia. Here, up to 450 daily lunches were distributed for a fee of 70 groszy to 1.10 *gilden* per meal.

- The sixth kitchen was opened in May 1940 at ul. Piłsudskiego 17, in the Bund's former premises. Here, up to 1,040 meals would be given out each day, some for 10 groszy and some for free.

In addition to these, the *Judenrat's* Employment Bureau ran a field kitchen, which would serve coffee and bread, every morning, to the workers of a few *placówki* which fell under the requirements of forced labour⁷⁴. Apart from kitchens five and six, which catered to the intelligentsia and forced labourers, the meals at the rest of the kitchens consisted mainly of turnips with water, but even this was a blessing for the famished inhabitants, in general, and the refugees in particular for, besides the fifty grams of bread a day that were distributed to each person, these lunches were, for them, the only additional food with which to still their hunger.

Over the course of 1940, the Social Aid Department gave out over 90,000 *gilden* in monetary aid. Clothing, linen, shoes and bedclothes were also collected from amongst the Jewish population, part of which was sent over to Radomsko for the local Jewish hospital and for Jews suffering poverty. The remainder was distributed within Częstochowa itself⁷⁵.

From time to time, the Social Aid Department would issue appeals to the Jewish populace regarding aid for the needy. On 28th November 1940, the winter relief committee sent appeals to all the Jews which, among other things, included the following plea:

"Thousands of Jews face the monster of hunger and cold. Jewish society cannot remain indifferent to this extraordinary need. The efforts of the entire community are needed in order to ease the lot of the great masses, who are starving and suffering cold..."

The goals of the winter relief committee, which had been established, are discussed in this appeal. It ends with the words:

"Remember that he who gives the donation is always happier than he who is forced to benefit from it!"

At the beginning, a proportion of the better-situated Jewish populace regarded the Social Aid [Department] with sympathy and gladly contributed to all necessary causes. Many even voluntarily participated in the fundraising campaigns. However, by the end of 1940, the sentiment and attitude towards anything that was connected with the *Judenrat* altered dramatically and, as a matter of course, also to the Social Aid Department, which was a division of the *Judenrat*.

Besides that, the financial situation of the Jews had changed for the worse. The people were crushed by the constant persecutions on part of the Germans and by the continuous taxes which the *Judenrat* was always imposing on the Jewish populace. All this caused people to become indifferent to the need and suffering of others. The voluntary contribution to relief causes was dropping steadily. The *Judenrat* regularly augmented the direct and indirect taxes,

⁷⁴ Statistics Book of the *Judenrat*, Vol. III, pp.373, 391, 395 and 417.

⁷⁵ Statistics Book of the *Judenrat*, Vol. III, pp.373, 391, 395 and 417.

in order to cover the ever-increasing deficits of the Social Aid Department. The indirect taxes usually fell upon the shoulders of the poorest because, when purchasing rations of bread, potatoes and coal, everyone had to buy special stamps.

Within the Social Aid Department, there was also a commission of Jews from Łódź (the “Łódź Sub-Committee”)⁷⁶, which conducted special relief activity for the poor refugees from Łódź. At the head of this commission stood the refugees from Łódź, Jaroczynski and Babiacki who, in a modest manner and with limited means, did a great deal for their fellow townspeople.

The “Dobroczytność” [Charity] Society, headed by the lawyer M. Hasenfeld, also conducted relief activity. During the first years of the occupation, “Dobroczytność” ran an aged care home for 188 people, an orphanage for 150 children and the Jewish hospital⁷⁷.

There was also the Refugee Aid Committee, whose task was to alleviate the plight of those who were suffering most. The activity of this committee relied on the funds that were raised from amongst the ghetto’s population, on funds proceeds from special stamps and on the aid from the Joint, that would be sent, from time to time, for this cause. However, this committee’s aid to the refugees was minimal - hunger and filth reigned there. The Refugee Aid Committee’s only concrete aid was the kitchen, which distributed 250 relatively nutritious lunches, every day, to refugee children up to the age of three⁷⁸. This kitchen was run by Jakub Tempel and Mrs Lipinska.

In the history of social aid, the activity of TOZ in Częstochowa was a chapter on its own. At the initiative of Jakób Roziner, former head of TOZ, and the writer of these lines as his deputy, the TOZ already restarted its activity in the second half of September 1939. The first to voluntarily report for work, without any wages, were the two former nurses of TOZ, Hanka Birenbaum and Genia Windhajm. Later, they were joined by the nurse Chana Janowska (wife of the city’s well-known Hebrew teacher). Of the doctors, those who voluntarily reported for work, were the [female] paediatrician Halleman and the *internista** Dawid Blumenfeld. Besides former TOZ officials, Dzunia Rozen (the daughter of Dr Rozen), Motek Kuszniur and Ciesia Rzańska voluntarily presented themselves as officials - without any prospect of remuneration. A couple of weeks later, other young people reported for work at TOZ, including the young surgeon, Lajzer Glatler.

At first, only three dispensaries were active - internal [medicine], paediatric and surgical. As time went on, however, the TOZ faced more difficult tasks. In particular, it was necessary to care for the health of the workers, because only a small number of them could withstand the savage labour which was forced upon them. Each day brought with it hundreds of [people who were] badly beaten, maimed and with frozen limbs. In addition, the poor also arrived on site, as well as the great masses of refugees from different towns in Poland, who required immediate and continuing medical assistance. The TOZ, therefore, had to widen [the scope] of its activity quickly and in a manifold manner.

⁷⁶ Statistics Book of the *Judenrat*, Vol. III, pp.373, 391, 395 and 417.

⁷⁷ Statistics Book of the *Judenrat*, Vol. III, pp.373, 391, 395 and 417.

⁷⁸ Letter from the Refugee Committee from 9th May 1941 to the *Judenrat*’s Provisioning Bureau.

* [TN: Pol., *internist* (physician who specializes in internal diseases); also a GP.]

At the start of 1940, the two former vice-presidents, the lawyer Mendel Konarski and Dr Adam Wolberg, nineteen physicians, five nurses and also many young people already working for TOZ. New dispensaries were set up, such as anti-tuberculosis, laryngology, dentistry, ophthalmology, a laboratory, and a “drop of milk point” for suckling [infants] and tuberculosis patients. From the end of 1940 until the great deportation, there were already thirty-one doctors and eight nurses working at TOZ. Additionally, there were also about 200 male and female sanitation workers, who were schooled at the sanitation courses that the TOZ held during the occupation. Also, all the Jewish physicians, who were in Częstochowa, without exception, were active at the TOZ’s sanitation points. They had the task of combating the plague of contagious diseases. These points were headed by Dr Wolberg.

For a long time, the TOZ also maintained contact with the Jews from the surrounding *shtetls* such as Kłobuck, Krzepice, Truskolasy, Panki, Przystajń, Pajęczno, Kamyk, Miedzno, Mstów, Przyrów, Janów, Olsztyn, Szczekociny, Włoszczowa, Lelów, Brzeźnica, Poraj, Żarki and Myszków. In each *shtetl* a TOZ committee was founded, which engaged in the relief work there. Besides medical aid, at the beginning, every *shtetl* received [food] products, linen, clothing and shoes for children. Later, certain monetary sums were sent over to these *shtetls* from what the Joint and the TOZ Central in Warsaw allocated for this purpose.

In addition, a “parcels campaign” was conducted for the Jews in the Łódź Ghetto. Jews in Częstochowa, through TOZ, would send certain sums of money over to the TOZ branches in Kłobuck and Krzepice which, at the time, had been absorbed into the Reich, and they would buy food products for the money and send them over to the Jews in Łódź, whose [names] had been submitted by their relatives in Częstochowa.

All this would be tended to, selflessly, by Jewish and Polish emissaries, who were delegated from the *shtetls*. Over the course of the entire time that the relief campaign for the *shtetls* was conducted, there was only one misadventure with one of the management members of TOZ in Kłobuck, a certain Chada*, who had also been active there in the field of TOZ work prior to the War. The Germans caught Chada smuggling himself into Częstochowa and turned him over to the “mercy” of their hounds. As chance would have it, this incident did not culminate in death and Chada perished later in a death camp, along with the majority of the Kłobuck Jews.

This TOZ activity, in the small *shtetls*, only ceased in April 1941, when the ghetto was established in Częstochowa and we were fenced in, all around, by a chain of German murderers.

In the field of relief of TOZ’s activity, the work in the area of care for children stood out distinctively. Among the most important work in this field were the feeding points for children, aged between three and fifteen. At first, lunches were given out to just 600 children. Due to the fact that poverty was constantly increasing and also because new refugees were constantly arriving, the TOZ had to see to feeding as many children as possible. In July 1940, the TOZ was already feeding 2,008 children⁷⁹. A counselling centre for mother and child was

* [TN: Also spelt Choda.]

⁷⁹ Letter from the TOZ to the *Judenrat* and to the Provisioning Commissar at Town Hall.

also run. Besides the usual work, pre-prepared food portions for 351 suckling [infants] were distributed every day at this counselling centre⁸⁰.

The TOZ offices were located in several streets of the Jewish [living] area. At ul. Berek Joselewicza were: an internal [medicine] cabinet for adults, an internal [medicine] cabinet for school age children, a laryngology cabinet, an anti-tuberculosis cabinet, a dentistry, x-ray and quartz lamp cabinet* and an internal [medicine] pharmacy. At First Aleja 6: an internal [medicine], dermatology and venereal disease cabinet, a chirurgic cabinet, a quartz lamp, a counselling centre for mother and child, a counselling centre for pregnant women and a healing point for trachoma patients. At ul. Katedralna 6: a point for combating epidemic diseases. At Przemysłowa 6: a day-care centre and kitchen for school age children. At Przemysłowa 11: a day-care centre and kitchen for school age children and a “drop of milk” point for suckling [infants], children to the age of three and sick people.

The TOZ activity entailed colossal expenditure. Therefore, for its objectives, the TOZ was compelled to borrow money from Częstochowa Jews, to be returned after the War. The Częstochowa TOZ borrowed on such terms not only for the local needs, but also for the Joint and the TOZ Central in Warsaw, which had turned to the Częstochowa TOZ activists. The Częstochowa TOZ also organised house committees, which would collect weekly payments from the tenants of a given building. Smaller monetary sums also flowed in from selling the pieces that the children had crafted at the “*światlice*” [day-care centres]. At the *światlice*, the children would make baskets, slippers, bags, breadbaskets and other things. All this would be displayed in a shop on ul. Warszawska, where Grylak’s wholesale chemist shop had been located before the War. Here, the objects would be sold and the money would be used for the club’s purposes.

A considerable addition would often flow in from the performances of the TOZ’s drama circle and choir, and from the children’s shows by the attendees of the day-care centres (*światlice*).

In May 1941 a branch of the ŻSS** (Jewish Social Self-Help) was established in Częstochowa, which was to finance all the Jewish charitable institutions which conducted certain activities. The ultimate effect of this initiative was that aid from the Joint was stopped and the aid from ŻSS was minimal. The ŻSS branch in Częstochowa took over the management of the aged care home, where there were [also] about 150 young children of the TOZ *światlica*. By 18th July 1941 the activity of the ŻSS led to the fact that, of all the kitchens, the only kitchens remaining were those which served the forced labourers and gave out 1,150 daily lunches. The kitchen at the quarantine area at ul. Garibaldiiego 18, which distributed up to 600 meals a day. The “intellectuals’ kitchen” and the kitchen for the religious Jews, [which] maintained themselves practically on their own. Of the 2,008 children in the TOZ *światlice*, only 1,400 began to be fed, and from August 1941 – just 1,200 children.

Over the course of the whole occupation, and until the great deportation, no love was lost between the *Judenrat* and TOZ. The first open quarrel arose back in December 1939.

⁸⁰ Letter from the TOZ to the *Judenrat* and to the Provisioning Commissar at Town Hall.

* [TN: Quartz lamps, which emit a powerful violet light rich in ultra-violet rays, are used to kill harmful bacteria but cause no harm to the patient. See: *International Journal of Orthodontia, Oral Surgery and Radiography* Volume 9, Issue 1, January 1923, Pages 53-55.]

** [TN: *Żydowska Samopomoc Społeczna*.]

Members of the *Judenrat* inspired the Gestapo to “take an interest” in the TOZ. On 21st January 1941, the adviser on Jewish affairs in the Gestapo summoned to him representatives of TOZ, grilled them on TOZ activity and warned them against not obeying the *Judenrat*. In that same month, one TOZ representative was called twice more to the Gestapo - where he heard the same warning as the previous one. Relations between TOZ and the *Judenrat* became ever more stressed as time went by. Representatives of the Joint in Warsaw made efforts to placate the [ill] sentiments, but to no avail.

At the end of February 1941, the *Stadthauptmann's* deputy, Kadner, summoned to him two representatives of TOZ- Konarski and Wolberg. (Wolberg then received a slap from Kadner in the waiting room as an “advance payment”.) In the presence of the chairman of the *Judenrat*, Kopinski, he ordered that the TOZ should discontinue its autonomous activity and be incorporated as a section of the *Judenrat*. The chairman of TOZ, Konarski, was so overwhelmed by this incident that, on that very same day, he suffered a serious nervous breakdown, after which came paralysis. Months afterwards, once more, Konarski began to take part in TOZ work - but just from time to time, as he had been left with a crippled hand and foot. Konarski tormented himself in this manner until the deportation when, along thousands of Jews, he was driven to the wagons transporting the Jews to Treblinka. Already back in Częstochowa, for not being able to climb up into the carriage, Konarski was beaten over the head with a *Spitzrute* [pointed rod] by a German and, in a moribund state, he was flung into a wagon.

The day after Kadner’s order, the TOZ issued a Polish language flyer. This flyer was written in the form of an obituary and was distributed, in large number, amongst the Jewish population in Częstochowa, itself, and was sent around to the Jewish institutions in Poland. In this manner, the TOZ made public the disgraceful act that the *Judenrat* had committed against an institution that was conducting relief work. The contents of the flyer were more or less as follows:

Częstochowa, 28th Sh’vat 5701 [25th February 1941]

Post of Guardianship over the Orphaned in Częstochowa

*“When God wishes to submit people
To the [most] cruel pain,
Then he delivers them
Into the hands of their [own] brothers.”**

To the hallowed memory of Dr TOZ

* [TN: We have rendered this poem verbatim as it appears in the Yiddish original; as of yet, we have not been able to find its source.]

On the 28th day of Sh'vat, in the year 5701, at 7:30 pm, at ul. Sobieskiego (the office of the *Stadthauptmann* – L.B. [Liber Brener]), well-known in our city, respected by all, beloved and supported by all spheres of society, Dr TOZ, died suddenly at a blossoming age.

In the last moribund moments, he was in full consciousness, rendering himself an account of the reasons for his premature demise. The chairman of "Rasta" (chairman of the *Judenrat* – L.B.) was present at the deathbed and he gave his last Judas' kiss on the lips of the dying one, who still managed to whisper out his vigorous urge to live for the benefit of the tens of thousands of poor and ailing Jews, to whom he had always rushed with aid in their moments of suffering, as well as for the thousands of hungry children, from whom he did not scrimp a single spoonful of warm food.

He went through life quietly, composed, honest, open-hearted and [was] unshaking in his dealings, proud of his deeds, [and] always had the poor, hungry and sick on his mind.

It was characteristic of his young age that he served all those in need without any personal interests.

He passed at a time when he was needed the most - when thousands of sick people were longing to find themselves under his protective wing, when thousands of hungry children were stretching out their pale hands for a chunk of bread.

Jewish society painfully feels this loss!

The city in which he was born and beloved will keep his activity in its grateful memory for a long time!

Information regarding the removal of the corpse and its burial in the pantheon of the meritorious will be shared by the chief of the "Rasta", Herr Pocholera** (Pohorille – L.B.).

Hypocrites and supposed friends of Dr TOZ in Częstochowa are requested not to express any commiseration.

Honoured be the untarnished memory of Dr TOZ!

"Those Closest⁸¹"

On 22nd March 1941, the presidium of the *Judenrat* decided to take over the TOZ into its [own] hands. On the following day, the 23rd, *Judenrat* members Borzykowski, Kurland and Gerichter presented themselves at the TOZ's bureau, at ul. Katedralna 6, and took over all the TOZ's departments. On 25th March the former teacher of the Jewish Gimnazjum, Dr Mering, appeared and declared that he had been appointed by the *Judenrat* as the commissar of TOZ. The TOZ management was dissolved.

** [TN: Pol., lit. "By cholera!"; the word cholera is used in Polish both to denote the disease by this name and also as an expletive, akin to "hell" or "damn" in English. "By cholera!" is obviously what someone would have exclaimed upon encountering this individual.]

⁸¹ From the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

The TOZ activity continued only for a number of months and it ceased on 22nd September 1942, at the time when the life of the Jewish community in Częstochowa ceased.