

Szlojme Waga

## Looting and Sadism

We knew that the German regime was taking over, for itself, private houses in the city. Tenants were being thrown out and various offices were being established there. In addition, the Germans were taking all Jewish residences, which the residents had left. The wealthy Jewish residences were looted - linen, furniture and everything left was taken. It was also known that one Jew, whom they had today thrown out of his apartment, had been ordered to create a representative group of several people who would give the orders of the German regime to the Jewish population.

Ten days had already passed since the Germans had entered the city - ten terrifying days and nights. The barracks were full of people. The battalions that arrive in town stop for 24 hours and continue on their way, apparently to the front. The soldiers stop near our windows and tease us. They point their guns at us. There are all sorts of types among them. One desired to start a conversation precisely regarding the "Aryan" blood that Jews allegedly consume, another about the wealth that the Jews had gained at the expense of the "Aryan" peoples, and similar themes. We attempted to conceal the long-bearded watchmaker from their eyes. However, one of the soldiers noticed him, and demanded that he come to the window. An argument about the Talmud ensued and he [the German] came very close to shooting a bullet through the window, because the Jew was unwilling to admit that he was familiar with the precept, "*Kill [even] the best among the Gentiles.*"

For several days, we were subjected to the devilries of one German who would come and pry all our windows open every morning at four, "so that the dogs should not sleep", as he explained to the soldier on guard. He would then take a long pole and push anyone, who was still asleep, off the table [on which they slept].

German sadism was expressed in all its cunning. Ten men came to us, searched everyone from top to bottom, selected twenty of us and took them away, at which point the soldiers standing by the window informed us that we would never see our friends again! They would be shot, "because the Jews shot at our army in the city".

We tried to convince ourselves that the soldiers, as usual, were just teasing in order to torment us. However, when several hours had passed and our friends had not returned, the soldiers' words began to drill into our brains. A father, who was there with a son who had been taken with the group, suffered terribly. He did not take his eyes off the door - perhaps the people would return.

There was a doctor [Dr Wider] with us, whose brother had been taken and, he too, was in deep despair.

As for ourselves, we went about the entire day tormented, silent - as mourners.

It was only at about eleven at night that we heard the sound of marching from afar and our hearts began beating intensively. The footsteps became clearer as they entered our corridor and, finally, the door opened and in came our friends! The father, who had been so worried for his son, was beside himself with joy, and the same with the doctor whose brother had returned. Indeed, we all breathed easier.

Our friends then told us what had happened to them.

When they were taken away in the morning, they were conveyed to a stall where each one received a spade with which to dig. They were then conducted through the city to the Christian cemetery, where they were put in a row and ordered to dig a large pit. This led them to suspect that they might be digging a grave for themselves. The soldiers stood over them and pressed them to work quickly and the Polish overseer measured the pit's depth from time to time. When the work was finished, they were made to stand in a row on the edge of the pit. Some broke down and began begging the Germans to spare their lives. The soldiers ordered them to be quiet and to stand straight. They stood this way for quite a long while, which seemed like an eternity, while the soldiers stood a short way off behind them, repeatedly cocking their guns. They also fired shots into the air, to increase the tension.

They then told our friends that this was the manner by which they would be shot, if anything bad happened to the Germans [in the city].

### **The Liquidation of Jewish Factories**

The large Jewish factory "Gnaszyńska [Jutowa] Manufaktura" ["Gnaszyńska (Street) Jute Manufacture"], which belonged to Jews and employed several thousand people before the War, was located outside the city on the road to the German border. When the German military marched by the factory on the second day of the War, a high-ranking, long-time factory official went out to welcome the Germans with flowers. This official, who was known as a Pole for many years, was suddenly transformed into a *Volksdeutsch* [ethnic German] and was chosen by the Germans to head the factory.

Next to the factory were houses in which lived the master craftsmen, factory officials and the chief engineer, all Jewish. The new manager not only threw them out of their apartments, but no longer permitted them to work in the factory. Moreover, he also accused the chief engineer of stealing money from the factory's cash-box, for which he suffered such persecutions, that he was forced to leave the city.

Other factories, large and small, were stolen in a similar fashion from their Jewish owners and were put under the management of non-Jews, who were given the title "*Treuhänder*" (trustee).

This was also the case with factories that belonged to foreign owners, [such as] French, Belgians – countries which were at war with Germany. The "trustees", taking over their offices, began their activities by checking if the original owners had left everything in "order" - whether the cash-box matched the books, if money had not been withdrawn from the banks and if the stock of raw materials and manufactured goods were in accord with the ledgers. If something appeared not to be in order, the Jewish owner was summoned to the "trustee's" office, where he was beaten murderously, after which he was taken to be interrogated.

Manufacturers, who had sent their goods elsewhere in order to safeguard them from the dangers of war, were forced by the new manager to bring them back to the factory at their own cost.

The majority of "trustees", who had been formerly officials in the same factories where they were made managers, were even worse than their "foreign" counterparts.

No longer wishing to associate with the former owner and work colleagues of old, they laid off all the Jews from work and even hung up a sign at the entrance: "Entry is Forbidden to Jews" [*Vor Juden ist der Eintritt Verboten*].

A former official of the Jewish "Warta" factory was appointed its "trustee" - he had, at one time, been sent to London, at the factory's expense, to study the craft of weaving.

But this did not stand in good stead for them, for on the same day he took over the leadership of the factory, he immediately drove the Jews out. This same person also took over the linen factory, which he liquidated and then sold off all the goods and machines, thereby making millions.

The former Jewish director of the factory, who had remained without any means of support, asked him for aid. However, instead of offering his assistance, he stole his watch from him and mocked him.

The Germans also treated others in a similar fashion, both the owners of the factories and their Jewish employees, after they had robbed the rightful owners of their property.

The exceptions were smaller factories and shops, whose owners were professional workers and managed the businesses themselves. The "trustees", themselves, were incapable of running the enterprises for they had been entrusted. Therefore, they retained the Jewish owners at their workplaces.

Working under such conditions was, of course, very embittering, but refusal to do so would be met with deportation to forced labour in the forests or by riversides, thus forcing them to stay put.

The wages of the Jewish workers, who were permitted to stay in their positions, were 25% lower than that which the non-Jewish workers earned. Furthermore, the non-Jewish workers at least received some few foodstuffs, while the Jews received nothing at all.

The factories continued operating, using the raw materials that the owners had left. A number of factories had enough raw materials for two years. Because the money [currency] that the Germans had introduced did not win the trust of the population, everyone rushed to spend it quickly and stock up on goods. Polish merchants paid any price for a little merchandise. The "trustees" of the factories were required to sell goods at pre-War prices, but they took ten times the price and listed the normal prices in their books, thus making millions.

The Jews, from whom the factories had been taken and who had not even been allowed to remain working there, appealed to the central government for support from the revenue of their former factories, having no other source of income. After a lengthy wait, the regime sent them to the "trustees" to receive 200 *złoty* a month, but with the stipulation that the support was to be paid out exclusively from the enterprise's "excess" income - if it had any - and under no circumstances from the capital.

The payment of these 200 *złoty* thus depended on the willingness, or lack thereof, of the "trustees," who always found an excuse not to pay, although the sum was barely enough for three days' sustenance, under those conditions.

Over time, the raw materials which the former owners had accumulated were depleted and new material was supplied in very small quantities, almost inexistent, because most of the material was used for the production of munitions. As a result, the factories slowly ground to a halt. Post factum

attempts were made by the Germans to consolidate various firms into one enterprise, but this too was to no avail. In the end, the factories were completely liquidated and the machines were sent to Germany and melted down for metal to be used for the war effort (artillery, shells, etc.).

### **The Seizure of Apartments**

Not only were businesses and factories taken from the Jews, but their houses were also placed under a "trustee." An office was created to this purpose, under the name of "The Trusteeship for Jewish Real Estate". A specialist in housing management, who was for many years an administrator for Jewish home owners in Dortmund, was brought from Germany. This person immediately demanded that he be referred to as "Doctor", and he settled down in great magnificence and luxury in the city, as did all the other members of the German ruling class. He demanded that a villa be put at his disposal, which the *Judenrat* was forced to beautifully furnish, and such was also the case in regards to his office, which contained numerous chambers.

His deputy and the rest of his office's personnel were *Volksdeutsch* as well as Poles from Poznań, who had always had a reputation for antisemitism. They were given control over entire streets of houses and began collecting rent. The Jewish homeowners had to pay rent just as every other tenant.

After the press had written that the houses were neglected and unfit, the tenants were forced to pay money for supposed renovations. But, in fact, the money was used for other necessities and the apartments deteriorated even further. From time to time, the "trustees" carried out searches in the Jewish residences and, at this "opportunity", took anything of worth, on the pretext that it fell under requisition orders. In this manner, they took away small machines and goods etc.

They did this after the eight o'clock night curfew, when Jews were forbidden to be on the street and they could not see to how everything was being taken away.

Once, it happened that an audacious Jew, from whom everything had been taken, filed a complaint with the [Polish] police. The police's investigation confirmed his claim but, due to the fact that a *Volksdeutsch* was involved, the police did not have the authority to continue attending to the case and referred it to the Gestapo.

After a few days, the Jew and his son were summoned to the Gestapo. However, contrary to their expectations, viz. that their complaint would be looked into, they were welcomed with a savage beating and made to stand before the administrator who had robbed them, while the Gestapo officer reprimanded them, saying "Jewish swindlers may not accuse persons of the German People - under *any* circumstances."

Only with great difficulties was it possible to extract the two Jews from the Gestapo. This was a lesson for all of the Jews - that they were not to complain against a German or *Volksdeutsch*, regardless of what their crime may have been.