

The New Ghetto

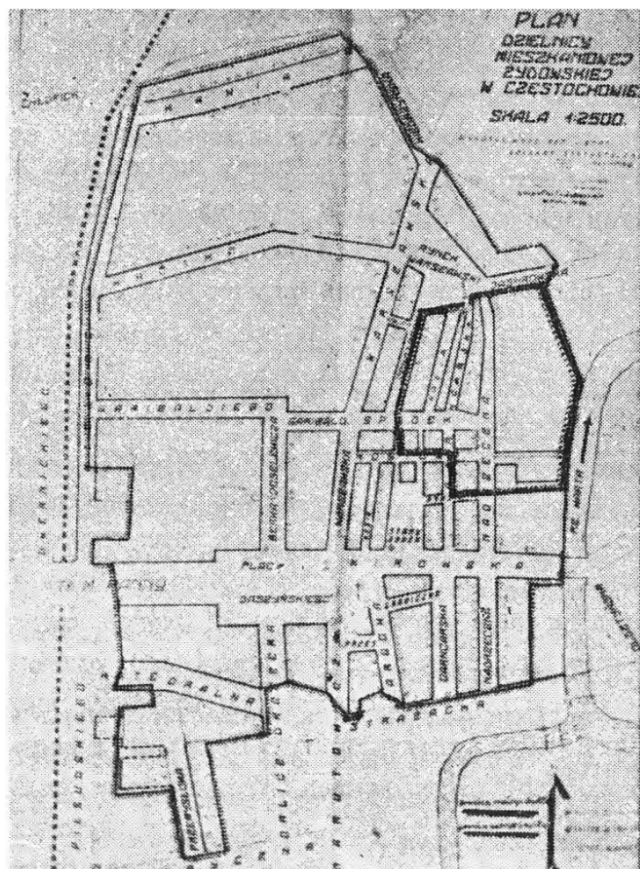
Following the five operations, during which 35,000 Jews were deported from our city, the ghetto became emptied. The houses were left deserted and the shops closed. From the window of my second-storey flat [at the Craftsmen's House], I saw guards patrolling the ghetto streets. Their task was to prevent the Polish population from looting the belongings that were left behind in the homes by their deported Jewish tenants. *Hauptmann* Degenhardt ordered that a "new ghetto" be set up, smaller than the previous one, in order to contain the Jews who still remained after the operations. He assigned the Chairman of the *Judenrat* to establish a new *Judenrat*, smaller than the first, and he ordered the Chief of Police's deputy to make a police force from the remaining fifty Jewish constables.

All the slave labourers from the factories and all those in quarantine - the doctors and their families, the nurses, and the entire hospital management - needed to be brought to the "New Ghetto."

Hauptmann Degenhardt chose three narrow, filthy alleys, without running water or sewers, and ordered the freshly organised Jewish "representation" to establish the new ghetto here. Under the supervision of the Jewish police, Jewish workers erected tall posts around the three ghetto streets/alleys, every three or four metres, and enclosed them with barbed wire. A wider space was left open for a gate. Thus, the "New Ghetto" was established.

The *Judenrat* reorganised - the swift activists assigned to each his position and they proceeded to their "activities". The *Judenrat* allocated lodgings for six to eight people per room or for three or four families together. "Furniture" was also distributed - old, broken tables and chairs - as anything that was still fit for use was removed by the Germans and transferred to their warehouses. A kitchen was set up, to which the municipal authorities allocated products and the life of wretchedness renewed its course.

During the cleaning operations in the "New Ghetto", people found hiding-places from which Jews emerged - men, women and children, who had been living in these hideouts in appalling conditions. But,



Map of the ghetto

they had endured nevertheless. They had the “luck” to be inside the ghetto again, where they would live amongst Jews.

They still needed to hide from Degenhardt and his gendarmes who came here, but it was easier for them anyway. Death no longer hovered above their heads as it had done previously and, besides, they would receive food here and would be able to wash. Nonetheless, the corpses of those who had not endured the terrible conditions were also taken out of the hiding places and, among them, there were also children who had died or who had been suffocated so as to not betray their presence by crying.

People, whose food had run out, began to emerge from bunkers onto other streets. The Germans shot them the instant they were noticed. When the emergence from the bunkers began to take on *en masse* characteristics, Degenhardt ordered that these people be concentrated on ul. Katedralna. This aroused concerns that *Hauptmann* Degenhardt was organising a new “*akcja*.”

And indeed, several days later, he ordered the deportation of eight hundred Jewish souls, who had been gathered in the collection point, to Radomsko. After this place was emptied of its Jews, Degenhardt instructed that anyone found in a bunker should be shot on the spot. From then on, each day brought new victims.

From Ghetto to “Labour Camp”

The “Small Ghetto,” as people called it, did not exist very long. The name “ghetto” was changed to “*Judenarbeitslager*” [Jewish Labour Camp]. In this labour camp, as well as in the Craftsmen’s House at Aleja 14, the “marks of disgrace” were abolished - the white bands with the Star of David on the right arm. However, simultaneously, people’s names were also “abolished” and each person received a tin plate with a number engraved on it, which one was required to wear on one’s chest. This measure depressed and humiliated the Jews even further.

At the beginning of December 1943 [sic; 1942 in the original], Degenhardt ordered all the Jewish doctors to present themselves in the former ghetto’s large square. This order made the doctors anxious, but all came to the appointed location at the specified hour. Degenhardt stood in front of them and told them that there were many Jews in Radomsko and a lack of doctors there. The authorities there had, therefore, requested that six doctors from the Cześćochowa “labour camp” be sent to them. And seeing as how, Degenhardt said, there were too many doctors here, he would send six of them there.

Of course, he asked no one if they desired to travel, but chose the delegates himself and notified them that they and their families were to make ready to travel to Radomsko within a few days. During the conversation with them, Degenhardt was extremely polite and he smiled unceasingly, remarking that, in three weeks’ time, they would be grateful to him for having sent them to such a good place.

Naturally, no one asked why in exactly another three weeks it would be “so good” for them.

Several days later, Degenhardt exchanged two of the six doctors intended for translocation. People said that the *Judenrat*’s hand was probably in this, because the consensus was that it was better to stay put than to travel far away to meet an unknown fate.

The doctors were sent off in mid-December. With their families, they presented themselves in the square, where a freight lorry already awaited them. The *Judenrat* came out to bid them farewell and gave them warm clothing. The remaining doctors and other people stood behind the barbed-wire fence and accompanied the travellers with teary eyes. While everyone had a sense of foreboding of what was to come, Degenhardt appeared again in the square and repeated his words that, in three weeks, the doctors would be grateful to him.

The residents of the Craftsmen's House were not allowed to leave the premises, but if someone required medical assistance, he was permitted to apply to the Chief of Police's deputy, who lived in the same building, upon which he would be escorted by a Jewish policeman to the labour camp - and back. Additionally, the residents of the Craftsmen's House were allowed to visit their family members at the "labour camp" once a week - on Sundays.

After each such visit to relatives in the "labour camp," the people returned broken and depressed. I also wanted to see the "labour camp" once, so one afternoon I set out with the others towards this camp.

In the "Labour Camp"

We went in twos, [each pair] escorted by a Jewish policeman - ten people in all. We walked in the centre of the road [as horses do], trudging through the mud. Polish passers-by looked into our eyes. Acquaintances no longer greeted us, but smiled from a distance. Antisemites mocked us and accompanied us with unrepeatable insults. Youths particularly "excelled" in this - they ran after us, shouting insults and curses [not only at us, but] also at the Jewish constable.

So, we walked along the long ul. Wilsona until its end, where we entered the former ghetto's first street, which is called "Krótka." There, we saw a horrifying image. The windows of the houses in which the Jews had lived not long ago stood open, the window panes were broken and the frames hung only half-attached to their hinges. The wind whistled through the rooms, blowing the rain-soaked curtains far inside. From within, we heard doors slamming back and forth. The ghostly winds cast their terror over the entire area, as it were. The gates of the houses were wide open and, as we passed by and gazed intently inside, we could see belongings strewn about in the courtyards - pieces of broken furniture, family photographs, and religious books. In the central entrances, were pots, bowls and other crockery. Some shops had been broken into and the remnants of merchandise lay strewn about. It was obvious that the shops had been looted and stripped of their contents.

Thus our group of ten, escorted by a Jewish policeman, passed through the streets of our city, where thousands of Jews had once lived, where effervescent Jewish life had thrived, with each open window reminding you of an acquaintance or of a friend. And now, all was deserted.. We did not see a single living soul!

We passed the square called the "Small Warsaw Market," and, again, we saw empty, deserted houses. We continued walking until we came to the "labour camp" - our intended destination - and stopped in front of a large gate at which stood a *Wachtmeister* [police constable], as they call them in German. He was tall and rosy-cheeked and, upon seeing us, asked, "Who are these loafers?" to which the Jewish policeman replied that he was escorting ten men from the Craftsmen's House to the doctor. In these proceedings, we found out that this *Wachtmeister* was the manager of the "labour camp" and that the Jewish policemen held him in high esteem. He was happy to socialise with some of them, even to the extent of clinking glasses or breaking bread together. This, however, did not stop him from shooting Jews at every "opportunity" and dispensing beatings for the merest

trifle. We entered through the large gate, on the outside of which a Polish policeman stood, whereas on the inside stood a Jewish one.

I began walking along one of the three narrow alleys and I chanced upon various Jewish policemen, who eyed me with suspicion, as if wanting to say, "What are you doing here?"

I then met a Jewish policeman with whom I was acquainted. He warned me that, according to the present regulations, no Jew was permitted to be out in the street from five in the morning to five in the evening, because everyone was required to be at work. Only those working in the factories at night were permitted on the streets of the "labour camp" in the daytime. These people wore special yellow bands on their arms with the inscription "night shift." If someone was caught without the yellow arm-band - they killed him!

The constable added that *Hauptmann* Degenhardt himself came here often, roaming the streets and searching for victims. He ordered houses to be opened and checked for anyone who might be hiding. On one occasion, he found two young people in a flat - one was a night shift worker and the other was ill and was unable to go to work that day. Degenhardt ordered that the night worker be taken to the German guard and that the second be executed.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon and I, therefore, waited at my policeman acquaintance's lodgings till five, to go out on the street. His flat was in a building which was reserved exclusively for Jewish policemen. They lived there with their families, each family in a separate room. The more respected ones had two rooms. The policemen's wives were exempt from labour and they were permitted to have their children "openly" with them. (This was a special right.) But all were very concerned regarding the future. Every mother sought ways to send the children over to the "Aryan side", as they had a feeling that, sooner or later, children would no longer be "tolerated" in the labour camp. Degenhardt would not allow anyone who was not working to live there. Moreover, they did not believe that even those working would be permitted to live long. There was a general feeling of scepticism concerning the labour camp's fate.

Suddenly, I heard a faint noise from behind the door. A woman exited the room and immediately returned, accompanied by a man, to whom she said, "Father, you can stay here. This Jew (pointing at me) is an acquaintance of ours from the Craftsmen's House". I was quite taken aback hearing the woman address the man as "father," for I had known the woman's father for a long time. It was very difficult for me to recognise him, as he had changed beyond recognition. Before the War, he had been the *Vice-prezes* of the Jewish *Kehilla* in Cześćochowa, a Jew of about sixty, with a large beard. He had had a haberdasher's store in one of the city's best neighbourhoods. Now, I saw him in front of me - clean shaven. His grey hair was dyed black and his figure seemed to have shrunk. With teary eyes, the man told me that he was there with his wife. They had lain hidden in a cellar for entire days and nights and could no longer bear the suffering and tribulations. I wished to see his wife as well and, therefore, waited until darkness fell. The daughter then went down and brought her mother up into the room. She entered quietly. "We have to be careful even of our own Jews," she said gloomily.

She knew me at once. I, however, had to look carefully to recognise her as the comely and charming woman she had once been. She confessed that she had already grown weary of life for all the troubles and sorrow, but she persevered - only because her daughter desired it. The two elderly folk then burst into tears. They lamented at not having gone together with all the other Jews to Treblinka. Their son-in-law, the policeman, had made all possible efforts to conceal them in all sorts of holes, hiding-places in cellars and attics. He had transferred them from place to place, from door to door, had bribed gendarmes to save them, until he brought them here to the "New Ghetto," the

current "labour camp." It was impossible to obtain lodgings for them, because they were living there "illegally" and did not have numbers. They were, therefore, compelled to conceal themselves and to live in constant fear, for they were convinced that they would eventually fall into the murderers' hands.

It was already quite dark when I went out into the street. The "labour camp's" alleys were [poorly] lit. I unexpectedly met an acquaintance who had been a conductor of the "TOZ" choir. We were both glad that we had remained alive and he invited me to his lodgings. On a specific stretch of the alley along which we were walking, we heard Jews loudly crying, "*Meat for sale! Fresh bread! Rolls, bagels, sausage, herring, sugar, liquor!*"

As I approached them, I saw they were the same workers from the factory who, upon their return from work, had become traders. They brought the merchandise from the "Aryan side", which they had bought or received in barter for garments they had given and, here, they were selling them. The prices were rather high. We entered a spacious courtyard, climbed hills, passed through holes in fences, winding paths and back doors. Every few steps, a Jew stood and whispered to the buyers - what was available today. They were very vigilant, in case someone should come along, who needed to be avoided. On the day of my visit, small sausages were available. Clients went in and out. Everything transpired quietly and cautiously. For the production of sausage, one received the death penalty, but conditions were so bad that they were willing to take the risk, because life was constantly in peril anyway. In another alley, Jews were selling garments - trousers, coats, underwear, etc. These were items that had been gathered from deserted Jewish houses and taken to the large warehouses on ul. Garibaldiego. The people's belongings were sorted by Jews, who worked like slaves. To stay alive, these slave workers - people who at home had received the best upbringing - risked their lives by "stealing" things, putting them on when they left work. Thus, they put their lives in peril on a daily basis, by "stealing" Jewish clothes from the Germans.

I went up to my friend's room-and-a-half accommodation. As soon as I entered, my attention was drawn to the seven beds that were set up there - some iron and others wooden, old - some were propped up with planks. Four women hung about there - it was very crowded. As there were not enough chairs to go around, they mainly sat on the beds. One young man was lying in bed. I inquired whether he was ill, to which the sick man himself replied, "There's nothing wrong with me. I lie in bed out of boredom". He was also surprised that I did not recognise him. I looked closer at him - a haggard countenance, a skull cap on his head, but I could not recognise him at all. Seeing my struggle to place him - in vain - he blurted out, "I am the city Chazan [cantor] - or I was".



"Die Yatke" (The "Slaughterhouse of Death") - the Polish and Ukrainian police were housed in this building and many Częstochowa Jews were murdered in its courtyard.

Upon hearing this, I was startled! Is this our Chazan, with the great beard and broad features who, on his way to the synagogue every Friday, used to walk through the Jewish neighbourhood so erect and proud? How changed the man had become, one cannot imagine - he had truly become a different person.

I did not ask him what had been the fate of his family, not wishing to reopen wounds, but he himself began telling me, "I have become a bachelor", he said bitterly. His wife, with their seven children, had been deported. Now he must look young - he was recorded here as a 25-year old. His beard was

shaved off and he has become very thin. Suddenly, it was as if he had awoken from a slumber. Then he sat up in bed with a jerk, his face reddened as if blood had been poured into it. Clenching his fists, he yelled [wildly], "The murderers! They've made me young! Turned me into a bachelor! Annihilated my seven children! Murdered my wife!" His rage caused him to tear out of the bed. He dressed hurriedly, tearing his coat in so doing. He then sat down at the table, alternately standing up and sitting down again – he simply could not find his place.

My friend winked at me, hinting that I should change the subject of our conversation so as to take his mind off the great pain and to soothe him a little. I attempted to do so, but in vain. He was unable to conquer his grief. He paced back and forth, speaking as if to himself, "I go every day to work - I'm a slave. I work in a factory. To what end? Why am I still alive - to be a slave for the Germans?"

A few of the other household members sat down at the corner of the table and set down bread on it. At the other end of the table, another couple was eating. The chairs were given, in turn, to those sitting down to eat. In all, four couples and four "bachelors" lived here. During the daytime, they were all at work - both men and women – and, in the evening, they returned here, bringing with them their soup and chunk of bread [from the soup-kitchen] and whoever had any money bought himself other things in the street.

My acquaintance, the choir conductor, a very dear man, told me that his wife and children had been deported and that he had remained all alone. He had grown weary of his life and would end it - but had not the courage to do so.

I then remembered that, at seven o'clock, I had to be at the exit of the "labour camp" in order to go home with my group. But it was already later and I scrambled to leave as quickly as possible. When I came to the barbed-wire fence, I learned my group had left about half an hour before. I was therefore left with no other option but to spend the night in the "labour camp" and to leave at dawn with a group of labourers going to work.

It was permitted to be out on the street until nine o'clock. As I walked in the street, I met several other acquaintances, whom I told about the tense situation I had gotten into. One of them took me home with him and arranged a place for me to sleep on the floor, saying that, for one night, one could sleep even in that manner.

I entered a large room in which six people lived, three men and three women. Young women, who had remained without their husbands, and men, who had remained without their wives. They had decided to get married and live together, for the loneliness was hard for them [to bear].

Each of them had experienced great misfortune, but the drive to live is great and one seeks a way to survive. I saw a young and attractive woman who, before the War, had lived with her husband and two children in a magnificent villa. Now she was living in this flat with her partner and six other people. During the day, they were at work and, in the evening, she cooked the food. They occupied one-third of the room, which was partitioned off with some sort wardrobe made of planks and, inside their section, was but one piece of "furniture" - a bed. In another corner, my acquaintance lived with a girl who had been orphaned during an "*akcja*." He had had a wife and two children and, being a policeman, he had been able to conceal his family for some time. But, during an "*akcja*", when he was on "duty", a gendarme found her and conducted the family to the railway carriages. Now, he had married the young lady. The third corner of the room was occupied by a young man with his wife. The man was a general labourer [without any specialty]. His wife and child had been deported during the third "*akcja*." He then married his wife's sister, who had remained all alone.

This young man earned more than the others living with him. He had become a carter and he transported the belongings from the [former] ghetto to the warehouses on ul. Garibaldiego. He therefore had the opportunity to conceal all sorts of items, which he then brought home and gave to those living with him to sell. In exchange for the items, they brought him money or goods which they traded for them.

The three couples eat well, drink alcohol, and smoke. They wish to forget what was and not think - what will be.

In another corner of the room stood a cooking range, which everyone used and, in the centre of the room, stood a large table surrounded by chairs that were also for collective use.

They told me of rumours that the Germans would soon be conducting another "*akcja*", for Degenhardt had been heard saying that he was aware of people and children who were hidden in the "labour camp". But this information is not conclusive.

When I sat at the table with these people, it seemed as if we were dining normally - albeit in a primitive manner, but comfortably. But in truth, this was only an appearance. Deep in each of their hearts, a heavy stone pressed, not ceasing to torture them for one instant. With the first sips of liquor, tears welled in the corners of their eyes, and streamed increasingly stronger, until the women were weeping disconsolately.

"Why are you crying?", the "new" husband asked his "new" wife, who had lost her two children in the "*akcja*." The woman stood up from her place, walked stumblingly and fell onto the bed crying miserably. "Where are my children now?", she screamed hysterically. At the word "children", the others also began weeping and, soon, sorrow and bereavement pervaded the entire room. The food [roasted goose] remained unconsumed, [the liquor was not drunk] and the depression and tears continued for a long while, until everyone turned towards their corners - including myself - and went to sleep for the night.

In the morning, I went to the assembly point for the workers and joined a group which was going in the direction of the "Craftsmen's House".