

Szlojme Waga

The Terror Increases

Signs appeared of harsher terror in relation to the Jewish population. A member of the Gestapo once detained a Jew outside the ghetto, took him into a courtyard and shot him. The Jewish police received an order by telephone, two hours later, that they should come with a horse-drawn wagon and take away "*das dreck*" [Ger.; the rubbish] (viz., the victim) that would be found at the indicated address.

Several days later, two youths were detained, by the Gestapo, in the ghetto after eight o'clock at night. The Jews presented their [night] passes, but the Gestapo took them away from them and ordered them to enter their car. They drove the young men to the cemetery, robbed them of everything they had and shot them.

Another case that illustrates the increase in terror occurred at the office of the *Stadthauptmann* [mayor]:

A Jewish physician named Dr Wolberg, who was in charge of the ghetto's sanitation, was called to this office. Being forced to wait a long time, Dr Wolberg started to read a German newspaper which he had with him. At this point, the *Stadthauptmann's* deputy, with whom the doctor was well acquainted, came out of one of the offices and, despite their knowing each other, tore the newspaper out of the doctor's hands in anger, moreover slapping and admonishing him that "*A Jew does not need to read a newspaper, especially not a German one!*"

The *Judenrat* was suddenly ordered by the regime to vacate its premises at Aleja 11, within two days, and to move their offices to ul. Garncarska, to the building in which the Crafts School had been located for many years. All the equipment and machines of the locksmith, carpentry and electrical departments had been removed beforehand and given to the Polish Crafts School. The *Judenrat* made great efforts to carry out the order within the designated time limit. Two days later, the Jewish tenants of the adjacent house were thrown out and concerns arose that the whole Aleja would soon be "purified" of Jews. The Jews, therefore, began taking anything they could out of their houses and transferring their belongings to acquaintances who lived in the streets deeper inside the ghetto.

Others brought valuable possessions and merchandise to Christian acquaintances. Every day, they feared that policemen would arrive and drive them out of their residences.

The panic grew even more at the end of August, with the news that the "*Juden Ausrottung Kommando*" [Commando for the Extermination of Jews] would be coming to Czestochowa. Many began to set up secret hiding-places in cellars and attics. The *Stadthauptmann* ordered the *Judenrat* to make "contribution" (a fine) of 550,000 *zlotych*, without explaining why. At a *Judenrat* meeting, it was decided that the sum must be paid, just as previous fines had been paid. Some were even of the opinion that, if the sum were to be mustered quickly, it would save the Jewish population from the impending doom.

But the question arose: Where was such a large sum to be found, and swiftly, to boot?!

Were they to tax the masses? It would, naturally, take a long time. It was therefore decided to ask the affluent Jews that they immediately lend this sum to the *Judenrat*, 70% of which would be returned once they collected the money from the general population. Having reached this decision, the well-to-do Jews were summoned to the *Judenrat*, where the Chairman described the approaching danger that threatened the Jews if the sum was not paid within the required term. The majority at once gave significant sums and some paid on the following day.

The *Judenrat* approached anyone whom they considered had any substantial means and a special commission was created to this purpose, which determined the quota that each was required to pay. The vast majority gave their share and, those who refused to do so, were forced to pay by the police. However, the scale of the *Judenrat's* monetary needs was so large that the newly-collected money melted in their hands and the wealthy Jews, who had given vast sums as loans, never saw their money again.

A Letter from Berlin

A local man, a well-known Jew in the city, once received a letter from his daughter in Berlin through a trustworthy clandestine channel. Years earlier, she had married a German who was an important figure in Germany. She somehow managed to remain with her husband and, here she was, writing to her parents, who had always been the dearest in the world to her, that she had heard from very reliable sources about the extermination of the Jews in the countries occupied by the Germans.

Therefore, she advises her parents to commit suicide and names various drugs and chemical preparations which would cause instant - painless – death. She goes on to implore her parents to do this with all possible haste, for they have little time left. Furthermore, the daughter notes that, if they do commit suicide and if fate should decree that she and her son Heinrich should survive, she would sometimes be able make a pilgrimage to their graves and commune with their memory. Only if they committed suicide would she be able to find their graves. But, if they waited for the general extermination, they would suffer a great deal. If, however, she and her son did not survive and this was entirely possible should it become known she is a Jew, her husband would visit their graves and also write to her sister, Liza, in Palestine, so that she should know where to find her parents after their deaths.

She bids her parents farewell with moving words, as does her son, who parts with his grandparents in a touching manner. Her husband also writes them a stirring letter, assuring them he is doing everything possible to save his beloved wife and [only] son. The paper, containing these tragic words, became warped in many places by the great amount of tears shed from the distraught daughter's weeping eyes which it had absorbed.

She then writes that she would have preferred to send the tears, wet and hot, straight from her eyes, but this being impossible, she bids them to accept them as they are, within the wrinkled paper, just as she had used to send dried flowers in her letters to her parents in the past.

The harrowing contents of this shocking letter loomed over the ghetto as a spectre. It threw terror into everyone who heard of it [or read it]. People listened and thought to themselves, "If a daughter has decided to give such advice to her parents!!!..."

This letter did much to increase the fear and panic of the people towards what was to come.

The Cieszanów Labour Camp

There was a small shtetl in the Lublin area named Cieszanów, where the Germans created a labour camp for the Jews. The Jewish labour office was ordered, by the authorities, to provide a thousand young men between the ages of 15-18 [sic.; 18-25, in the original]. Clerks immediately went out with notifications and demanded of young Jews to present themselves at the labour office during the course of the day, in order to be sent from there to the workplace.

Meanwhile, the *Judenrat* made use of the opportunity to increase its funds and permitted the rich to ransom themselves with the payment of money. Others - from amongst the poor - were forced to take their place, of course. Several days after the youths were sent away to the camp, letters arrived from them, which told of horrible conditions. They were being tortured, cruelly beaten and had nothing to eat. The parents of the young people, upon receiving this terrifying news, ran to the *Judenrat* to ask for help. But here too, the *Judenrat* was unable, as always, to extend any aid at all.

Thus passed the summer and, only in the autumn of 1940, when escapees from the camp arrived, did we learn, in detail from their stories, what had happened in the camp since they had first arrived there:

Upon leaving Częstochowa, they had been conducted under armed escort to Lublin, where they were loaded onto cattle-wagons. They were then handed over to the S.A. [*Sturmabteilung*; paramilitaries], who had come especially from Cieszanów to take the slave-labourers there. Upon their arrival at night, the S.A. men took them out of the wagons and made them march for several kilometres - whipping them with iron whips - until they reached the camp. Here they fell, exhausted and broken, onto the [bare] ground and only at daybreak were they first able to look around them and see the barracks - without roofs - that had been erected by the Jews who had been brought there before. But there was little time to look around, because the troubles began at once. They received their daily rations - 100 grams of bread and a half-litre of watery soup - and were then taken to work in the adjacent woods, where the Germans were secretly building fortifications near the German-Russian border, [this was in 1940] when Germany and Russia still had what was considered a "friendly" relationship. The Jews dug pits under the supervision of the S.A. As they dug, they were cruelly beaten with lead riding crops which flew over their heads. With rifles and whips, the German killers cracked heads, disfigured faces, gouged out eyes and knocked out teeth - and often, after such "operations," many people lay dead at the workplace.

The dead were thrown into the pits on the spot and covered with earth. They had but one epithet for all Jews - "Israel". Jews chopped down trees in the forests and the Germans beat them, regardless whether someone worked well or poorly.

The murderers devised various methods of torture. Suddenly an S.A. man might order a Jew to lower his trousers and to lie with his backside facing upwards on a cut-down tree trunk. He would then force two of his working colleagues to beat him with [thin] branches with all their might. And, if the blows they gave him seemed to him not strong enough, he would order them to also lie down in the same manner - and he would take up a piece of wood, himself, and would beat all three until the blood gushed forth. He often continued beating his victims until they had stopped screaming from the pain and fell unconscious off the tree trunk onto the blood-soaked ground. Whoever no longer stood up on his feet was flung into the pit and covered with soil.

Once, It occurred that a young man stood up in the middle of a beating and asked the S.S. [sic; S.A.] man, "Why am I being beaten?" The punishment for his daring to inquire was horrific - he was forced to put his hands in his trouser pockets and, in this position, he was placed in the pit and

buried alive. Only his hair was left sticking out, as a warning - here is what happens to those who ask questions. "Jews", they said, "must only do as they are told, and not ask questions."



Funeral of the twenty seven victims, who were murdered at the Rynek Warszawski [a square in Częstochowa] in 1943. The funeral took place in 1946.

The commander of the labour camp was one named Dolf, a major, who had not earned the title "King of the Sadists" without good reason. One of his favourite "games" was to have people stand in a row and to hit them between the eyes with his revolver. However, the Jews had become so indifferent to death, that the call to come and participate in this "game" no longer made any impression on them. For them, dying by a bullet constituted a "luxurious death" - it was better to be shot than to fall under a hail of blows or to be buried alive in the ground. Major Dolf visited the labour sites every day, and, in every division, he left several people dead.

Major Dolf had a son living not far from the camp, who would often come to visit his father. Dolf Junior was unfortunately a sports enthusiast and was particularly fond of boxing. He would make several Jews stand in a row and "learn" boxing with them, hitting them cruelly in the face and in all parts of their bodies. After the Jews fell powerless to the ground, he would drive them out of the room, whacking them over the head and would then bring in others to replace them. He would hold several suchlike "rounds". Dolf Junior, just like his father, enjoyed shooting live people. But, whereas his father shot them between the eyes, he aimed for the middle of the head. The killer did this in this fashion - he would order a Jew to run and would shoot after him until he had hit the middle of his head. Every time he came to the camp, he engaged in this "sport", until he had hit the centre of a Jew's "clever" head, as was his expression.

Major Dolf and his son had trained hounds, which they would set upon the Jewish workers. The dogs fall upon the victims and would tear pieces of flesh from their faces and bodies. Once the gruesome carnage had concluded, they were submitted to affective petting and fussing by their masters.

One summer night, several drunken S.A. men barged into a barrack with metal whips in their hands, and ordered one hundred Jews to go out naked into the courtyard. Several Jews were shot at once on the spot. Those remaining were ordered to march to the small town of Cieszanów. Upon arriving there, they were marched naked to the cemetery. The S.A. men whipped them the entire way and, when they arrived at the cemetery, their flesh was crisscrossed with wounds and scars and their

bodies burned with the heat of the cruel blows that had been hailed on them. Only three had been able to escape along the way.

The cutthroats ordered the Jews to dig pits, but there were no spades. So the S.A. men made them run to swampy ground, where they shot everyone.

Several young men in the barracks decided to escape to the Russian side. They worked diligently at their posts, so as not to arouse any suspicion and, on a dark night, they very cautiously sneaked out of the barracks. They made it to the nearby woods and set out towards the Russian border.

After several hours of losing their way, they were stopped by the Russian Border Guard, who took them to their unit's headquarters to be interrogated. They were questioned and their statements regarding the appalling conditions in the German labour camp were taken down. But they explained that, by agreement with the Germans, the Russians could not permit anyone to cross the border illegally and that they would therefore be sent back to the Germans.

All their endeavours and begging were to no avail and, on a dark night, they were taken by the Russians back to the border, which they had to steal across and then penetrate back into the camp clandestinely. Here, they joined a different group of workers, thus erasing their tracks.

The *Akcja* of 22nd September 1942

On Yom Kippur, 21st September 1942, the city's streets looked as on any regular weekday. The men went in groups to their workplaces, while the women engaged in cleaning the windows and doors of the German offices. The teachers, lawyers and other intellectuals marched, in orderly rows, with brooms on their shoulders to their workplaces. And anyone, in general, who had somewhere to work, rushed with hurried steps to the appointed place, tapping the rhythm of a slave-march out with their wooden clogs. Only here and there flitting shadows moved along the wall, pressed closely to it, cautiously, to avoid being seen. These were elderly individuals, who were attempting to reach the synagogue to spend the entire day there in prayer.

At the offices of the *Judenrat*, the officials sat without any work, for on this day there were no applicants. At one point, an official entered, in conversation with the German chief - Herr Frentzel. He told him of the fear that reigned, among the Jews, of the forthcoming "deportations". Upon hearing this, Frentzel was angered, and he burst out, "Have you gone mad? There is no such thing!"

At the official's request, Frentzel rang various places, after which he explicitly stated that nothing would happen, because "where would he find the thousands of people he needed for work?"

Nevertheless, an atmosphere of impending doom loomed over the ghetto. Some even said that on the following day, 22nd September, the deportation of Jews would take place in Częstochowa. Information filtered through, from the "Aryan" side, that Ukrainians and Latvians had already arrived in the city and had boasted somewhere that they had come here to put an end to the Jews. A Polish lady, who owned a restaurant, said that Ukrainians and Latvians, who had come from Warsaw, had already been eating at her restaurant for several days. On one occasion, they even told her that they had been in the Warsaw ghetto for two months and had liquidated the Jews there. Now they would do the same with the Jews of Częstochowa.

This news spread and soared through the ghetto streets like a windstorm and the terror grew from moment to moment.

On the large square near the ghetto limits, all the sergeants of the gendarmerie were seen assembled. They had been given various nicknames for their cruelty - "White Head," "Barrel," "Killer," "Throat" and others. They stood there [with their bicycles], holding discussions amongst themselves, in constant movement. Every now and then, one would ride off and return after a while, after which somebody else would go off. They carried on their conversations almost in whispers, pointing with their hands here to one street, there to another. It all gave the impression that something was being planned here. The Jews, who noticed these movements, pointed out the scenario which was unfolding before their eyes to the others, and the panic grew.

However, a calming message from the Chairman of the *Judenrat* was spread in the afternoon hours, after the authorities had notified him he was to tell the Jews that nothing would happen to them, and that all the rumours were groundless. To the Craftsmen's House [?] came the lawyer Pohoryles, Chief of the *Judenrat* organisation - a mature and composed man - who assured, with complete certainty, that he "had heard from reliable sources that there is no cause for fear - not tomorrow, nor the day after tomorrow, and that nothing will happen to anyone at all." At that same time, an officer from the gendarmerie and his wife came to a craftsman and commissioned several items, the production of which would take over a fortnight. Very cautiously, the craftsman remarked to the German that according to rumours, "something" was to happen tomorrow that might prevent the completion of his order. The officer dismissed this rumour laughingly and promised that "here, in town, nothing will happen." The good news spread throughout the ghetto with the speed of lightning and the fear fell from the faces of the Jews to a certain extent.

The Streetlights Remain Lit All Night

However, the calming news could not entirely banish all concerns from Jewish hearts. The ominous signs were too apparent to not worry. Therefore, people did not sleep at all on the night after *Yom Kippur*, but stayed up at home. It was a very dark night. Usually, the streetlights were turned off, as a precaution against aircraft. How those who stayed up all night were astonished to see all the lights suddenly turned on, this time remaining lit all night long!

It was as if the danger of aerial attacks had suddenly ceased to be a concern and the lights shone as they had done before the War. Furthermore, an electrician surveyed the ghetto streets, checking the entire electrical grid.

In my case, I went out onto my balcony at home. It had a view from the *Aleja*, along all its length as far as the *Nowy Rynek*. I saw unfamiliar military units. They were short, stocky fellows, dressed in long coats, with guns on their shoulders. Besides these, there were also gendarmes. They marched into the ghetto in groups, stopping before each house and leaving one or two of their men as guards. Under my balcony, on my threshold, two gendarmes with metal helmets on their heads stood guard. A little further, on the "Aryan" side, two others stood while, in the middle [of the *Aleja*], patrols of gendarmes and Ukrainians marched back and forth. In the quiet of the night, various military commands were heard from further inside the ghetto - "Right! Left! March!" Someone stopped in front of our gate and called to the guard to open it. None of the tenants was asleep any longer. We turned our gaze to the gate and saw that a Polish policeman had come to summon the chief of the Jewish police's deputy and several other policemen who lived in the building to report at once to the police headquarters. We did not get any answers to our questions about what was happening. The Polish policeman was extremely agitated and he hurried off to call Jewish policemen out from other houses.

At about five o'clock in the morning, we suddenly heard the shots and the roars of the Germans. The fusillades and the clamour continued until daybreak and, suddenly, we saw that a great multitude of

Jews, with small packs on their backs, was being conducted by the Germans to the same square where the gendarmes had held their discussions the previous day. Fear seized us, the residents of the Craftsmen's House. We gathered together, several families in one residence and, from time to time, stole a glance out the window. We saw how the Gestapo, with the *Totenkopf* [Death's Head] insignia on their hats and uniforms and with pistols drawn, were herding multitudes of Jews to the square.

This "operation", accompanied with shooting and roaring, lasted for several hours. While this was happening, we noticed a Jewish policeman enter our house. The previous night, he had left his wife there with relatives. Upon seeing this policeman, several of us hurried down to the dwelling he had entered. We saw him standing and crying like a small child. He told us that horrible things were happening in the ghetto.

When the Jewish policemen arrived the police headquarters in the morning, they were ordered by Degenhardt, who was in charge of the whole operation, to carry out the instructions they were about to receive accurately. "Whoever does not conform to these commands", the German threatened, "will be shot on the spot!"

Firstly, they received the task to enter all the Jewish homes in the streets that would be indicated to them and to tell all the Jews - everyone: men, women and children - that they should come out in groups and walk in orderly rows, one behind the other, to the Nowy Rynek. They were only permitted to take along small packs. The houses were to remain open, with the keys in the door. And, again, the threat, "Whoever hides - will be shot!"

This is My Mother

Degenhardt's orders shook the hearts of the Jewish policemen and their faces became pale. They grasped the essence of the sorrowful role that they had to carry out, but they nevertheless set forth to fulfil the command.

However, it seemed that this was not completely left to the Jewish policemen. The ghetto streets were full of gendarmes and Gestapo men, who burst into residences and drove the people out, searching everyone's pockets and yelling, "Money! Diamonds!", and robbing them of anything of value. The old and the sick, those could not move, were shot then and there. These were the shots and shouting that we had heard at daybreak. The policeman then told us that he had led his mother outside the house, because her crippled legs had failed and she could not walk by herself.

But, as he led her through the streets, someone pushed him from behind, making him fall to the ground. He at once recovered and, as he sprung to his feet, he saw how the murderer was pointing a revolver at his mother's heart. He only had time to shout out, "This is my mother!" and three shots instantly rang out. The mother fell there and, within seconds, gave up her spirit. He carried her into a courtyard and hid her in a garden, covering her with branches. As he concluded his account, the policeman burst into tears and hastened to leave the dwelling.

At around three o'clock in the afternoon, the policemen, who lived with us at the Craftsmen's House, returned. They were exhausted and shattered. After they had somewhat composed themselves, they began to tell us what had happened in the ghetto.

One described how small children, aged between three to eight, who had been put in the care of Poles on the "Aryan" side the previous day for great sums of money - for fear of the operation - were driven by the Poles out of their houses. The children ran about frightened and confused, but

the Germans and their Ukrainian helpers did not allow them back into the ghetto, but instead chased them into the square, where a great multitude was concentrated. The children cried and screamed, but no one paid them any attention. The masses of thousands of people were chased by the German murderers and their Ukrainian helpers with sticks and pistols, so that the children were simply crushed and trampled under the feet of the pursued masses.

The operation encompassed the streets Garibaldi, Wilsona, Krótka, Kawia and part of Warszawska. It was decided that, in the first operation, 7,000 Jews should be gathered and deported.

Degenhardt, the *Hauptmann*, stood in the market square with a baton in his hand like an orchestra conductor and contemplated the multitudes passing before him. When he noticed a strong man or a beautiful young woman, he pointed with his wand and the person indicated was immediately taken from the row and placed at the side. This meant - remains.

Those saved were forced to relinquish their families and this needed to be done quickly. No goodbyes were said. Tears streamed down cheeks, eyes stared sorrowfully, children wept and women tore their hair - all this quickly, quickly - the murderers kept "order", pushing and shoving, and wildly shouting, "Quickly, quickly!"

The *Hauptmann* ordered that the Jewish doctors and their families be placed in quarantine and that they remain there. The wives and children of the Jewish policemen were also to be taken there. The unmarried doctors and policemen took advantage of the opportunity and pointed to female acquaintances as being their wives, so that they too should be taken to "safety".

The large mass of people was conducted, by troops, to the Warta train station, where railway wagons and gendarmes were already waiting. Here, an order was given that all Jews take their shoes off and lay them aside.

Great mounds of shoes at once piled high, each pair tied together by its laces. Then, a second command was given: "Enter the wagons!" Here, there was pushing, blows and pandemonium, until everyone was crammed into the wagons. The crowding was horrific. More than one hundred people were packed into each railway wagon. The Gestapo men looted here too, taking anything they could lay their hands on.

The Chairman of the *Judenrat*, after much effort, received permission to have his wife brought to the office of the *Judenrat* and to save her in this manner. But, when he went to bring her there, he heard from a Jewish policeman that she had already been loaded into a railway wagon. He ran to an officer of the gendarmerie whom he knew and asked him for help to extract his wife, citing the authorisation he had received from Degenhardt. The officer agreed and went with him to the railway wagon to free his wife. As she was alighting, another lady managed to toss her infant child into her arms and she brought it away with her. Everyone stretched their hands out to the Chairman of the *Judenrat*, pleading, "Take me out of her. I am weak. My heart will not withstand this crowded carriage." However, the heavy wagon doors rolled on their small wheels and all the cries and entreaties were dimmed, silenced, and disappeared. One after the other, the doors of the other wagon were also closed and the train began to move.