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## The Workers Council in Częstochowa



A localised Jewish institution existed inside the Częstochowa ghetto - The Workers Council.

A few days after “Bloody Monday” (4<sup>th</sup> September 1939), members of “*Ha’Chalutz*” and the “Working Land of Israel League” held deliberations concerning the renewal of activities at the pioneers’ farm which, following the evacuation of most of its members, had been destroyed by the local Poles. Engineer Leib Horowicz and Simche Lastman displayed great selflessness at the time, saving the possessions and goods of the farm which, under the new circumstances, should have been the centre of all the illegal political and educational information work.

The Workers Council was established in May 1940, when the law of forced labour for Jews was implemented.

The entire brunt of this harsh law was borne by the poor workers and commoners. In many cases, this spelt absolute ruin. Labouring in Bugaj [a neighbourhood of Częstochowa] was extremely difficult. We were forced to stand all day long, barefoot in water, and work hard. Due to the widespread want, men came to work without food and it often happened that they fell unconscious to the ground from hunger and physical exhaustion.

This same slave-labour was, nevertheless, a great source of monetary income for the *Judenrat*, which took pay-offs from certain individuals to not go to work, and it put that money to various uses.

The leaders of “*Ha’Chalutz*” then resolved to organise a campaign and demand from the *Judenrat* that the workers should alternate. Afterwards, once the “*Kucelinka*” and “*Bugaj*” workplaces had been set up, it was decided to hold a protest rally at the hall of the *Judenrat*.

On 12<sup>th</sup> May 1940, a crowd of a thousand people, headed by the leaders of the Workers Council - Szyldhaus, Szmulewicz and Rozenwajn - occupied the *Judenrat*’s premises and, under the pressure of the assembled public, the representatives of the *Judenrat* were forced to give in to certain demands, such as organising workers’ kitchens and distributing bread rations to those working.

In the autumn of 1940, the Jewish population was shocked by the German demand that a thousand young men present themselves for compulsory work in Cieszanów and Hrubieszów (Lublin region). In its proclamations, the *Judenrat* wrote that the work would be well-paid and it requested that volunteers should present themselves. The result was that *Judenrat* sent volunteers, including the under-aged and the sick.

It was not long before terrible news began coming from the camps - hunger, filth and torture. Then news came of the first victims in Cieszanów. The embitterment of the Jewish population grew daily. Every day, hundreds of people went to the *Judenrat* headquarters, where heartrending scenes were played out.



offices of "Ha'Chalutz" in Warsaw, as did Marjem Hajnsdorf from "Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair". Later, Frumke Plotnicka and Rywka Glanc from "Dror" and Leizer Geller from "Gordonia" came. We suggested forming a unified *kibbutz*, but were unsuccessful. In the end, we decided that "Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair" should organise its own *kibbutz* and "Dror", together with "Gordonia", another one. The Workers Council strongly supported these *kibbutzim*.

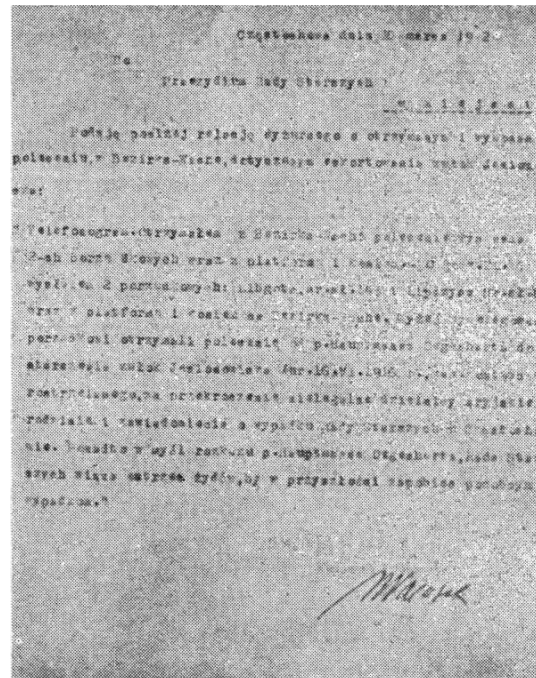
### **Judenrat - Against the Resistance**

Meanwhile, the tearful news came of the liquidation of Warsaw. In our bewilderment, we felt there was no chance of salvation. The Workers Council put forward, to the *Judenrat*, that the population should show passive resistance by not allowing themselves to be transported in wagons. But the *Judenrat* dismissed this idea, arguing that such resistance might put in jeopardy the twelve thousand labourers who were considered to be safe.

Many then enlisted as policemen, thinking that this would save them and their families from Nazi claws. The Workers Council strictly prohibited its members to join the police force.

All false hopes and illusions were dashed by the bitter reality. The Workers Council's tragic last meeting was held on the night of *Yom Kippur*, at the house of Mojsze Liebling at ul. Katedralna 11, when the ghetto was already surrounded by Gestapo and policemen.

The poet Ch.L. Zytnicki also took part in this meeting. We parted company with heavy spirits, not knowing if we would survive the day to come.



**Warning from the Judenrat that instances of leaving the ghetto not be repeated**

