

Professor Ch. Z. Hirszberg

From a Notebook of Memoirs on the Expulsion at Zbąszyń

Professor Ch. Z. Hirszberg, who served as rabbi of the enlightened Jews in Częstochowa at their New Synagogue and as Director of the Academic Institute for Jewish Science and who was among the best teachers at the Hebrew high school, has provided us with an excerpt from his notebook of memoirs on the expulsion of the Jews of Polish citizenship from the borders of Germany and the actions taken by the Jews of our city in favour of these poor deportees. These are his words:

Persecution against Jews in Germany was conducted in accordance with a system that was implemented with precision and rigorousness.

They wished to rid themselves of the Jews of foreign citizenship and, first and foremost, the subjects of Poland - and they began with trivialities. They searched and found Jews who had not paid their taxes on time or who had conducted commerce without a license and immediately issued them a deportation order. Within fourteen days, they were required to liquidate their businesses, hand over their apartments and relinquish their lodgings, although there were those among them who had lived in Germany for decades.

Their plight was obviously terrible, for it is impossible to sell anything within a few days, and whoever wished to salvage some of the fruits of his labour - the labour of years-- was forced to take whatever his kindly "neighbours" were willing to give for their property.

In praise of the Jews of Germany, who had German citizenship, it should be said that they tried with all their might to aid their persecuted brothers and supported them with everything possible. Suddenly, a disaster descended upon thousands of Jews, Polish natives and subjects, who now lived in fear and worry following the few individual cases of deportation. On Friday night, 14th November 1938, a general deportation order was issued and all the Jews without German citizenship - their number reached the tens of thousands of souls. Men, women and children were taken to the border point Zbąszyń and expelled to no-man's-land, without any possibility whatsoever to proceed into Poland, as the Polish government blocked their path and no other country was willing to take in these refugees.

Częstochowa, which was near the German border, was appalled by the news from the rabbi of Katowice, which reached Pruszycki, the bank manager. It stated that, on Poland's border, freight train full of poor Jews stood and that they are locked inside wagons intended for the transport of cattle and horses, without food and without hope.

An action committee was immediately organised, headed by the writer of these lines, and included Galster, Gerichter, Neufeld, Zvi Szpaltyn and Feliks Szapira.

Our delegation arrived in Katowice and discovered that, next to Beuthen (Bytom), there was a second train full of Jewish refugees and that, all along the border with Poland, such trains stood.

The local authorities announced that they would not allow the wagons to be opened until they received orders to do so from the central authorities in Warsaw.

Great efforts were also made by public figures in Warsaw and everyone waited longingly for an affirmative order.

Finally, glad tidings came, giving permission for these wretched ones to enter Poland.

It is impossible to describe what happened there, when the wagons were opened and men, women and children burst out, some of them with no clothes except for night pyjamas and some in black suits, who were caught in entertainment parlours, where they played in the orchestras, or who had come there for enjoyment. It was a jumble of people from different circles, who were mercilessly taken from their homes and beds and driven to the freight trains, without food or drink. They separated husbands from their wives and children and, among them, also infants from their parents.

After the members of our delegation were able to calm these wretched ones, they took upon themselves the maintenance of the six hundred souls who had already registered and transferred them to public institutions, in which beds and warm food had been prepared beforehand.

The following day, the question of "and what next?" presented itself. There was a concern – which also came to pass – that, tomorrow, a new transport would arrive. We therefore decided to immediately move the people to Częstochowa, in order to house the other poor people, yet to come, in the temporary lodgings.

To the praise and glory of the Częstochowa Jews, it should be mentioned that the best of the public and youth mobilised at once to vigorous action. A detailed record of the living location of their families in the cities of Poland was made and, those who had nowhere to go, remained in Częstochowa and its Jews provided them with workplaces and, those who were unable to work, were maintained at the cost of the relief committee.

The deportees, who recovered through the fraternal aid generously given to them, hurried to the homes of their relatives in different cities and were gradually absorbed into the Jewish communities in Poland.

(However, they did not even have one whole year of rest for, on 1st September 1939, the Second World War broke out and Nazi troops saw to it that the Jews, banished in 1938, would share the same destiny of all the Polish Jews. The gas chambers and other means of annihilation put an end to the suffering of these miserable ones!)