

A Town Goes Under

A Polemic With
Natan Ek

The New York *Yiddische Kemper* [Jewish Fighter], in the Rosh Hashana issue of the year 5708 [1947], printed an essay by Natan Ek on Częstochowa, bearing the title *A Town Goes Under*.

It is a deplorable fact, that a newspaper as serious as the *Yiddische Kemper* is, should have published an essay, whose content, from the historical standpoint, is false, and from the logical one – nonsensical.

When the Germans entered Częstochowa, they firstly organised days of blood¹, [then] captured Jews for forced labour, deported them to camps, robbed Jewish property, cast Jews out of their dwellings and imprisoned them in a ghetto, in order to wipe them out.

Prior to the War, there were 29,000 Jews living in Częstochowa, in 9,000 dwellings and, in the times of the ghetto, as a result of the stream of Jewish refugees from all the surrounding settlements and from all cities in Poland, the size of the population increased to 60,000 (sixty thousand), and they lived in 4,520 rooms. The secondary effects of life in the ghetto were, on the one hand, hunger, dearth, typhus epidemics and dysentery, which resulted in a large number of fatalities and, on the other, the absolute exclusion of Jews from the legal system, degrading the Jews to worthless entities, which could be exterminated *en masse* with impunity.

Natan Ek presents this situation as a ghetto of luxury.

No, friend Natan Ek! You can tell that in America, to those who know nothing of ghettos.

Historically, the ghettos originated as Jewish residential areas – the so-called “*giudeccas*”. In the Middle Ages, there were “*giudeccas*” in Italy, Germany, Spain, France, Czechia, Russia and Poland. The Jews worked all day in town, carrying out enterprises and business, and only came to the “*giudeccas*” to sleep. At the time, the Jews conducted business with all the world.

[Even so,] not a single historian is to be found, who presents the “*giudeccas*” favourably.

You, friend Natan Ek, presents the Częstochowa Ghetto - which was for the Nazi regime a point for robbing the possessions of the Jews, exploiting their working power and finally killing them off – as a ghetto of luxury.

This, from the historical standpoint, is even more than false, and from the logical standpoint, it is nonsensical. Just as there cannot be a good illness, a joyous grief, [or] a radiant darkness, so there cannot be a luxurious ghetto.

It is suspicious that Natan Ek describes [certain] individuals, who were in service of the Gestapo and who directly or indirectly abetted the annihilation of Jews, as fine characters.

The president of the *Judenrat* in Częstochowa, Leon Kopiński, summoned German gendarmes against the presidium of a workers’ gathering, who demanded bread for the tormented forced labourers. On numerous occasions, he ordered the Jewish police to detain representatives of the *Arbeiterrat*, because they were defending the interests of the forced labourers. He threatened Dr Adam Wolberg and Adv. Mendel Goldberg with being put into the hands of the Gestapo, unless they ceased to publish the illegal ghetto periodical *Rasta*³. He obediently fulfilled all the orders of the tyrannical Nazi regime, while rejecting any proposal of assigning monies to purchase armaments for the underground movement to wage war on the bloody Nazi foe. He also rejected the proposal of a passive resistance on part of the Jewish populace during the period of the resettlements, and other comparable things.

The situation was similar with [Mojżesz-Israel] Mering [sic Merin], president of the *Judenrat* in Będzin – and Natan Ek presented these people as fine individuals, and [claimed] the Jewish population had the most favourable opinion of them.

It is inappropriate of Natan Ek to present himself as a hero. We read in the article by Cwi Rozenwajn *Let the Truth be Revealed*, in *Unser Wort* [Our Word] (Bamberg, №47/85, from 5th December 1947), that Natan Ek deserted from battle and fled Warsaw. He also fled from Częstochowa to Będzin, once the resettlements began.

Friend Natan Ek, do not pass yourself off as being on a par with Lajzer Geler⁴ – for we read of him in Szulim Grajek’s diary, [that] “*The combat group of our suburbs (Leszno 76), under the leadership of Lajzer Geler, occupied a position at the windows of the third floor.*”

Whereas, in your case, we read in Cwi Rozenwajn’s writing, that you deserted battle.

B.O

¹ [TN: Ref. to the “Bloody Monday” and similar events.]

² [TN: Obsolete Italian word meaning Jewish neighbourhood; the correct plural form is “giudecche”.]

³ [TN: Dr B. Orenstein explains in his book “Churban Czenstochow” (see there, pp. 201-202), that “Rasta” was an abbreviation of the Polish term “Rada Starszych”, or Council of Elders, viz. the *Judenrat*, and that “The newspaper’s purpose was to call to conscience the representatives of the *Judenrat*, who at the time were the rulers over the life and death of the Jewish population in the Częstochowa ghetto, to the effect that they should not be tools in the hands of the Nazi authorities, who strove to morally and physically destroy the Jewry. This was done with satirical pieces mocking the influential members of the *Judenrat*, illustrated with caricatures. This newspaper boosted the morale of the populace and caused the *Judenrat* embitterment.”]

⁴ [TN: According to *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. II, col. 74, Lajzer (Eliezer) Geler was the commander of the “Gordonia” group within the Częstochowa ŻOB.]