

# **Inferno of Choices**

**Poles and  
the Holocaust**



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## **Poles and the Holocaust**

Edited by Sebastian Rejak  
and Elżbieta Frister

Second Edition  
Revised and Expanded

Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM  
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Editors  
Warsaw, October 2011



## Introduction

Holocaust research has a special significance in Poland. Of the almost six million Holocaust victims, three million were Polish citizens. It was on Polish soil that the Germans located their annihilation industry. All the death camps: Kulmhof, Bełżec, Sobibór, Treblinka, Majdanek, and Auschwitz-Birkenau (which in time has become the symbol of the Holocaust), were built on the territory of Poland. In these death camps perished Polish Jews and Jews brought from afar – from Western Europe, Greece, Norway, and North Africa.

The history of the Holocaust and of the relations between Poles and Jews during the German occupation is an integral part of the history of Poland, no less important than the history of the Polish resistance movement, of the Polish armed effort on the different fronts of World War II, or of the hecatomb of Polish civilians during the Warsaw Rising of August 1944.

How does this volume differ from the thousands of other publications in the field of Holocaust studies?

There are several answers to this question. Firstly, part of the book contains a voluminous selection of authentic documents from the period of German occupation of Poland. They are both German and Polish sources, with a special focus on documents originating with various agencies and institutions of the Polish Underground State. Of these, many were never published in English before, and those that were are difficult to access and for this reason are not present in public awareness and public discourse. The documents to be found in this volume include clandestine press articles, the occupier's regulations and announcements, statements by the Polish Govern-

ment-in-Exile, and correspondence between the Government in London and the Polish Underground State.

Secondly, this publication contains Polish historians' works hitherto unknown to the Anglophone readers, documenting the realities of everyday life in Poland under German occupation. Among them there is Barbara Engelking's *Dear Mr. Gestapo*; Grzegorz Berendt's *The Price of Life*, a study of the economic determinants of the existence of Jews in hiding on the "Aryan side"; Zofia Kossak's wartime description of the situation of Polish rural communities; and, last but not least, excerpts from *Warsaw: 1859 Days*, by Professor Władysław Bartoszewski, a remarkable man, who, besides having accumulated in his private collection a huge amount of documents, is himself a witness of the war tragedy, a Righteous Among the Nations, and an Honorary Citizen of the State of Israel.

Thirdly, this volume illustrates the extremely complex and equivocal occupation time reality. The same realities could appear very different indeed to witnesses in different situations. This aspect is addressed by one of the authors, Andrzej Żbikowski, who concludes that "for every example of a negative attitude there is an example of a positive one, every generalisation made on the basis of one source can be countered by another generalisation drawing on another source."

Holocaust studies belong to a very special area of historiography. They are concerned with events which, while they may certainly be called a closed past, are close enough in that the witnesses and direct participants thereof are still among us, albeit in ever smaller numbers. What is more, being concerned with events unprecedented in terms of the scale of drama and horror, studying them is highly emotionally-charged. At times, strong emotions make it difficult to judge objectively the complex wartime realities with the result that a black-and-white picture is painted instead. By taking into account the social, economic and political context of the Holocaust, this volume attempts to describe this everyday reality which Primo Levi termed "the grey zone." The texts presented herein will help

understand that in different places, at different times, and in different communities different codes of conduct and different strategies of survival, resistance and adjustment prevailed. Noble and ignoble attitudes co-existed – in fact, they were often intertwined. This broad selection of texts will help bring home to the reader the murky reality in which Jews were seeking shelter and Poles had to make the most difficult decisions, life-and-death decisions. It will also make the reader aware of the scale of demoralisation in part of the society exposed to a system of organised lawlessness, and of the immeasurable courage of those who defied this lawlessness. The understanding of the conditions in which Hitler’s Holocaust project was being carried out is the key to comprehending the then attitudes, behaviours, act of vileness and deeds of heroism.

\* \* \*

The dramatic fortunes of Poland after World War II turned this part of the 1939–1945 history into a “blank area” – by no means the only one but particularly painful – in the Poles’ historical memory. Immediately after the war conducting unbiased historical research was not easy in this country, both because the time distance was still short and because of the then political determinants. This is not to say that no valuable and reliable studies appeared, yet the official historiography targeted at the mass audience was being falsified. This included Polish-Jewish relations. Research into the history of Poland’s occupation – other than highlighting and overstating the activities of Communist resistance groups, which in fact were few and marginal – was strictly banned. A paradoxical situation developed: on the one hand, there functioned an official historiography designed to show that the occupying enemy’s atrocities had been aimed at the Poles and to portray the Communists as the only ones to have challenged the terror, and, on the other hand, the history passed down in families was centred on the Soviet massacre of Polish officers in Katyń, the drama of the Warsaw Rising, the Polish armed forces’ ac-

tivities in the West, and the record of the Home Army (AK). In both narratives the tragedy of the doomed Jewish community, which accounted for ten percent of Poland's pre-war population, almost disappeared. It was then that the notion of "six million Polish victims" evolved and remained officially binding till the end of the 1980s. No mention was made of the fact that three million of them were victims of the Holocaust, selected in accordance with the Nazi racial doctrine. References to the "dark" pages of the occupation reality: the Jedwabne massacre; the phenomenon of *szmalcownictwo*, i.e. blackmail and extortion against the Jews; delation; and various forms of collaboration with the occupying authorities were the strictest taboo zealously enforced by the censors.

Only in the post-1989 free Poland, with the defalsification of all areas of history underway, have reliable studies on the Holocaust become an important area of scholarship. A number of outstanding research centres, focused in whole or predominantly on this subject, were created in Warsaw, Cracow, Lublin, Wrocław and other places. Holocaust study centres were established at the Jagiellonian University and the Polish Academy of Sciences. Every year dozens of students complete their master's and doctoral dissertations in the field of Holocaust studies.

The current volume portrays the present state of academic research and public debate on wartime Polish-Jewish history which goes on regardless of the controversies and the trauma both sides have to face.

## I. Documents

### **October 28, 1939, Piotrków – Announcement by the Executive Authority of the Jewish Religious Community to the Jewish Population of the Town of Piotrków on the Establishment of a Ghetto**

Announcement to the Jewish population of the town of Piotrków.

You are hereby reminded by the Executive Authority of the Jewish Religious Community in Piotrków that the TIME LIMIT FOR MOVING INTO THE GHETTO ELAPSES ON the 31 day of this month. By the said date all Jewish inhabitants, save for those granted special reprieve, shall have moved out of premises beyond the perimeters of the Ghetto.

In this connection, the Executive Authority of the Community calls on the SENIOR MAYOR of the town of Piotrków to absolutely comply with the above regulation, and on owners of real estate in the Ghetto and on the inhabitants of the Ghetto not to interfere with the process of occupancy of the living quarters assigned by the Executive Authority of the Jewish Religious Community of the town of Piotrków.

The Executive Authority of the  
Jewish Religious Community in Piotrków  
Done in Piotrków on October 28, 1939.

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Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, the Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto, Ring. I 958 b, k. 1 (former file No. Ring. I/340), published in *Selection of Sources for Teaching About the Holocaust of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of Poland*, ed. by A. Skibińska and R. Szuchta, Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, Warszawa 2010.

**November 12, 1939, Poznań – A Circular from Senior SS and Police Commander for Warthegau, Wilhelm Koppe<sup>1</sup>, on the Plan for the Resettlement of Jews and Poles to the General Government**

[excerpts]

Secret!

Re: The Removal of Jews and Poles from the “Wartheland” District.

1. The Reichsführer of the SS and the Head of German Police acting in the capacity of the Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of German Identity has ordered the removal from former Polish territories now belonging to the Reich:
  - a) of all Jews; and
  - b) of all Poles who belong to the intelligentsia or who, for the reason of their Polish-national attitudes, are likely to endanger the introduction and strengthening of German identity. They shall be treated on a par with the criminal element.

The purpose of the deportation shall be:

- a) to clear the new German territories and to make them secure;
- b) to provide housing and job opportunities for incoming Volksdeutsche<sup>2</sup>.

The evacuation operation shall at all times be targeted at achieving these aims, totally regardless of any other interests.

2. Pursuant to a conversation held at the Governor General’s office in Cracow, the deportation from Warthegau shall take place between November 15, 1939 and February 28,

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<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Koppe, SS-Obergruppenführer, senior SS and Police Commander in the Wartheland, subsequently Secretary of State for Security in the General Government.

<sup>2</sup> Editor’s note: “*Volksdeutsche*” was a term used by Nazi ideologues to refer to people of German ethnicity (volk) living beyond the borders of the Reich regardless of their prewar citizenship.



1940 and it shall cover, for the time being, 200,000 Poles and 100,000 Jews.

3. The deportees from this area are to be resettled in appointed areas south of Warsaw and Lublin.
4. In the first operation all Jews resident in all the counties and no less than 2,000 Poles resident in the smallest counties each shall be deported, with correspondingly greater numbers in larger counties. The following separate towns/cities shall provide for deportation:

Poznań: about 35,000 Poles and all of the Jews;

Łódź: about 30,000 Poles and about 30,000 Jews;

Gniezno: about 2,300 Poles and all of the Jews;

Inowrocław: 2,300 Poles and all of the Jews.

The quotas of Poles and Jews to be deported, as set for the separate towns/cities and counties, shall be transported over the period given in point 2. Preparations are to commence immediately, with due consideration given to the fact that the number of the deportees will, for the time being, exceed the number of Volksdeutsche scheduled for resettlement from the Baltic countries, the General Government and Volhynia.

Only after the leading cultural stratum, the entire intelligentsia, as well as all political and criminal elements have been removed, will the territory have been cleared and made secure, with all the consequences thereof. [...]

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*Eksterminacja Żydów na ziemiach polskich w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej. Zbiór dokumentów*, prepared by Tatiana Berenstein, Artur Eisenbach, Adam Rutkowski, Warszawa 1957, document No. 3, pp. 30–33, published in *Selection of Sources for Teaching About the Holocaust of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of Poland*, ed. by A. Skibińska and R. Szuchta, Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, Warszawa 2010.

**January 20, 1941, Warsaw – A Report from Waldemar Schön, Head of the Resettlement Department of the Office of the Governor of the Warsaw District on the Purposes of the Establishment of a Ghetto in Warsaw**

[excerpts]

Background

The setting up of Jewish residential areas and the imposition on Jews of constraints regarding their choice of place of residence, as well as economic constraints, are by no means new in the history of the East. These restrictions are traced back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and they have recurred throughout history until the establishment of the Polish Republic.

What is novel is the method of administering such restrictions in accordance with National-Socialist principles and views.

As early as in February 1940, shortly after the establishment of the Resettlement Department, an idea was conceived of setting up a Jewish residential area in Warsaw and initial preparations were set in motion. [...]

Following a consultation meeting of March 8, 1940 it was decided that the plan to establish a ghetto had to be postponed for the time being.

About the same time a plan was under consideration in the General Government, to designate the Lublin District as the place to bring together the entire Jewry in the General Government, in particular evacuee Jews and Jewish refugees. [...]

Early in April 1940 the Senior SS and Police Commander in Cracow advised us that there were no plans to assemble Jews in the Lublin district.

Under the circumstances, the Resettlement Department again addressed preliminary work aimed at setting up Jewish residential areas in the Warsaw District. [...] These operations were scheduled to begin on July 1, 1940, so that major moves could be completed in a timely manner before the onset of winter.

Already at the first stage of the preparations, we received from Cracow an intimation that whatever work on the estab-

lishment of a ghetto was undertaken, it was necessary to bear in mind that since the Führer's plan provided for the resettlement of European Jewry to Madagascar after the end of the war, the setting up of a ghetto would have been in practice an illusory proposition.

Accordingly, the Resettlement Department's initial work was again discontinued.

Late in August 1940 a plan to establish a ghetto was again put forward by the Department of Health, largely in response to the intensified concentration of troops in the Warsaw district and to the necessity to protect the German armed forces and the population. [...]

The reasons underlying the establishment of Jewish quarters in the Warsaw districts are [...] as follows:

1. Preventive protection must be provided for the German armed forces and the German nation against the Jew, that germ-resistant carrier of epidemics.
2. To isolate the Jewry from the remaining population, Poles and Volksdeutsche alike, is a political-moral must. Until recently Jewish thought and Jewish deed reigned over the population in the Eastern territory. Now the blessed results of the elimination of the Jewish influence are already noticeable. If the German reconstruction is to be at all fruitful, it must put an end to the Jewry's unrestrained lording over this territory.
3. Another reason is the need to take and pursue measures relating to the war economy and the provision of food; this can be achieved by eliminating illegal trade and profiteering. [...]

Progress of the relocation operation in Warsaw:

The relocation operation commenced at the beginning of October. Initially, October 31, 1941 was set as the deadline for its completion. [...]

Overall, 113,000 Poles and 138,000 Jews were successfully relocated. [...] 11,567 Aryan residential premises in the Jewish residential area and some 13,000 beyond it were vacated.

By October 30, 1940 figures, 8,600 flats were exchanged voluntarily, with the result that some 165,000 people on both sides moved to new accommodation. [...]

Surprisingly, the relocation operation involving some 250,000 people was carried out in a relatively short time (less than six weeks) without bloodshed and with police pressure applied only in the final stage. Use was made of the Polish mayor on the one hand and of the Jewish Council on the other hand.

On November 16, 1940 a major police operation was launched [...] involving yet another search of all parts of the city save for the Jewish area; 11,130 Jews were intercepted and forcibly removed to the Jewish residential area.

An overview of the Jewish residential area.

The Jewish residential area covers about 403 hectares<sup>3</sup>. This area is inhabited – according to data of the Jewish Council, which allegedly conducted a census – by about 410,000 Jews; at our estimates and observations from various sides, the number is between 470,000 and 590,000 Jews.

Based on the Jewish Council's statistics – and discounting the vacant lots and the cemeteries – there are 1,108 inhabitants per 1 hectare of built-up area, i.e. 110,800 people per square kilometre<sup>4</sup>. The population density in the city of Warsaw stands at 14,400 people per square kilometre, for the total area, and 38,000 per square kilometre<sup>5</sup> for the built-up and residential area.

It should be emphasised that this number has been increasing in the wake of the relocation operation which has proved necessary and which involves 72,000 Jews from the western part of the district. Room must be made for 62,000 evacuated Poles.

In the Jewish area there are some 27,000 flats averaging 2.5 rooms per flat. Accordingly, the number of persons per flat can be put at 15.1, on average, and the number of persons per room at 6–7.

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<sup>3</sup> Editor's note: 403 hectares = 1.55 square miles or 996 acres.

<sup>4</sup> Editor's note: 110,800 people per square kilometre = 287,000 people per square mile.

<sup>5</sup> Editor's note: 38,000 people per square kilometre = 98,000 people per square mile.

To isolate the Jewish area from the rest of the city, use has been made of fire protection walls and perimeter walls and street outlets, windows, doors and construction openings have been bricked up. The walls are three metres high, with another one metre of barbed wire on top.

In addition, there is monitoring by motor and mounted police patrols.

Initially, 22 passages were left in the walls to service such traffic as was still necessary. By now the number of these has been reduced to fifteen. Initially, fairly strong German police units were stationed at the passages; these units have since been replaced by the Polish police, the German police now being concerned for the greater part with the exercise of supervision.

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*Eksterminacja Żydów na ziemiach polskich w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej. Zbiór dokumentów*, prepared by Tatiana Berenstein, Artur Eisenbach, Adam Rutkowski, Warszawa 1957, document No. 44, pp. 99–108, published in *Selection of Sources for Teaching About the Holocaust of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of Poland*, ed. by A. Skibińska and R. Szuchta, Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, Warszawa 2010.

**June 29, 1941, Warsaw – Order No. 1 of Reinhard Heydrich to the Einsatzgruppen Commanders on “Self-cleansing” Operations and the Role to Be Played in the Same by German Military and Police Forces**

[excerpts]

No impediments should be made to self-cleansing aspirations occurring in anti-Communist and anti-Jewish circles in the newly seized territories. On the contrary, they should be triggered without leaving a trace, encouraged where necessary, and directed into appropriate channels, yet in a way that will prevent local “self-defence” circles from pleading, at some latter date, [that] a regulation [was] issued or [that] political

promises [were] received [...]. The setting up of regular self-defence units with a central command should be avoided at first; instead, triggering local pogroms in the manner described above will serve the purpose well.

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Tomasz Szarota, *U progu Zagłady. Zajścia antyżydowskie i pogromy w okupowanej Europie*. Warszawa, Paryż, Amsterdam, Antwerpia, Kowno, Warszawa 2000, pp. 294–295, published in *Selection of Sources for Teaching About the Holocaust of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of Poland*, ed. by A. Skibińska and R. Szuchta, Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, Warszawa 2010.

## **July 1, 1941, Warsaw – Order No. 2 of Reinhard Heydrich to the *Einsatzgruppen* Commanders on Involving Poles in Anti-Jewish Operations in Newly Occupied Territories in Eastern Poland**

[excerpts]

Order No. 2:

The Poles inhabiting the newly seized territories, in particular in former Polish lands, are to be expected – because of their experiences – to have both anti-Communist and anti-Jewish attitudes.

It is therefore obvious that the self-cleansing operations are to be targeted chiefly at Bolsheviks and Jews. The Polish intelligentsia and their ilk can be addressed at a later date, save for individual cases where taking immediate measures is necessary on the grounds that a delay might engender a threat.

It is equally obvious that, at the outset, there is no need to implicate those Poles whose attitudes are such as described above in the cleansing operation, in particular because of their special importance as the initiating element (which, however, is true only to a certain extent, depending on local determinants) both for purposes of pogroms and as informers.

Obviously, the tactic proposed by me extends to all cases of a similar kind.

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Andrzej Żbikowski, *U genezy Jedwabnego. Żydzi na kresach Północno-Wschodniej II Rzeczypospolitej wrzesień 1939–lipiec 1941*, Warszawa 2006, p. 169, published in *Selection of Sources for Teaching About the Holocaust of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of Poland*, ed. by A. Skibińska and R. Szuchta, Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, Warszawa 2010.

**March 6, 1941, Warsaw. Ban on joining auxiliary force assigned to guard barracks in labour camps for Jews, published in the underground *Biuletyn Informacyjny* [Information Bulletin] of the Union of Armed Struggle**

On this March 1 a call was pasted on walls throughout the capital city and in other Polish towns and cities, for Poles with a military training to volunteer for an auxiliary force assigned to guarding Jewish barracks.

WHEREAS:

1. It is treason against the nation, for Poles to serve voluntarily under German command;
2. An auxiliary force for the police (gendarmierie) might be made to perform acts disgracing the good name of Poland;
3. No individual joining this force can be assured of not being transported to Germany or to another country, with the result that Poland would be deprived of people with a military training, who are going to be indispensable when a struggle against the occupying enemy breaks out;
4. Every Pole who joins German service makes one German available to be sent to the front to fight our allies,

thus delaying our victory and the rebuilding of Independence;

5. The Government of the Republic of Poland in Exile already called on Poles last year to refrain from any collaboration, even if only ostensible, in the German-organised anti-Jewish operation;
6. The German enemy will use this auxiliary force to show to the whole world that we are cooperating with them in destroying the Jews and will attempt to compromise us in the eyes of other countries – now, therefore the military/organisational agencies at Home acting for the Government of the Republic of Poland in Exile call on all Poles to categorically reject the idea of joining the ranks of the auxiliary police (gendarmerie) force.

The editorial boards of the Polish underground papers are requested to reprint this appeal.

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Text published in: *Poles – Jews: 1939–1945*, ed. by Andrzej K. Kunert, Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa, Muzeum Historii Polski, Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, Warsaw 2006.



**May 1941, A reportage from the Warsaw Ghetto by “Jefim” [Icchak Cukierman]<sup>6</sup> entitled “In the Labour Camp”<sup>7</sup> published by an underground paper<sup>8</sup>**

[excerpts]

\* \* \*

We are draining muddy fields, cleaning out mud-clogged canals. We stand in water and shovel sand out. There is a drizzling rain, our clothes are getting wetter and wetter and the hearts – heavier and heavier.

Hunger is gnawing at us all the time. In the morning we were given a mug of unsweetened ersatz coffee each, and it is only in the evening that we’ll be issued our bread rations of 180 grams.

A group of curious villagers has gathered on the little wooden bridge. A peasant woman looks at us with compassion; a Jew whimpers:

“Have pity, good people... we are dying of hunger. There are the wife and the child at home.”

The peasants rummage through their pockets: this one has some rolling tobacco, that one a tiny piece of bread. One of them leans down from the bridge and says:

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<sup>6</sup> Icchak [Yitzhak] Cukierman, assumed name “Antek” (1914–1981) – a member of the Dror youth organisation and of underground resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto, underground press editor, co-founder of the Jewish Combat Organisation (Pol. Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa, ŻOB) and its liaison officer on the “Aryan side” during the [Ghetto] Rising; after the death of Mordechaj Anielewicz, the ŻOB [Jewish Combat Organisation] commander. Fought in the Warsaw Rising of 1944. After the war he emigrated to Israel where he and his wife, Cywia Lubetkin, established the Ghetto Fighters’ Kibbutz (Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot). He published memoirs entitled *Nadmiar pamięci (Siedem owych lat). Wspomnienia 1939–1946*, translation by Zoja Perelmuter, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2000 [translated into English and published as *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993].

<sup>7</sup> The camp at Narty near Kampinos. The forcible rounding up for work in this camp took place in mid-April 1941.

<sup>8</sup> *Dror-Wolność*, No. 5.

“We surely would give if we had, brother. See, this is a marshy land, a poor land... bread is worth its weight in gold... The Germans take everything – eggs, bread, potatoes...”

Yet after half an hour a peasant woman arrives, takes from under her wraps a chunk of bread and passes it to the Jew nearest to the bridge.<sup>9</sup> For a while the men stand confused and then, suddenly, they all throw their shovels aside, leap across the canal and a moment later the Jew with the bread lies on the ground, tens of Jews are fighting, falling down, rolling in the sand. Their yelling can be heard from afar.

Legerschutz<sup>10</sup> come running from the adjoining field, they strike right and left with their gun-butts, the policemen brandish long flexible sticks. The shouting increases. A man gets up with his face smashed; another has blood on his neck. They jump into the water again, grab shovels and, with broken hearts, resume shovelling sand with quick movements.

And by the bridge lies the Jew who first got the bread. He is sobbing hysterically. There are bread crumbs scattered on the ground.

The canal bank is rising steadily as sand is poured on it.

The Lagerschutz are standing with their guns on the ready.

\* \* \*

A small railway station an hour and a half away from Warsaw.<sup>11</sup> We have dragged in the weak, by superhuman effort. We have left nobody on the road. In an hour and a half each of us

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<sup>9</sup> According to narratives preserved in the Ringelblum Archives, peasants helped workers from the Jewish labour camp. Instrumental in this was a priest from the Kampinos parish, who called in his sermons for showing the Jews compassion and help: “Our brothers, born and raised in this land, are being tormented, beaten and starved in the camp.” (ŻIH Archives, Ring. I 1203, former file No. Ring I/399, a narrative about the Narty camp by an unidentified author. The same priest is also mentioned by Rabbi Szymon Huberband in a report “Kampinos” awarded the Oneg Szabat prize (ŻIH Archives, Ring. I 1131, former file No. Ring I/379; according to a footnote by Ruta Sakowska).

<sup>10</sup> Lagerschutz (German) – members of the camp’s guard force.

<sup>11</sup> The Szymanów Station.

will see his wife, children, his near ones and dear ones... We are waiting for the train. Suddenly someone staggers, his legs are faltering – and he drops down, foaming at the mouth. There are shouts all around: “He is dying – a piece of bread!...”

A passer-by, a Christian woman, comes up and hands out a slice of bread, but the commander, a Pole, explodes: “It is forbidden for an Aryan to get near a Jew! Go away!”

We are standing helpless. The man has already swallowed the foam. He has heaved his last breath – he’s dead.

Two brothers are sitting on the grass. Suddenly one throws back his head, rolls his eyes. “Dovidl! Dovidl,” the other brother pleads; he cries: “Dovidl! Chayele will be there by the railway, Rivka will be there... They are waiting! Some tea... a piece of bread...”

From a house opposite, from the second floor, a Polish woman throws a bottle of milk... A hundred hands reach to grab it. The bottle spins in the air, drops on the cobblestones and shatters. Several minutes later Dovidl no longer craves a piece of bread or a drop of milk. He is dead.

There are twelve bodies lying by the station. Twelve corpses. The Germans stand with cameras ready. A paramedic writes on the stiffened hands of the dead their names in indelible pencil. The bodies are loaded on a peasant’s cart... hauled back to the camp... to the cemetery uphill...

We are waiting for death as sheep for slaughter.

Still an hour and a half to go. Whoever else’s legs give in, will drop down – suddenly, unexpectedly, without a cry – like a dog at the doorstep of its own home and will rot in the camp cemetery.

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Ruta Sakowska, *Dwa etapy. Hitlerowska polityka eksterminacji Żydów w oczach ofiar. Szkic historyczny i dokumenty*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź 1986, document No. 1, pp. 79–84, published in *Selection of Sources for Teaching About the Holocaust of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of Poland*, ed. by A. Skibińska and R. Szuchta, Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, Warszawa 2010.

**June 26, 1941, Warsaw – A denunciatory letter to the Gestapo  
about smuggling into the Warsaw Ghetto**

To the Head Office of the German Police Gestapo  
Warsaw, Al. Szucha 52

This is Gospel truth. I am afraid to sign my name, for if the Polish police found out about this they would murder me themselves.

Dear Sirs,

On June 26, 1941 in Ceglana Street, as I stayed in a house in the same street, at Nos. 6 and 4, I watched Polish policemen guarding the Jewish Ghetto in the selfsame street. Not only were whole groups of people passing to Jews various parcels and bundles, bottles of milk, loaves of bread and even larger contraband by sackfulls, but a cycle rickshaw came, loaded with six sacks of flour or cereal and with four men walking beside it. They pulled in by the fence on the side of the Ulrich building. Jews immediately brought out a table and the men who had bought the six sacks passed them to the Jews over the fence and left undisturbed, heading for Żelazna Street.

Several minutes later another cart arrived, with five sacks of goods that were passed to Jews the same way, over the fence. Not only is massive smuggling conducted by Poles, but various suspect individuals move to and fro over the fence. And the men who deliver various foods to Jews by cartloads sit in a suspicious café at 55 Żelazna Street, cool as you please, and they drink vodka with Polish policemen. I approached one of the policemen and said to him: “You are three policemen here to see that there is no smuggling but instead of catching the smugglers, you are making the job easier for them.” I have remembered the policeman’s number, it’s 322. Please check which police station had men on guard duty on 26/41 [sic!] between 8 and 9 in the morning. The Polish police, they do no

good nowhere, they just get paid for nothing. These gentlemen ought to have been sent long ago to Westphalia, to dig up coal, this is not an anonymous letter but Gospel truth.

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Institute of National Remembrance, Der Kommandeur der Sicherheitspolizei und des SS für den Distrikt Warschau, denunciatory letter No. 84 (spelling as in the original), published in *Selection of Sources for Teaching About the Holocaust of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of Poland*, ed. by A. Skibińska and R. Szuchta, Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, Warszawa 2010.

**September 25, 1941, Warsaw. Wire message No. 354 from Union of Armed Struggle [Związek Walki Zbrojnej] Chief Commander General Stefan Rowecki “Kalina” to Commander-in-Chief General Władysław Sikorski “Strażnica”**

Radiogram No. C.354<sup>12</sup>  
From Waclawa via Bey /photo/

Received ...  
Read .....

Strażnica,

Information report on the situation at home.

This is to report that any and all steps and statements by the Government and by the National Council members re Jews in Poland are getting at home the worst possible reception and are eminently helpful to Government-unfriendly or hostile propaganda. This was so with the “Jewry Day” and the Szwarcbard address, the Liberman appointment and the greetings for the Jewish New Year.

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<sup>12</sup> Received in London with much delay – only on December 2, 1941.

Please accept it as a very real fact that antisemitic sentiments prevail among an overwhelming majority at home. The Socialists are no exception. The differences are only in the conduct of tactics. Hardly anyone recommends emulating the German methods. These methods had sparked compassion, but after the two occupations joined and the conduct of Jews in the East became known to the general public the compassion has waned. I am not aware of the reasons which make it necessary for the Government to take such steps, but here at home they have been rapidly undermining the Government's following and have been capitalised on by Sanacja groups.

Kalina 354, Sept. 25, 1941.

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Text published in: *Poles – Jews: 1939–1945*, ed. by Andrzej K. Kunert, Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa, Muzeum Historii Polski, Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, Warsaw 2006.

**October 15, 1941, Warsaw – Regulation of the Governor General Hans Frank prohibiting the Jewish population from leaving residential areas assigned to them on pain of death penalty**  
[excerpts]

§ 4b

- 1) Jews who leave their assigned residential area without a permit shall be subject to the death penalty. Whoever knowingly offers a hiding place to such Jews shall be subject to the same penalty.
- 2) Instigators and accomplices shall be subject to the same penalty as the perpetrator; an attempted act shall be punishable as if committed. In less serious cases, sentencing to prison with hard labour, or to prison, is permitted.

3) The sentencing shall be carried out by Special Courts.

#### Article 2

This Regulation shall take effect as of its promulgation.

Governor General  
Frank

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*Eksterminacja Żydów na ziemiach polskich w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej. Zbiór dokumentów*, prepared by Tatiana Berenstein, Artur Eisenbach, Adam Rutkowski, Warszawa 1957, document No. 52, pp. 122–123, published in *Selection of Sources for Teaching About the Holocaust of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of Poland*, ed. by A. Skibińska and R. Szuchta, Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, Warszawa 2010.

### **December 16, 1941, Cracow – Minutes of a Meeting of the Cabinet of the General Government on the Policy Towards the Jews and Plans for Their Total Extermination**

[excerpts]

A meeting of the Cabinet held at the Government House in Cracow.

[Frank:] [...] Jews should, and indeed will, be prevented with utmost severity from leaving the ghetto. In the future, death sentences given to Jews who committed this act must be carried out as promptly as possible. A regulation [mentioned] by the speaker, under which every Jew found outside the ghetto is to be punished by death, must be immediately put in effect. If necessary, the rules of procedure for special courts should be simplified. [...]

[Kundt:<sup>13</sup>] The next important thing is to simplify the criminal procedure in respect to those Jews who leave their assigned residential areas without authorisation. As things are,

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<sup>13</sup> Dr. Ernst Kundt, the Governor of the Radom District.

while death sentences<sup>14</sup> for unauthorised leaving of Jewish residential areas are given promptly, the official procedure for the authorisation of execution is protracted. For this reason, the speaker recommends shortening the procedure by vesting in the governors the powers to have death sentences carried out. The Jews will find out then that the regulations of the German authorities are not to be trifled with and that not much time elapses between catching a Jew and his or her death sentence being carried out. Judges in the speaker's district having voiced reservations concerning the imprecise wording of the regulation on the grounds that it refers merely to "a Jewish residential area," the speaker issued an administrative order explaining that the said term is to be understood to mean any place in which the presence of Jews is permitted. [...]

[Hummel:<sup>15</sup>] [...] Having the Jews rounded up and confined in the ghetto is a boon indeed. Now the important thing is to have the ghetto completely isolated. The Ordnungspolizei commander's order whereby shooting Jews encountered on the road is allowed has been gratefully welcomed. Dr. Hummel proceeds to present the practical effects of the regulation on death sentence for unauthorised leaving the ghetto. In Warsaw only forty-five death sentences have been given so far, despite the third panel of judges having been assigned to these cases; of these sentences only eight were carried out, the reason being that in each case a final decision of the Pardons Commission in Cracow is required. Six hundred more motions for sentencing are pending. It is impossible to achieve effective isolation of the ghetto through the special courts. Their procedure until the dispensation of the case is too slow and it is burdened with excessive formalities; it needs to be simplified. Also, Warsaw can be said to be essentially capable of dealing with all of its difficulties this winter. [...]

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<sup>14</sup> Death penalty for leaving the ghetto was introduced under the "Third Resolution on Restrictions on Residence in the GG" of October 15, 1941.

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Herbert Hummel (1907–1944), Deputy Governor of the Warsaw District.



[Frank:] The Jews – and I’ll be frank with you, gentlemen, also on this issue – must be done away with, one way or another. The Führer once put it this way: “If, in the future, the united Jewry succeeds again in unleashing a world war, then not only will the nations drawn into such a war sustain bloody sacrifices, but this will be the end of the Jews in Europe.” I am aware that there has been criticism of many steps taken these days against the Jews in the Reich. Reports on the prevailing sentiment show that deliberate attempts are made, time and again, to emphasise the cruelty, harshness [of these steps], and so on. Before proceeding further in my argument I will ask you, gentlemen, to agree with me on the following point: As a matter of principle, let us feel compassion only towards the German nation and nobody else in the whole world. The others had no pity on us either. As a long-standing National Socialist I must say that were the Jewish tribe in Europe to survive this war while we are shedding our best blood for the preservation of Europe, this war would be just a half-success. For this reason my attitude to the Jews is based on a hope that they will cease to exist. They must be removed. I have commenced negotiations on having them transported to the East. In January a major conference on this subject will be held in Berlin, to which I am going to delegate Mr. Secretary of State Dr. Bühler. The conference is to be held at the Reich Security Head Office<sup>16</sup>, at SS-Obergruppenführer Heydrich’s office. This way or other, a great migration of Jews is about to begin. [...]

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<sup>16</sup> Editor’s note: *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA, Germ.) – a state institution of the German Reich created by Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler on September 27, 1939 through the merger of the SS intelligence service – Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst*, SD), Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei*, Sipo, which in turn was composed of Secret State Police – the Gestapo or *Geheime Staatspolizei*, and Criminal Police – *Kriminalpolizei*, Kripo). Its official task was to track and eliminate “enemies” of the state: Jews, Romani people, and other racially or politically “undesirable.” The RSHA was responsible i.a. for the operations of the infamous *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing units) following the German invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.

We have been told in Berlin: “Why so much fuss; we have no use for them in the Ostland<sup>17</sup> either”; at the Reich Commissariat we have been told: “Liquidate them yourselves.” Gentlemen, I must request you to be immune to all considerations of pity. We must destroy Jews wherever we encounter them and wherever we can, so as to preserve the structure of the Reich intact in this land. Obviously, we shall achieve this by other methods than those referred to by the Bureau Chief Dr. Hummel. This responsibility cannot be put on the judges of the special courts because the matter concerned transcends the boundaries of [normal] judicial proceeding. Traditional views are inapplicable to so giant and unique phenomena. This way or other, we must find a road to lead us to the target; I have been greatly preoccupied with this matter.

The Jews are – also for us – extremely malignant gluttons. At present we have in the General Government some 2.5 million Jews, and, with people related to Jews and their families included, about 3.5 million. We cannot shoot or poison this number of Jews, but we shall be able – following sweeping, effective measures proposed by the Reich – to take steps towards their successful destruction. Like the Reich, the General Government must be emptied of Jews. The question where this is to be done, and how, will be decided by institutions to be set up and organised by us here; I shall advise you in due time of [the scope of] their operations.

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*Okupacja i ruch oporu w dziennikach Hansa Franka. 1939–1945*, vol. 1: 1939–1942, Książka i Wiedza, Warszawa 1970, pp. 408–416, published in *Selection of Sources for Teaching About the Holocaust of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of Poland*, ed. by A. Skibińska and R. Szuchta, Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, Warszawa 2010.

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<sup>17</sup> *Reichskommissariat Ostland* (Germ.) – Reich Commissariat for the Eastern Territories – covered the territories of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Byelorussia.

**August 1942, Warsaw. *Protest!* – an Appeal by the underground  
Front for the Rebirth of Poland [Front Odrodzenia Polski],  
by Zofia Kossak**

**PROTEST!**

In the Warsaw ghetto, behind the wall which cuts those off from the world, hundreds of thousands of doomed people are waiting for death. There is no hope for them; no rescue is on the way. Their tormentors race through the streets, firing at anyone who dares to venture out. They also open fire at anyone who stands at the window. Unburied corpses lie around in the streets.

The prescribed daily victim quota is 8,000–10,000. The Jewish police are under orders to deliver the victims into the German executioners' hands. If they do not, they will die themselves. Children unable to move by their own strength are loaded on carts. So brutally is the loading done that few of them arrive at the ramp alive. The mothers watching this are going mad. The numbers of those who have lost their minds from despair and horror equal the count of those shot dead.

Railway wagon cars are waiting at the ramp. The executioners cram the sentenced into them, 150 people to a car. On the floor there is a thick layer of lime and chlorine, doused with water. Now the lorry door is shut and sealed. Sometimes the train will move on immediately upon loading, sometimes it will be left standing on the sidetrack for twenty-four hours, or forty-eight hours... This no longer matters to anyone. Of the people packed so tightly that the dead cannot fall and are standing upright, arm in arm with the living, people dying slowly of the vapours of lime and chlorine, with no air, not a drop of water, no food, none will remain alive. Wherever the deadly trains arrive at their place of destination, whenever they arrive, they will be carrying only a cargo of dead bodies...

Compared with this torment, dying fast would be a release. The tormentors have taken precautions against this. All

pharmacies in the ghetto were closed so that they did not supply poison. There are no weapons. The only way out left is to throw oneself from the window on the cobblestones. Many of the sentenced have escaped their executioners this way.

What is happening now in the Warsaw ghetto has been happening for six months in a hundred of Polish cities and towns. The total count of slain Jews has already exceeded one million and it is rising every day. They are all perishing: rich and poor, old women, men, youths, infants, Catholics dying with the names of Jesus and Mary on their lips, and Judaists. They all are guilty of having been born into the Jewish nation sentenced to annihilation by Hitler.

The world is looking at this crime, more terrible than anything history has seen – and it remains silent. The slaughter of millions of helpless people proceeds amidst universal ominous silence. The executioners are silent, they are not bragging about their doings. England and America do not raise their voice, and even the influential international Jewry, once ultra-sensitive to any injury to their own, are silent. So are the Poles silent. Polish political friends of the Jews confine themselves to writing notes in papers; Polish adversaries of the Jews demonstrate their lack of interest in an alien cause. The perishing Jews are surrounded only by Pilates who wash their hands off them.

This silence must no longer be tolerated. Whatever its motivations, it is vile. One must not remain passive in the face of crime. Whoever is silent in the face of murder becomes an accomplice in it. Whoever does not condemn – condones.

Let us, Polish Catholics, speak up. Our feelings towards the Jews have not changed. We still consider them to be political, economic and ideological enemies of Poland. What's more, we are aware that they hate us more than they do the Germans, that they hold us responsible for their tragedy. Why and on what grounds? – this remains the secret of the Jewish soul, yet this is a fact continuously borne out by evidence. Still, being aware of these sentiments does not exonerate us from the duty to condemn crime.

We refuse to be Pilates. We are incapable of actively counteracting the German murders, we cannot do anything about them or save anyone – but we protest, from the depth of our hearts filled with pity, outrage and horror. This protest is what God demands of us, God who has forbidden to kill. It is what the Christian conscience demands. Any human being is entitled to his or her neighbours' love. The blood of the helpless is crying to heaven for vengeance. Whoever fails to join us in supporting this protest is not a Catholic.

At the same time, we protest as Poles. We do not believe that German atrocities can benefit Poland. On the contrary. In the stubborn silence of international Jewry, in the endeavours of German propaganda which is already seeking to put the odium of the slaughter of Jews on the Lithuanians and... on the Poles we sense the planning of a hostile action against us. We also know how poisonous the planting of the seed of crime can be. Compulsory participation of the Polish people in the bloody spectacle playing out on the Polish lands can easily breed indifference to wrongdoing and sadism and – most importantly – a dangerous belief that one may murder one's fellow human beings with impunity.

Whoever does not understand this, whoever dares to link a proud and free future of Poland with the vile rejoicing in the misfortune of our fellow human being is, for this reason, neither a Catholic nor a Pole.

*Front for the Rebirth of Poland*

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REPUBLIC OF POLAND

*Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

**THE MASS EXTERMINATION  
of JEWS in  
GERMAN OCCUPIED POLAND**

NOTE

addressed to the Governments of the  
United Nations on December 10th, 1942,  
and other documents



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Your Excellency,

1. On several occasions the Polish Government have drawn the attention of the civilised world, both in diplomatic documents and official publications, to the conduct of the German Government and of the German authorities of occupation, both military and civilian, and to the methods employed by them "in order to reduce the population to virtual slavery and ultimately to exterminate the Polish nation." These methods, first introduced in Poland, were subsequently applied, in a varying degree, in other countries occupied by the armed forces of the German Reich.

2. At the Conference held at St. James's Palace on January 13th, 1942, the Governments of the occupied countries "placed among their principal war aims the punishment, through the channel of organised justice, of those guilty of, or responsible for, those crimes, whether they have ordered them, perpetrated them, or participated in them."

Despite this solemn warning and the declarations of President Roosevelt, of the Prime Minister, Mr. Winston Churchill, and of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Molotov, the German Government has not ceased to apply its methods of violence and terror. The Polish Government have received numerous reports from Poland testifying to the constant intensification of German persecution of the subjected populations.

3. Most recent reports present a horrifying picture of the position to which the Jews in Poland have been reduced. The new methods of mass slaughter applied during the last few months confirm the fact that the German authorities aim with systematic deliberation at the total extermination of the Jewish population of Poland and of the many thousands of Jews whom the German authorities have deported to Poland from Western and Central European countries and from the German Reich itself.

The Polish Government consider it their duty to bring to the knowledge of the Governments of all civilised countries the following fully authenticated information received from Poland during recent weeks, which indicates all too plainly the new methods of extermination adopted by the German authorities.

4. The initial steps leading to the present policy of extermination of the Jews were taken already in October, 1940, when the German authorities established the Warsaw ghetto. At that time all the Jewish inhabitants of the Capital were ordered to move into the Jewish quarter assigned to them not later than November 1st, 1940, while all the non-Jews domiciled within the new boundaries of what was to become the ghetto were ordered to move out of that quarter. The Jews were allowed to take only personal effects with them, while all their remaining property was confiscated. All Jewish shops and businesses outside the new ghetto boundaries were closed down and sealed. The original date for these transfers was subsequently postponed to November 15th, 1940. After that date the ghetto was completely closed and its entire area was surrounded by a brick wall, the right of entry and exit being restricted to the holders of special passes, issued by the German authorities. All those who left the ghetto without such a pass became liable to sentence of death, and it is known that German courts passed such sentences in a large number of cases.

5. After the isolation of the ghetto, official intercourse with the outside world was maintained through a special German office known as "Transferstelle." Owing to totally inadequate supplies of food for the inhabitants of the ghetto, smuggling on a large scale was carried on; the Germans themselves participated in this illicit trading, drawing considerable incomes from profits and bribes. The food rations for the inhabitants of the ghetto amounted to about a pound of bread per person weekly, with practically nothing else. As a result, prices in the ghetto were on an average ten times higher than outside, and mortality due to exhaustion, starvation and disease, particular-



ly during the last two winters, increased on an unprecedented scale. During the winter 1941–1942 the death rate, calculated on an annual base, has risen to 13 per cent, and during the first quarter of 1942 increased still further. Scores of corpses were found in the streets of the ghetto every day.

6. At the time when the ghetto was established the whole population was officially stated to amount to 433,000 and in spite of the appalling death rate it was being maintained at this figure by the importation of Jews from Germany and from the occupied countries, as well as from other parts of Poland.

7. The outbreak of war between Germany and Soviet Russia and the occupation of the eastern areas of Poland by German troops considerably increased the numbers of Jews in Germany's power. At the same time the mass murders of Jews reached such dimensions that, at first, people refused to give credence to the reports reaching Warsaw from the eastern provinces. The reports, however, were confirmed again and again by reliable witnesses. During the winter 1941–1942 several tens of thousands of Jews were murdered. In the city of Wilno over 50,000 Jews were reported to have been massacred and only 12,000 of them remain in the local ghetto. In the city of Lwow 40,000 were reported murdered; in Rowne 14,000; in Kowel 10,000, and unknown numbers in Stanislawow, Tarnopol, Stryj, Drohobycz and many other smaller towns. At first the executions were carried out by shooting; subsequently, however, it is reported that the Germans applied new methods, such as poison gas, by means of which the Jewish population was exterminated in Chelm<sup>18</sup>, or electrocution, for which a camp was organised in Belzec, where in the course of March and April, 1942, the Jews from the provinces of Lublin, Lwow and Kielce, amounting to tens of thousands, were exterminated. Of Lublin's 30,000 Jewish inhabitants only 2,500 still survive in the city.

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<sup>18</sup> Editor's note: the document mistakenly gives the name of the notorious death camp. The place was not called Chelm but Chelmno n. Nerem (Germ. Kulmhof).

8. It has been reliably reported that on the occasion of his visit to the General Gouvernement of Poland in March, 1942, Himmler issued an order for the extermination of 50 per cent of the Jews in Poland by the end of that year. After Himmler's departure the Germans spread the rumour that the Warsaw ghetto would be liquidated as from April, 1942. This date was subsequently altered to June. Himmler's second visit to Warsaw in the middle of July, 1942, became the signal for the commencement of the process of liquidation, the horror of which surpasses anything known in the annals of history.

9. The liquidation of the ghetto was preceded, on July 17th, 1942, by the registration of all foreign Jews confined there who were then removed to the Pawiak prison. As from July 20th, 1942, the guarding of the ghetto was entrusted to special security battalions, formed from the scum of several Eastern European countries, while large forces of German police armed with machine guns and commanded by SS officers were posted at all the gates leading into the ghetto. Mobile German police detachments patrolled all the boundaries of the ghetto day and night.

10. On July 31st, at 11 a.m., German police cars drove up to the building of the Jewish Council of the ghetto, in Grzybowska Street. The SS officers ordered the chairman of the Jewish Council, Mr. Czerniaków, to summon the members of the Council, who were all arrested on arrival and removed in police cars to the Pawiak prison. After a few hours' detention the majority of them were allowed to return to the ghetto. About the same time flying squads of German police entered the ghetto, breaking into the houses in search of Jewish intellectuals. The better dressed Jews found were killed on the spot, without the police troubling even to identify them. Among those who were thus killed was a non-Jew, Professor Dr. Raszeja, who was visiting the ghetto in the course of his medical duties and was in possession of an official pass. Hundreds of educated Jews were killed in this way.

11. On the morning of the following day, July 22nd, 1942, the German police again visited the office of the Jewish Coun-

cil and summoned all the members, who had been released from the Pawiak prison the previous day. On their assembly they were informed that an order had been issued for the removal of the entire Jewish population of the Warsaw ghetto and printed instructions to that effect were issued in the form of posters, the contents of which are reproduced in Annex. 1 to this Note. Additional instructions were issued verbally. The number of people to be removed was first fixed at 6,000 daily. The persons concerned were to assemble in the hospital wards and grounds in Stawki Street, the patients of which were evacuated forthwith. The hospital was close to the railway siding. Persons subject to deportation were to be delivered by the Jewish police not later than 4 p.m. each day. Members of the Council and other hostages were to answer for the strict fulfilment of the order. In conformity with German orders, all inmates of Jewish prisons, old-age pensioners and inmates of other charitable institutions were to be included in the first contingent.

12. On July 23rd, 1942, at 7 p.m., two German police officers again visited the offices of the Jewish Council and saw the chairman, Mr. Czerniaków. After they left him he committed suicide. It is reported that Mr. Czerniaków did so because the Germans increased the contingent of the first day to 10,000 persons, to be followed by 7,000 persons on each subsequent day. Mr. Czerniaków was succeeded in his office by Mr. Lichtenbaum, and on the following day 10,000 persons were actually assembled for deportation, followed by 7,000 persons on each subsequent day. The people affected were either rounded up haphazardly in the streets or were taken from their homes.

13. According to the German order of July 22nd, 1942, all Jews employed in German-owned undertakings, together with their families, were to be exempt from deportation. This produced acute competition among the inhabitants of the ghetto to secure employment in such undertakings, or, failing employment, bogus certificates to that effect. Large sums of money, running into thousands of zlotys, were being paid for such

certificates to the German owners. They did not, however, save the purchasers from deportation, which was being carried out without discrimination or identification.

14. The actual process of deportation was carried out with appalling brutality. At the appointed hour on each day the German police cordoned off a block of houses selected for clearance, entered the back yard and fired their guns at random, as a signal for all to leave their homes and assemble in the yard. Anyone attempting to escape or to hide was killed on the spot. No attempt was made by the Germans to keep families together. Wives were torn from their husbands and children from their parents. Those who appeared frail or infirm were carried straight to the Jewish cemetery to be killed and buried there. On the average 50–100 people were disposed of in this way daily. After the contingent was assembled, the people were packed forcibly into cattle trucks to the number of 120 in each truck, which had room for forty. The trucks were then locked and sealed. The Jews were suffocating for lack of air. The floors of the trucks were covered with quicklime and chlorine. As far as is known, the trains were despatched to three localities – Tremblinka, Belzec and Sobibor, to what the reports describe as “Extermination camps.” The very method of transport was deliberately calculated to cause the largest possible number of casualties among the condemned Jews. It is reported that on arrival in camp the survivors were stripped naked and killed by various means, including poison gas and electrocution. The dead were interred in mass graves dug by machinery.

15. According to all available information, of the 250,000 Jews deported from the Warsaw ghetto up to September 1st, 1942, only two small transports, numbering about 4,000 people, are known to have been sent eastwards in the direction of Brest-Litovsk and Malachowicze, allegedly to be employed on work behind the front line. It has not been possible to ascertain whether any of the other Jews deported from the Warsaw ghetto still survive, and it must be feared that they have been all put to death.

16. The Jews deported from the Warsaw ghetto so far included in the first instance all the aged and infirm; a number of the physically strong have escaped so far, because of their utility as labour power. All the children from Jewish schools, orphanages and children's homes were deported, including those from the orphanage in charge of the celebrated educationist, Dr. Janusz Korczak, who refused to abandon his charges, although he was given the alternative of remaining behind.

17. According to the most recent reports, 120,000 ration cards were distributed in the Warsaw ghetto for the month of September, 1942, while the report also mentions that only 40,000 such cards were to be distributed for the month of October, 1942. The latter figure is corroborated by information emanating from the German Employment Office (Arbeitsamt), which mentioned the number of 40,000 skilled workmen as those who were to be allowed to remain in a part of the ghetto, confined to barracks and employed on German war production.

18. The deportations from the Warsaw ghetto were interrupted during five days, between August 20th–25th. The German machinery for the mass slaughter of the Jews was employed during this interval on the liquidation of other ghettos in Central Poland, including the towns of Falenica, Rembertów, Nowy Dwór, Kaluszyn and Minsk Mazowiecki.

19. It is not possible to estimate the exact numbers of Jews who have been exterminated in Poland since the occupation of the country by the armed forces of the German Reich. But all the reports agree that the total number of killed runs into many hundreds of thousands of innocent victims – men, women and children – and that of the 3,130,000 Jews in Poland before the outbreak of war, over a third have perished during the last three years.

20. The Polish population, which itself is suffering the most grievous afflictions, and of which many millions have been either deported to Germany as slave labour or evicted from their homes and lands, deprived of so many of their lead-

ers, who have been cruelly murdered by the Germans, have repeatedly expressed, through the underground organisations, their horror of and compassion with the terrible fate which has befallen their Jewish fellow-countrymen. The Polish Government are in possession of information concerning the assistance which the Polish population is rendering to the Jews. For obvious reasons no details of these activities can be published at present.

21. The Polish Government – as the representatives of the legitimate authority on territories in which the Germans are carrying out the systematic extermination of Polish citizens and of citizens of Jewish origin of many other European countries – consider it their duty to address themselves to the Governments of the United Nations, in the confident belief that they will share their opinion as to the necessity not only of condemning the crimes committed by the Germans and punishing the criminals, but also of finding means offering the hope that Germany might be effectively restrained from continuing to apply her methods of mass extermination.

I avail myself of this opportunity to renew to Your Excellency the assurances of my high consideration.

L.S. EDWARD RACZYNSKI.

**April 30, 1943, Warsaw. Statement by the Government's Delegate/Plenipotentiary for Poland Jan Stanisław Jankowski (an excerpt addressing the persecution of the Jewish population by the Germans).**

### STATEMENT

At a time of their propaganda's choosing the Germans made known to the world the vile massacre by the Bolsheviks of Polish officers in Katyń. This disclosure was intended to sup-

port a sweeping German propaganda campaign aimed at persuading the peoples of Europe, including the Poles, to support Germany with armed effort, labour and material resources, and to facilitate its conduct throughout Europe, and through Poland in particular. Such is the purpose – to multiply the German might – of the calls for an anti-Bolshevik crusade.

In the face of these German propaganda efforts it must be said that they are being undertaken by the same Germans who, while so vocal about Soviet barbarities, have been displaying to the world, for nearly four years, in the lands of Poland, their own barbarity and cruelty. These alleged defenders of culture have murdered, starved, exiled from lands which had been their home for centuries, and deported for forced labour millions of Poles. The same Germans, who hypocritically decry the Katyń crime, have been tormenting to death thousands of Poles in Oświęcim<sup>19</sup>, Majdanek, Ravensbrück, Oranienburg, Mauthausen, Treblinka and other camps, in prisons across the whole Poland and in Gestapo torture houses. The same Germans apply the principle of collective responsibility as they murder hundreds of innocent Polish peasants.

The hypocrisy and barbarity of the Germans is further evidenced by their crimes against the Jews. More than a year has elapsed since, after years of cruel persecution, the Germans launched in the entire territory of Poland mass-scale murders of Jewish people, which they have continued to this day. In recent weeks the capital of Poland has witnessed the bloody liquidation of the remnants of the Warsaw ghetto by the German police and by Latvian mercenaries. Now a cruel hunt for and the killing of Jews hiding in the ruins of the ghetto and outside the ghetto walls go on. The Polish nation, filled with the Christian spirit and refusing to recognise two measures of morality, has been repulsed by the Germans' anti-Jewish bestialities, and when the unequal struggle broke out in the Warsaw ghetto

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<sup>19</sup> Editor's note: a town in southern Poland; incorporated into the Reich, it was renamed by the German authorities "Auschwitz."

on April 19, it treated the Jews bravely defending themselves with respect and compassion, and their German murderers with contempt. The political leadership at Home has already expressed the most profound condemnation of the Germans' anti-Jewish bestialities and today it is emphatically re-stating this condemnation. The Polish society has been right to feel compassion for the hunted and persecuted Jews and to extend help to them. This help should continue also in the future.

I denounce the hypocrisy of the Germans who, while continually committing heinous crimes, are seeking, through perfidious propaganda, to portray themselves as the defenders of civilisation and Christianity and to win the Polish society for their own ends – and I call on all to expose these aims and to fight them unreservedly.

Warsaw, April 30, 1943.

PLENIPOTENTIARY FOR POLAND  
OF THE GOVERNMENT OF  
THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND

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Text published in: *Poles – Jews: 1939–1945*, ed. by Andrzej K. Kunert, Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa, Muzeum Historii Polski, Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, Warsaw 2006.

**May 7, 1943, Cracow. Article “Zwalczajmy szantaż” [Let’s Fight Blackmail] published in an underground paper *Wolność – organ PPS (WRN)*, condemning the blackmailers and the indifference to Jews and calling for help for those in hiding**  
[excerpts]

Now that blood is being shed again in the streets of Warsaw, when the Jews should be the object of respect even to those



who have no special liking for them, it is our duty to condemn all those who, in their moral depravity, go as far as to commit acts that include blackmailing the hiding Jews. Whole groups of the scum of the society, who have quickly accommodated to the bandit system of the Hitlerite rule, collaborate with the occupying enemy by extorting exorbitant sums from those Jews whose instinct of preservation prompted them to hide from the Gestapo. We shall likewise denounce the passive attitude of the reactionary part of the Polish society towards the cases referred to here.

The term “passive” should not be construed as meaning that we demand from an average citizen some planned counter-action; what we mean is that a sizable part of this society have behaved in this matter as indifferent spectators, failing to feel the immensity of degradation that this act of hounding the already cruelly persecuted Jews represents – not to mention the fact that none among this indifferent audience has stopped to think that this [conduct] amounts to collaborating with the Hitlerite occupying enemy.

We must remember that those in hiding are our guests who, fleeing from the enemy, have taken refuge in our home and have thrown themselves on our mercy. There is no record in the pages of our history of an occasion when we failed to act chivalrously towards anyone seeking asylum in this country. This is our tradition of which we can be nothing but proud. Therefore, let us not allow a gang of corrupt villains tarnish our honour for which every Pole has been and will be prepared to die. This matter is non-debatable because, in the face of the raging Hitlerite terror, our conscience commands us to defend the oppressed who have sought shelter under our protective wings. [...]

We must not watch with indifference as Hitlerite gangs murder Jews with impunity. All those among us, who have turned out Judases, deserve unreserved condemnation and punishment which should be meted out by powers that be not after the war but already now! [...]

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*Wojna żydowsko-niemiecka. Polska prasa konspiracyjna 1943–1944 o powstaniu w getcie Warszawy*, selected and prepared by Paweł Szapiro, Aneks, London 1992, pp. 136–137, published in *Selection of Sources for Teaching About the Holocaust of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of Poland*, ed. by A. Skibińska and R. Szuchta, Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, Warszawa 2010.

**March 11, 1943, Warsaw. Warning from the Directorate of Underground Resistance [D.U.R.] to blackmailers and extortionists**

**WARNING**

The Polish society, though itself a victim of terrible terror, watches with horror and deep compassion as the Germans murder the remnants of Poland's Jewish population. It has raised a protest against this crime which has become known to the entire free world. It has given such substantial aid to Jews who have escaped from ghettos or from the places of execution that the occupying enemy issued a regulation threatening death to Poles who help Jews in hiding. Yet there are individuals without honour or conscience, members of the criminal world, who have devised for themselves a new source of criminal income, from blackmailing Poles who hide Jews, to Jews themselves.

The D.U.R. warns that such cases of blackmail are being registered and will be punished with utmost severity of law now, whenever practicable, and at all times in the future.

Directorate of Underground Resistance

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Text published in: *Poles – Jews: 1939–1945*, ed. by Andrzej K. Kunert, Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa, Muzeum Historii Polski, Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, Warsaw 2006.

**May 6, 1943, Warsaw. "Preying on Greatest Tragedies" an article published by *Rzeczpospolita Polska*, the underground paper of the Government Delegation for Poland.**

It is a known fact that where there is a war, hyenas prevail. They co-exist on the various peripheries of the struggle the Polish Nation has been waging for close to four years with the German invaders. One species of the hyena are those preying on the tragedy of Polish families suffering political persecution. Generally, various go-betweens hover around the families of people arrested by the Gestapo, offering (obviously, for a generous fee) to help get the arrested out of prison or camp, or to make their prison life easier. Of these intermediaries, only a small fraction can render genuinely important, valuable services; the rest are typical wartime hyenas in the business of shamelessly tricking money out of people. This is a criminal activity – all the more so because while people are being lead up the garden path, precious time is lost; by the time the fraud has been discovered and a different, proper course taken, it is often too late for an effective rescue action.

The past year has brought yet another species of the war hyena: those who take advantage of the tragedy of Jews hiding from the German manhunt to practise extortion and blackmail. An overwhelming majority of the morally healthy, Christian-spirited Polish society has been disgusted by the atrocities committed by the German tormentors against the Jews and have treated the victims of this crime with sincere, profound compassion. Yet there are depraved individuals – regrettably, many of them wearing police uniform – who do not scruple to cash in on the tragedy of the German-hounded Jews, by blackmailing and extorting from them exorbitant payoffs. The dishonourable, unconscionable individuals who engage in such blackmail are but a step removed from those – fortunately, few – criminals who do not hesitate to deliver Jews into the Germans' hands.

Both categories of wartime hyena – those who swindle money out of the families of political prisoners and those who

blackmail the ill-fated Jews – should be treated with condemnation and contempt by the society. Their names should be put on special records and they ought to be brought up before special courts for severe punishment.

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Text published in: *Poles – Jews: 1939–1945*, ed. by Andrzej K. Kunert, Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa, Muzeum Historii Polski, Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, Warsaw 2006.

**July 23, 1943. “The Jewish Issue” – excerpts from a report from the Foreign Affairs Section of the Government Delegation for Poland**

The mass murders of Jews committed in Poland by the Germans will reduce the Jewish issue in this country, yet they will not remove it altogether. Certainly, a very substantial number of Jews will survive and, what with their re-emigration after the end of the war, we shall need to reckon with a Jewish population of between one and two million. After the monstrous persecution suffered by Jews in Europe, the global opinion will be even more sensitive to their fate and even more caring of their interests. While the Christian compassion for the tormented Jews prevails at home at the moment, there is alongside it, in the eastern part of Poland, a very pronounced resentment of the Jews – a remnant of the Bolshevik occupation – and throughout the country the state of things (the psychological aspects aside) is such that the return of Jews, even in much reduced numbers, to their settlements and workshops is to be absolutely ruled out. Non-Jews have filled Jews’ places in towns and townships and this is, in a vast part of Poland, a fundamental change of a final nature. A massive return of Jews would be perceived by the population more in the light of an invasion to be thwarted – even physically – than of restitution.

Accordingly, it would be tragic indeed for our policy if, at a time when our borders are being set, loans are contracted, and alliances or federations made, Poland were to be branded by the global opinion as an anti-Semitic country. [...] The government is right to assure the world's opinion that there will be no antisemitism in Poland – yet this will be so only provided the Jewry survived from the pogrom do not attempt to return in masses to Polish towns and townships. The Government Delegation for Poland sees only one way out of this difficult situation: that is, for the Polish government to take – immediately, if possible – a pre-emptive initiative to create for the East European Jews their own national centre. [...]

Perhaps it would be premature to specify a territory to be considered. Our position on this matter must be philo-Jewish rather than anti-Jewish. The Jews are a nation; they are entitled to a territory of their own in which to develop all strata and classes of society. The diaspora is a curse for the Jewry who deserve compensation for the present monstrous persecution; this [compensation] should primarily be the concern of those nations which have hosted Jews for centuries and which, after a peaceful parting, are prepared to contribute to the economic aid provided to the new state and to its military protection.

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Tomasz Szarota, *Karuzela na placu Krasińskich. Studia i szkice z lat wojny i okupacji*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, Fundacja "Historia i Kultura," Warszawa 2007, pp. 217–218, published in *Selection of Sources for Teaching About the Holocaust of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of Poland*, ed. by A. Ski-bińska and R. Szuchta, Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, Warszawa 2010.

**August 5, 1943, Warsaw. Wire message No. 1321 from Home Army Commander General Tadeusz Komorowski "Lawina" to Commander-in-Chief's Staff in London**

Coded Cable Message No. 382

Secret

From Wanda 6

Sent on ....

Received on Sept. 7, 6.05 hours

Decoded on Sept. 8, 13.00 hours

Na 3737.

1. Aid in weapons and explosives was provided by us to the Jews fighting in Warsaw.

This aid could not be very substantial, given our modest resources and the difficult conditions for identifying the needs.

If other centres of Jewish struggle with the Germans emerge, we shall not refuse to aid them, within our means.

The Kalina order<sup>20</sup> issued in the past regarding this matter is still in force and effect.

2. Too-expansive aid for the Jews would be ill-advised, for the following reasons:
  - a) At home the Jews are regarded as an alien element and on many occasions hostile to Poland, as evidenced by their conduct during the Soviet occupation and frequently also here.
  - b) There are many Jews in the armed bands of plunderers and Communists which are a plague at home. The Jewish members of these bands stand out for their special cruelty to Polish people;
  - c) Public opinion and the underground community would take a negative view of any major provision

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<sup>20</sup> An order of the Home Army Commander General Stefan Rowecki („Grot”, „Kalina”) of February 1943, not found to this day.

for the Jews; such support would be seen as cutting into our own resources contrary to Poland's direct interests.

3. The Jews have been at pains to publicise worldwide the magnitude of their armed resistance to the Germans, while in fact resistance occurred only in the Warsaw ghetto, by several thousand heroic people who fought for their lives while the rest of the Jewry remained totally passive.
4. The indicated contact in Bendzin is known to us.

Lawina 1321 of Aug. 5

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Text published in: *Poles – Jews: 1939–1945*, ed. by Andrzej K. Kunert, Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa, Muzeum Historii Polski, Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, Warsaw 2006.

**September 4, 1943, Warsaw. “For People’s Active Stance,” an article published in *Głos Demokracji*, the Polish Democratic Alliance’s underground paper**

The massacre of the Jewish population is one of the most striking manifestations of the barbarity of German totalitarianism. Constrained as we have been ourselves by the invaders’ indescribably brutal terror, many murdered throughout the occupation in cities and in the countryside, in prisons and in camps. We have been helpless witnesses of the common crimes committed by the German thugs every day, sometimes on a mass scale, according to a plan prepared in advance. Overpowered today by the enemy’s overwhelming strength, brutal ruthlessness and cruelty, we have no strength to defend ourselves, neither are we capable of frustrating the tormentors’ infamous project to murder the Jewish population.

Yet it has been our duty to provide shelter and aid to the victims who have escaped from under their executioners' knife. In this respect, an overwhelming majority of the Polish society have passed the test. Many a heroic act, many a sacrifice of life made with full awareness of the danger involved will stand out as evidence of the effort to rescue persecuted Jews. In the underground, Poland's laurel wreath of the heroism these sacrifices and this heroism will be covered with no less glory as the others.

Like earlier in Germany, so today in the occupied lands the bestial slaughtering of Jewish people before our eyes and the robbery of their possessions are more than an antisemitic strategy. They are a deliberate and calculated effort by the totalitarian nationalism to be set free from the restraints of culture and ethics, the savage instincts which lie dormant in the human soul, so as to harness this blind and brutal force to its own ends. Not enough attention has been paid to this aspect of the tragedy playing out before our eyes, not enough has been said and done to protect our society, in particular the young generation, from a moral gangrene likely to develop from a passive attitude towards the multitude of crimes committed around us. For this reason, aid extended to the persecuted, besides being of real significance to the victims, is of meaningful moral importance for Polish society. Only an active attitude, such as offering help to victims of violence, can be a purposeful and effective defence against the deliberately disseminated demoralisation. For this reason, public opinion should put in the pillory not only those individuals – fortunately, they are few and come chiefly from the scum of the society – who either collaborate with the Germans by laying information against hiding Jews, or blackmail the latter, but also those who, by preaching passivity, obstruct efforts to help the massacred Jews. [...]

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Text published in: *Poles – Jews: 1939–1945*, ed. by Andrzej K. Kunert, Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa, Muzeum Historii Polski, Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, Warsaw 2006.



**September 7, 1943, Warsaw. Official announcement by the Directorate of Underground Resistance on the execution of a death sentence for delivering Jews to German police**

**ANNOUNCEMENT<sup>21</sup>**

By a judgment given by the Special Court in Warsaw on July 7, 1943, Borys aka Bogusław Jan Pilnik, born on May 5, 1912, son of Aleksander and Felicja Szołkowski, residing in Warsaw in 17, Pierackiego Street, was sentenced to death for collaborating, during the German occupation in Poland, with the German occupation authorities as an informer to the detriment of the Polish society, in the course of which collaboration he had delivered to the German authorities Polish citizens of Jewish nationality hiding from the German authorities; and for obtaining from his victims large sums of money on the pretext that these were needed to ensure their protection; and after he had turned over those hiding to the German authorities, taking from the victims' families various items – allegedly to be delivered to the arrestees – which he used for his own gain.

The sentence was executed by shooting on July 25, 1943.

September 7, 1943

The Directorate of Underground Resistance

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*Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej. Polacy z pomocą Żydom 1939–1945*, prepared by Władysław Bartoszewski, Zofia Lewinówna, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, supplemented, Stowarzyszenie ŻIH, Świat Książki, Warszawa 2007, Document No. 50, p. 682, published in *Selection of Sources for Teaching About the Holocaust of the Jews in the Occupied Territories of Poland*, ed. by A. Skibińska and R. Szuchta, Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, Warszawa 2010.

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<sup>21</sup> This announcement was published in a number of underground papers.

**September 1943. Poster – announcement by the Directorate of Underground Resistance of the execution of the first death sentence against a blackmailer of Jews**

IN THE NAME OF  
THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND

Under sentences given by the Special Civil Court for the Warsaw District, the following were sentenced to death and the forfeiture of public rights and civil rights of honour: [...]

8. PILNIK Bogusław Jan of 17 Piernackiego Street, Warsaw – for blackmailing and delivering into the hands of German authorities hiding Polish citizens of Jewish nationality. [...]

The sentences were carried out by shooting.

DIRECTORATE OF UNDERGROUND RESISTANCE

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Text published in: *Poles – Jews: 1939–1945*, ed. by Andrzej K. Kunert, Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa, Muzeum Historii Polski, Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, Warsaw 2006.

## Today's Face of the Rural Areas

[excerpts]

[...] The general atmosphere prevailing among the rural populace is that of waiting. Waiting for what? For a breakthrough. For the Germans' defeat followed by the day of reckoning when enemies are paid in kind and the wrongs suffered are put to right. For a moment "to let rip." The rural populace are still unclear about how they will "let rip." Depending on local circumstances, a sudden discharge of tension could be directed against the Germans, Volksdeutsche, displaced persons, Jews, the manor people, the mill owner, the sawmill owner, the innkeeper, the shopkeeper. This tension could oscillate in any direction. Still, the dreams of this day invariably include the notion of someone's Liquidation.

The extreme-right and extreme-left elements are aware of this mood's simmering in the country side. They both count on harnessing this "desire to let rip" for their own ends.

What are the rural areas' principal ailments of this moment? 1. Schools. 2. Displaced persons. 3. Delation. 4. Poverty.

### 1. Schools.

The condition of education in rural areas is indeed deplorable. With vast numbers of children not attending school at all, a new group of illiterates is being generated. There are many reasons for this: the abolition of compulsory education: the lack of footwear and warm clothing and the increased demand for farm labour. The livestock of the peasant has become paramount: the hen that lays eggs; the cow, now the source of subsistence for the entire family, and the young pig – a valuable treasure to be kept hidden. Taking care of their livestock – the

regular watering, feeding and guarding – has been the pre-eminent concern to which all others are secondary. A child has become indispensable at home. These are the external causes but, possibly, the most common reason lies in the school itself. At the few schools which are still operating, which have escaped being closed on the pretext of an outbreak of typhoid, the off days vastly outnumber the working days. The teachers, left to fend for themselves without guidance or care, are disheartened by the hard living conditions, and are demoralised. Worse still, they beat the children. The Germans have abolished compulsory education, but they have permitted beating. A majority of teachers abuse this permission. In schools beatings are administered without moderation. The peasants often thrash their children, but they will not have others usurp what they consider their exclusive parental prerogative. “I ain’t sending them to no school to be walloped by a bloody schoolmaster,” is the most frequently offered explanation of the child’s non-attendance.

## 2. Displaced persons

In the first year of occupation the coexistence of locals and displaced persons was bearable, but of late it has deteriorated considerably. This is due to mental changes on both sides. The displaced were coping well for some time. They believed they would go back home and they were living with this hope. Yet as this conflict is drawing on – simple people have a short imagination span. Gradually, the displaced have come to yearn for stabilisation and take a present-day rather than pre-war view of life. At first, their humiliation and poverty did not depress their morale, for they were still feeling the old way. It seemed to them that, regardless their present destitution, they were commonly recognised as yesterday’s and tomorrow’s people of means. Now they have forgotten that things used to be different. This has aggravated their anguish and their desire to do better for themselves here and now. In 1940 they would invite their hosts, on every occasion, to visit them “the next Christ-

mas,” “the next Green Holiday” [the Pentecost], “on our patron saint’s fiesta in September.” “You’ll see, we’ll do you proud,” they declared. By 1942 they had stopped extending invitations and they no longer mentioned their homes and farms. Instead, they have taken advantage of their knowledge of the German language and they have gone to serve... the occupying enemy. They have filled, in droves, junior positions with the local commune administration, as well as janitor and watchman jobs. They no longer feel like beggars – not now that they have got ahead of the locals. They have come to be looked at with awe as important people who can help, or do harm.

The locals’ feelings have evolved along much the same line. Initially, the newcomers had been regarded as victims of the war, a terrifying evidence of what war could do. They had been given a humane welcome prompted by the feeling of solidarity. “It’s you today, it could be ourselves tomorrow...” Thereafter, the displaced were regarded as an interim phase – tiresome, costly, but not here for long. “The war will be over, they will go their own way...” However, in this third year of war this reasoning no longer applies. The arrival of the newcomers seems to have happened so long ago that their departure appears unlikely. They have taken roots. They have come to feel at home. They have become a permanent element – competitive and taking space. The locals recognize – whether they like it or not – that the displaced are here to stay even after the war has ended, to be permanently in the way. As if this was not enough, they are at the German’s beck and call. Anxious to keep their jobs, they are “getting under the skin” of their kind-hearted hosts who once took them in. With each side reasoning this way, it is not at all surprising that the outcome is a mutual dislike that often evolves into hatred... This war has lasted too long.

### 3. Delation

[This is] a pestilence, disgrace, plague, curse, it renders independence work in the rural areas impossible. The same peasant woman or man who would tear a German limb from

limb with their own hands will run to him bearing tales against a neighbour, teacher, priest, village chief... There is no moderation or limit to denouncing. Information laid about buried weapons, about reading an underground paper, illegal slaughter of a pig, illegal grinding of grain, theft of a tree, disrespectful remark about the Germans, somebody's presumed membership in an underground organisation – mounds of such files accumulate on Gestapo desks. The Germans display these files without concealing their contempt: "We cannot possibly deal with all this. We handpick the choicest ones..."

What is the cause of this psychosis (for there is hardly another name for these symptoms)? It is difficult to say. Presumably, a bit of everything: the village class antagonisms referred to earlier, common envy, insensitive stupidity, a desire to appear important and, last but not least, anxiety about one's own security.

Whatever the informers' reasons, the denunciation plague is dangerous and must be counteracted. How? This is the snag. A campaign in the underground press is unlikely to produce the desired result because underground papers reach the rural areas seldom and irregularly. A threat would be more useful, particularly when backed by the execution of a number of sentences against informers. On these occasions there should be no skimping on sinister, mysterious stage effects that would serve to breed and disseminate a legend of an unknown – distant, yet omnipresent and omniscient – executive power which has all informers on its records.

#### 4. Poverty

The urban population is firmly convinced that the peasants have enriched themselves fabulously during this war. Stories are circulating about grand pianos bought and trimmed to fit into peasant cottages, or of other luxury goods. Perhaps isolated cases like this did indeed happen somewhere, but on the whole it's high time to do away with such fairy tales. The countryside has been destroyed, like most of Poland. The country-

side has become poorer, not richer. It is not the peasants who have become rich, but the smugglers and the middlemen. The peasants are milked dry by the occupying force, groaning under the compulsory delivery quotas for grain, potatoes, labour, eggs, milk, butter, fruits. No product is quota-exempt. Besides in-kind dues, there is the excessive burden of mandatory work paid for at pre-war rates, which are laughable compared with today's price of nails or horse shoes. The peasant has reduced his needs to a minimum, but from time to time he simply must shoe his horse, buy some kerosene, and have his boots soled or patched. Where is he to get the money for this? At the same time he knows that the "townspeople" regard him as a rich man, a "profiteering yokel" – and this fills him with bitterness. Rather than die out amidst the universal poverty, the old antagonisms between the burghers and the peasants are growing and gaining intensity.

Yet they could have been done away with so easily! Despite the real penury and the insecurity in which the peasants live, the project to send town children to the country, initiated by the R.G.O.<sup>1</sup> in spring, could have produced excellent results. The peasants responded to it favourably, on the whole. In the villages where it was properly presented and vigorously promoted on site, whether by the parish priest, the community executive, or the village chief, applications for a child were many and the agreements were faithfully kept. In the time-honoured peasant fashion, when declarations to host a child were first called for, there was typical procrastinating, due to a reluctance to jump the gun and the desire to hear what the others would say. This was why more than once there were no offers at all at the first and the second meeting but at the third – half of the village applied. Cases of ill-treatment of children taken for the summer were very rare and they were often provoked by young guests' culpable conduct. The honour of the village demanded that the

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: Rada Główna Opiekuńcza (RGO) – Central Welfare Council.

“townies” be fed better rather than worse than the host’s own children. The blame for the whole project’s failure to produce a positive result lies at the door of the R.G.O. authorities which had proved incapable of managing it in a consistent manner. Cases are known when villages declared themselves ready to receive tens of children, only to have their offers left without a reply. In some other cases the requirements as to housing conditions were such that the village could not meet them. The peasant, once he decides to offer something, does not like his offer to be unappreciated or treated with contempt. He considers it a grave slight. Thus, an initiative which could have brought relief to many thousands of starving children and, at the same time, driven the process of bringing closer the urban and rural communities, dissolved causing more damage than good.

There is no shortage of rural communities in which local Red Cross committees successfully collect for parcels for POW inmates. The quantities of products received through this channel are sometimes impressive. Letters from POW officers of trust, confirming the receipt of parcels, are read from the pulpits – to the donors’ great satisfaction and pride. Minor as these matters are, they are worth keeping in mind and interpreting in the context of the impoverishment of rural communities mentioned earlier. These people are not disposing of a surplus – they are taking food away from themselves.

Predictably, all public-spirited gestures of rural communities are closely linked with the personal energy and merits of the local priest, or the village chief.

We have already said while addressing the displaced persons’ issue that this war has been going on too long. This can be re-stated in connection with the Jewish issue – with the mental attitudes towards it. Initially, the peasants’ behaviour in the face of violence committed by the Germans on the Jews was human, logical and understandable. It was reflected in filling hastily the jobs and posts vacated by Jews, in educating young people in the crafts which had previously been the Jews’ exclusive domain, such as hat making or tailoring, but it



also included highly Christian help for starved refugees from ghettos. "Sweet Lord Jesus! Them's God's creatures too," exclaimed peasant women as they pressed a chunk of bread or some cereal into a skeleton-thin beggar's hand. This was how things were in 1941. By now German bestialities have dulled the peasants' sensitivity, undermining their certainty of judgment. No lightning strikes from the heaven to kill the murderers of children; blood does not call for revenge. Perhaps it is true, then, that the Jew is a cursed creature a crime against which goes unpunished? Regrettably, because of this belief there have been more and more cases of peasants' active participation in the Germans' campaign of extermination. This is a very dangerous precedent.

*(Abridged by Sebastian Rejak)*

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## Warsaw Under Occupation: A Timeline

1939

### September 1, 1939, Friday

At dawn, the first German bombs fell unexpectedly on the suburbs of Warsaw: on the Okęcie Airport, on residential areas in Rakowiec and Koło (Obozowa Street). There are now the first civilian casualties.

Radio Reports in the morning news announce an attack of German forces on Poland: at 4.45 hours, Central European time (4.45 hours British summer time, 5.45 hours in the German Reich) German troops moved across the state border at many points.

During the day two more air raid alarms have been sounded. In the city there is, understandably, much agitation – but no symptoms of panic; indeed, an optimistic mood prevails. Volunteers carry on with the digging of anti-aircraft trenches. Crowds are gathering at railway stations. Thousands of uniformed men hurry to their barracks. All the shops are open, selling goods at usual prices.

### September 2, 1939, Saturday

German air raids now occur at dawn, mid-day and in the afternoon. People are getting used to the new situation, they watch with interest as airplanes run into anti-aircraft and heavy machine-gun fire. Radio broadcasts: “An air raid alert is called for the city of Warsaw” are received with utter calm. In vain the Air Defence wardens attempt to shepherd the curious onlookers from house entrances and courtyards to safer pla-

ces. This morning air-raid alerts continued from 5.50 hours to 6.30 hours and from 7.50 hours to 8.15 hours – that is, at times when street traffic is heavy as people hurry to factories and offices. [...] People arriving from outside of Warsaw bring news of the strafing from the air of trains with civilian passengers on board and of people on roads.

### **September 4, 1939, Monday**

First sizable transports of wounded have been arriving in Warsaw. Bad news about the situation on the front, in particular about German armies advancing from south-east. Civilian refugees have been streaming in from the Wielkopolska province and from the Częstochowa and Łódź regions. [...]

A decision was taken to partly evacuate the government and central government agencies from Warsaw to the city of Lublin and its environs. Scheduled to leave Warsaw under the first wave of evacuation are a majority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' agencies together with part of the diplomatic corps, and the Ministry of Military Affairs.

### **September 10, 1939, Sunday**

This second Sunday of the war has been marked by heavy bombing. The first German air raid came as early as 5.30 hours, and over a dozen more followed. All in all, today there have been seventeen air raids by about 70 planes, of which five were shot down by the city's air defence. This afternoon's two-hour bombing caused tens of fires, chiefly on the right-hand bank of the Vistula, in the Praga and Wawer districts. Grochowska Street and Waszyngton Avenue are devastated by bombs. The Grochów road is a mass of people and a hundred metres above German pilots are firing machine guns at refugees and at women who ventured out to dig up some potatoes.

In central Warsaw bombs hit many buildings in Krakowskie Przedmieście Street, in Królewska Street and in Piłsudski Square. Corpses were lying unburied until the evening. Only

under the cover of dusk are the dead being buried in makeshift cemeteries: in gardens, city greens, larger courtyards.

### **September 13, 1939, Wednesday**

After a two-day intermission during which the city was worried only by around-the-clock artillery shelling, German bombers have made themselves felt again. Since 17.00 hours some 50 planes have been dropping demolition and incendiary bombs on the city centre and on the northern part of Warsaw, deliberately targeting larger civilian settlements.

#### *Regulation of September 16, 1939 on Consumption*

“It is hereby ordered that as of today restaurants, eateries, inns, soup kitchens and other catering establishments shall prepare and serve one dish only – a nourishing soup.

Whoever contravenes this regulation, be they a consumer or the owner of a catering establishment, shall be liable to a fine of up to 10,000 zlotys, or arrest for up to 3 months, or to both penalties together.”

(-) ST[EFAN] STARZYŃSKI  
The CIVILIAN COMMISSIONER  
at the Warsaw Defence Command  
Major of the Reserves

### **September 17, 1939, Sunday**

A decisive German assault on the Bzura River has definitely scattered the “Poznań” and “Pomorze” Armies, the reminders of which will be making their way to Modlin and Warsaw.

Aggression by the USSR – at 4.00 hours Warsaw time (6.00 hours, Moscow time) Red Army units crossed the Polish-Soviet border along its whole length. [...] in the morning and in the afternoon planes are showering demolition and incendiary bombs on Warsaw. People drop dead in the streets.

[...] Hundreds of people have died under the ruins of churches destroyed while Sunday services were in progress. The main streets of the city are turning into cemeteries.

### **September 26, 1939, Tuesday**

The whole city is on fire. Hundreds of people trapped in cellars under the debris of bombed houses are awaiting help in vain. Nearly all hospitals have been turned into rubble. Stocks of food, medicines and dressings are buried under ruins. There is no water, not even for the wounded, since the few working wells cannot provide it in sufficient quantity. Fires are no longer being extinguished.

### **October 2–8, 1939, Monday–Sunday**

*Einsatzkommando der Sicherheitspolizei* has been making first arrests of hostages: several hundred, all in all. Only in one day, on October 8, 354 priests and teachers were arrested and many professionals, merchants, artisans, and pre-war social workers were incarcerated in the Pawiak prison. [...] Quite a few of the arrested were released after several days, but many (the Burschs among them) will be sent to concentration camps from which only few will return.

### **October 10, 1939, Tuesday**

A Council of Elders of the Jewish Community constituted itself as a 24-member body headed by Adam Czerniaków.

### **October 11, 1939, Wednesday**

[...] The Municipal Food Supply Authority has commenced the sale of first-necessity goods through an organisation with a block structure patterned after that of the Air Defence. Each larger house (or a block of houses) has its delegate for food supply. Today for the first time bread has been distributed in left-bank Warsaw (250 grams per inhabitant) at a price of 0.30 zloty per kilogramme. In the next two days sugar and rice (100 grams of each per inhabitant) are to be distributed in Praga.

### **October 21–22, 1939, Saturday–Sunday**

The Jewish Council is supplying – on a mandatory basis, as of now – 360 labourers to perform work commissioned by the German police. This is the beginning of an operation of systematic conscription of ever-increasing numbers of Jews for slave work.

### **October 26, 1939, Thursday**

Hans Frank signed a proclamation (posted immediately and published on the next day in *Nowy Kurier Warszawski*) on the establishment of a “General Government for the Occupied Polish Territory.” [...] A census of the Jewish population in Warsaw is ordered to be held on October 28.

### **Closing days of October 1939**

[...] In October free-market prices (in zlotys) of first-necessity goods stood at: wholemeal bread – 1.68 per kg (before the outbreak of war – 0.30 per kg); potatoes 0.65 (previously 0.14); butter 12.75 (previously 2.73); eggs 0.36 per egg (previously 0.08); pork 6.24 (1.60); pork fat 0.87 (1.61); salt 2.50 (0.32); washing soap 3.00 (0.89); coal 0.20 per kg (0.05); wood 10.00 per 100 kg (7.00); fabric for clothing (worsted) 67.50 per 1 metre (32.50); shoe soles 8.00 a pair (4.50).

Wages and salaries in public institutions remain at pre-September levels.

### **November 9, 1939, Thursday**

In Paris the Commander-in-Chief, Division General Władysław Sikorski, bestows a Class V *Virtuti Militari* Order on the capital city of Warsaw “in recognition of the heroic, unwavering courage shown by the population of the capital city of Warsaw during the defence against the German invasion.” [...] In the southern part of downtown Warsaw all Polish inhabitants are being evicted from selected houses, their flats being turned over to Germans.

### **First half of November 1939**

[...] Bodies are being exhumed from graves in streets and squares. The German Hospital Department has forbidden the hospitals to accept Jewish patients.

### **November 25, 1939, Saturday**

A regulation of the Head of the Warsaw District, Fisher, on compulsory wearing of armbands with a blue Star of David on a white background by all Jews and by all individuals of Jewish origin (within the meaning of the Nurnberg Laws), regardless of their religion, including by children from 12 years of age, effective as of December 1 (*Nowy Kurier Warszawski*, November 30, 1939, No. 44; *Amtsblatt des Chefs des Distrikts Warschau/Dziennik Urzędowy Szefa Okręgu Warszawskiego* [The official Journal of the Head of the Warsaw District], December 12, 1939, No. 2).

Also, Fisher signs a Regulation on the Marking of Jewish Enterprises and Shops in the Warsaw District, under which a “special poster with a blue Star of Zion on a white background” must be displayed in a visible place (*Amtsblatt des Chefs des Distrikts Warschau/Dziennik Urzędowy Szefa Okręgu Warszawskiego*, December 12, 1939, No. 2).

### **December 19, 1939, Tuesday**

For several days now Warsaw has seen an inflow of Jews deported from the provinces “annexed into the Reich.” In just one week some fifty thousand displaced persons have arrived in the city.

## **1940**

### **January 3, 1940, Wednesday**

Between January 3 and January 15 the holders of ration coupons are to be issued 50 g of sugar and 300 g of salt. Some shops offer oranges priced at 14–16 zlotys per kilo.

The inflow of deported Jews and refugees from Łódź, Płock, Mszczonów and other locations continues. In the Jewish residential area living quarters are heavily congested. [...]

### **January 17, 1940, Wednesday**

[...] On the black market, the price of the paper dollar has approached 100 zlotys (compared to 5 zlotys before the war). The price of pork fat has been rising daily, to 12 zlotys, then to 17 zlotys per kilo.

### **January 24, 1940, Wednesday**

*Nowy Kurier Warszawski* has published the text of a regulation of Governor-General Frank (of January 21) under which trading in food at prices above the official ones carries a penalty of imprisonment or death. At the same time, restrictions have been imposed on the baking of bread and severe penalties announced for unrationed sales of bread. From now on, baking wheat bread as well as selling and buying bread without rationing coupons is a criminal offense.

### **February 1, 1940, Thursday**

A 100 percent rise of railway fares and restrictions on passenger traffic between Warsaw and other cities and towns, applicable to Jews and Poles, are coming into force. [...] Posters of the Jewish Council of Elders, announcing the text of the regulation on registration of Jews for compulsory work, have been affixed in public places.

### **Mid-February 1940**

[...] Swindlers are at large, extracting money from the families of missing persons or of prisoners of war, on the pretence of being able to help them.

Cod-liver oil for children – 350 barrels donated by the American Red Cross – is being distributed in the city via the Red Cross and the Joint Distribution Committee. The German Red Cross figures officially as the donor.



### **February 16–20, 1940, Friday–Tuesday**

In Praga and the city centre several operations of seizing young people for forced labour in Germany were conducted. They were promptly dubbed “round-ups.”

### **March 4, 1940, Monday**

This is how an underground paper *Polska Żyje!* (No. 34) described the situation prevailing in Warsaw, “for our readers outside the capital city”:

“Schools have been closed, first on the pretext of the threat of an epidemic and then on the grounds of there being no coal (which the Germans stole). Polish staff have been removed from many hospitals. Recently the chaplains have been thrown out from all hospitals in the Capital; 90 percent of Warsaw’s population are out of work and they are starving and freezing in congested flats. The Germans sent to the Reich the entire stocks of coal, tea, coffee and cocoa and of most other goods; they requisitioned fats, soap, textiles, leather. They shipped out libraries, art collections and scientific laboratories. Prices have been skyrocketing. The occupying authorities’ regulations on administration, food supply [and] currency policy are Draconian and, at the same time, chaotic and conflicting. Thousands of men and women have been forcibly transported to work in Germany.

The poverty, which leaps to the eye wherever you look in the streets of the Capital City, defies description. Legless and handless cripples, people walking barefoot in the snow, soldiers and soldiers’ widows begging – these are commonplace sights. The frozen corpses of soldiers are found in the streets and in houses. Enlivening this nightmarish scene are gangs of drunk soldiers having fun with prostitutes.”

### **March 22, 1940, Good Friday**

A Germans-incited wave of shop-looting and beating-up people by the city’s riff-raff – in streets inhabited mainly by Jews, but also in the city centre. It went on, with short inter-

missions, until Good Thursday. The police did not intervene in defence of the persecuted. “There have been incidents of adolescents attacking Jews, women in particular, with the sole purpose of robbery, but there have also been cases when non-Jewish passers-by reacted firmly in defence of the Jews,” noted Ludwik Landau on March 23.

#### **April 4, 1940, Thursday**

[...] The price of the dollar bill on the black market has soared from 100 zlotys to 170 zlotys.

For several days now walls are being erected across Świątokrzyska Street, Złota Street and other streets, to separate from the Centre the north-western part of the city which is the chief habitat of the Jewish population.

#### **April 20, 1940, Saturday**

“The destruction of Warsaw’s parks and woods around the city, wantonly tolerated by the occupying authorities, has reached an enormous scale,” notes an underground paper *Pol-ska Żyje!* (Nos. 46–48). “The poorest people in the suburbs, suffering from the severe winter, have been cutting roadside trees and local timber to heat their homes with and, to make things worse, whole gangs have been logging trees – systematically, for trade – in the Młociny and Kabaty suburbs, in the Praga and Mokotów districts, and in unprotected city parks.”

#### **May 8, 1940, Wednesday**

A peak of street round-ups in the city centre.

“Again, people found in cafes and tea-shops were the main target, but pedestrians in the streets were seized too – chiefly young men, but also girls and elderly people; even those wearing armbands were rounded up, although Jews are not sent to Germany as a matter of principle. The streets have become empty, people are attempting to go out as infrequently as possible, they feel like hunted animals,” noted Ludwik Landau.

### **Mid-May 1940**

[...] For several weeks now the Jewish Community has had to supply about seven thousand people daily for manual labour. In many locations in the northern part of the city walls are being erected, the work being arranged by and paid for by the Jewish Community, to obstruct contact with the “epidemic-threatened area” (*Seuchen-Sperrgebiet*).

### **June 20–21, 1940, Thursday–Friday**

378 political prisoners, 80 women among them, from the Pawiak prison and from Al. Szucha [interrogation centre at the Gestapo Headquarters] were executed at Palmiry [near Warsaw]. Many of the victims were “politically suspect individuals” within the meaning of the assumptions of the AB Action: members of socially creative communities, professionals, or – simply – people widely respected as figures of prestige. Social workers, politicians, senior government officials were killed in this execution.

### **June 1940**

Throughout June the Warsaw Water and Sewage Company has been commissioning newly built canals in Mokotów [...], in Żoliborz and Marymont [...], in Ochota [...] and in Wola [...].

The soup kitchens run by the Warsaw Social Self-Help Committee have been issuing about 90 thousand free and low-priced helpings a day; with this number steadily increasing, about 10 percent of Warsaw’s Christian population can be said to be getting its nourishment “from the communal pot.” Similar soup kitchens for Jews distribute about 60 thousand portions a day, a figure corresponding to 15 percent of the Jewish population in Warsaw.

### **Late in July 1940**

*Gazeta Żydowska* [The Jewish Gazette] a Polish-language Cracow-based paper published twice a week since July 23 under the aegis of the occupying authorities has been distributed

in the Jewish residential area. This is how Ludwik Landau assessed this publication on July 30, upon analysing its first issues:

“Just as disseminating antisemitism and inciting hostility against the Jews is an important purpose of a paper targeted at the Polish population, the purpose of *Gazeta Żydowska* is to incite the Jews’ hatred of the Polish population – under the same aegis. *Divide and impera!* [...]”

### October 2, 1940, Wednesday

[...] The eviction of the Jewish and Christian population from houses in the city centre (including in Nowogrodzka, Żurawia and Wspólna Streets) continues. Governor-General Fisher has signed a Regulation on the Establishment of a Jewish Residential Area in Warsaw under which “the Jews resident or resettling in Warsaw must reside in the Jewish residential area (the Warsaw ghetto).” “The Poles resident in the Jewish residential area shall move by October 31, 1940 to another part of the city” (but they are prohibited from settling in the German residential area) and “the Jews resident outside the Jewish residential area shall move thereto by October 31, 1940,” subject to a condition that “they may take with them only a refugee kit [hand luggage and bedding].”

### October 18, 1940, Friday

*Biuletyn Informacyjny* [Information Bulletin] (unnumbered) – the underground paper, brings a note “National Residential Areas,” reading:

[...] “The resettlement regulations, which put into practice the barbarous designs of Hitlerism, affect some **two hundred thousand** inhabitants of Warsaw who must change their living premises within two weeks. Poles appear to constitute a majority of the resettlees. The Poles and the Jews alike are being sentenced to indescribable penury and hardships.”

### **November 16, 1940, Saturday**

The Warsaw ghetto is now sealed – cut off from the rest of the city. A police cordon has been set up around the Jewish residential area, which must not be left without a special pass. Tramways cross the Jewish area in transit, without stopping, supervised by the Navy-blue [controlled by the German authorities – trans.] Police.

In the ghetto a “Jewish Organization for the Maintenance of Public Order” has been established to act as a police force reporting to the Jewish Council and to the German administration.

### **November 22, 1940, Friday**

300 men were transported from the Pawiak prison; a day later they arrived at the Auschwitz (Oświęcim) concentration camp [...].

### **Pre-Christmas week 1940**

Food prices have soared to ten times the pre-war level. The prices of bread, flour, and sugar have increased by about 1,000 percent from their prewar levels; butter – about 800 percent; milk – about 750 percent; pork fat – about 600 percent; meat – about 500 percent; potatoes – about 400–500 percent. Despite this increase in the prices of means of subsistence, wages and salaries have remained basically at the prewar level. Also, the number of the jobless has risen significantly. In the ghetto food prices are two to three times higher than on the “Aryan side.”

### **Christmas 1940**

[...] The high wall fencing the Jewish residential area off from the rest of the city, Italy’s accession to the war several months ago, and Britain’s having granted asylum to the monarchs of the countries occupied by Germans in 1940 have bred a typical Warsaw war joke:

“There won’t be any Nativity plays for kids this year. Banned by the Germans.

How so?

No actors to play the star parts, that's why. Lord Jesus is in the ghetto, Mary's in Nazareth, the donkey's in Rome, the devil's in Berlin. The three Wise Men are in London – there's nobody to perform...”

## 1941

### **January 6, 1941, Monday**

Still severe frost. At 6.00 hours 505 prisoners were transported from Pawiak to a railway siding near the Western Railway Station. The mangled, emaciated people were loaded into unheated cargo trucks. [...] In the Auschwitz (Oświęcim) camp those brought in on January 7 (and several prisoners from Radom) were registered under numbers 7,881–8,389.

### **January 14, 1941, Tuesday**

Under regulation issued by Leist, penalties have been sharpened for unauthorised crossing of the boundaries of the Jewish residential area (a fine, an arrest, a long labour camp sentence).

“Also subject to penalty shall be whoever assists a Jew to cross over from the area, or whoever, being aware or having received information about the presence of a Jew outside the Jewish residential area fails to notify this to the competent authority.” [...]

### **January 17, 1941, Friday**

The Social Self-Help Committee has had to close several soup kitchens due to the deficit of food products. [...]

### **January 31, 1941, Friday**

593 prisoners were transported from Pawiak to the Auschwitz (Oświęcim) concentration camp.

The operation of forcible resettlement of some 1,800 Jews from the area around Warsaw (Pruszków, Włochy) to the Warsaw ghetto continues.

Warsaw has a population of 1,355,328 (according to statistics based on the number of ration cards issued), of which 953,510 in the so-called Aryan area and 401,818 (i.e. 30 per cent) in the ghetto.

### **March 6, 1941, Thursday**

[...] Following the posting by the Germans (on March 1) of a call for male Poles with a military training to join, on a voluntary basis, an auxiliary police force to guard the barracks in forced labour camps for Jews, the underground *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (unnumbered) announced, in the name of military/organisational agencies in the territory of the country, acting for the Polish Government-in-Exile (i.e. the Government Delegation for Poland), an absolute ban on joining this type of service, on the grounds that “[i]t is treason against the nation, for Poles to serve voluntarily under German command; an auxiliary force for the police (gendarmerie) might be made to perform acts disgracing the good name of Poland; [...] The Government of the Republic of Poland in Exile already called on Poles last year to refrain from any collaboration, even if only ostensible, in the German-organised anti-Jewish operation.”

### **June 1941**

The “Wawer” Underground Small-scale Sabotage Organisation, has counteracted the German cinema propaganda campaign by pasting on walls graphic pamphlets (pigs sitting in a cinema theatre, gazing at the screen) with legends “Heil Hitler” and “Nobody But Pigs Will Sit in a Kraut Cinema.”

In June 4,290 people died in the Warsaw ghetto.

### **July 1941**

The prices of basic necessity goods shot up in the wake of initial military actions on the Bug and the San rivers, adding

to the impoverishment of the population. July has brought a certain downturn of prices, but the living conditions are unbearably difficult.

Throughout July 5,550 people have died in the ghetto of starvation and epidemic diseases.

### **August 5, 1941, Tuesday**

“In the streets of Warsaw,” notes a chronicler of the underground, Kazimierz Gorzkowski “Andrzej,” “one sees groups of begging Jewish children. The Navy Blue police grab them zealously, encouraged by a special order of the ‘authorities.’ At police stations Jewish escapees, including children, are often beaten up senselessly.” [...]

### **September 11, 1941, Thursday**

114 Pawiak prisoners were transported to the Auschwitz (Oświęcim) German concentration camp.

### **October 15, 1941, Wednesday**

In Cracow Governor-General Frank signs The Third Regulation on Restricted Residence in the General Government, whereby “unauthorised leaving by Jews of their assigned residential area” and “wittingly sheltering such Jews” both carry death penalty. “Instigators and accomplices shall be subject to the same penalty as the perpetrator; an attempted act shall be punishable as if committed.” [...]

Another transport, of 108 men, left from Pawiak to the Auschwitz (Oświęcim) concentration camp [...].

### **November 10, 1941, Monday**

Governor Fischer signed a regulation on “death penalty for unauthorised leaving of Jewish residential areas” (issued in the wake of the Regulation of Governor-General Frank of October 15, see above). Under the regulation sheltering Jews and providing any kind of assistance to them are alike punishable



by death. “I expressly draw the attention of the entire population of the Warsaw District to this new legislative measure because as of now merciless severity will be exercised.” The text of the regulation was published in *Nowy Kurier Warszawski* of November 12–13; a day later the same paper brought news of the sentencing to death “of eight Jews who had left the Jewish residential area in Warsaw without a permit and loitered in other parts of the city, begging for part of the time” and a reminder that “accomplices providing shelter” were also liable to death penalty.

### **November 19, 1941, Wednesday**

A sizable transport left Pawiak for the Auschwitz (Oświęcim) German concentration camp; over a dozen men escaped en route having cut out some boards in the truck. The 157 prisoners arrived at the camp on November 20 [and] were given numbers from 22,800 to 22,956. [...]

## **1942**

### **January 1942**

5,123 people have died in the ghetto (a year earlier in the same month – 828, and in January 1938, in the Jewish community of the same size – 454). [...]

### **February 2, 1942, Monday**

155 men were transported from Pawiak to the Auschwitz (Oświęcim) German concentration camp [...].

### **March 1942**

4,951 men, women and children have died in the Warsaw ghetto (in March 1941 – 1608, in March 1938 – 670).

The Hechaluc organisation operating in the ghetto underground approached the Poaley Zion Left, Poaley Zion Right and the Bund with an idea of forming “a common Jewish com-

bat organisation” and a military representation “of all Jewish political parties and youth organisations to represent them vis-à-vis the civilian authorities of the Underground Poland, and a delegation of the combat organisation to the Polish military authorities.” This idea was never implemented, but late in March an “Anti-Fascist Bloc” was set up in the ghetto [...], its main aims including the marshalling of combat cadres.

### **April 2, 1942, Good Thursday**

[...] “As of the beginning of this year bread rations for the Jewish population in the Warsaw ghetto are two kg per head,” notes the underground *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (No. 13). “Tales of the extremely comfortable situation of the Jews are a German propaganda ploy. Indeed, they refer to a narrow group of affluent Jews, while the majority, the poor Jews, are starving and over 1,000 people die in the ghetto every week.”

### **April 17, 1942, Friday**

A transport of 461 men left from Pawiak to the Auschwitz (Oświęcim) German concentration camp [...].

### **May 23, 1942, Saturday**

The underground *Rzeczpospolita Polska*, (No. 9) ran an appeal, reading:

“The Polish nation is being destroyed by the enemy in a ruthless and brutal manner and with full awareness of the target set by hatred. Emaciated, undernourished children beg in the streets; the hardships of displaced persons are beyond human endurance. In prisons and in concentration camp barracks tens of thousands of people pray for death as release. Broad masses of workers and of the intelligentsia, who by now have sold out all their possessions, are groaning under the burden of day-by-day merciless poverty.

At the same time, luxurious cafes and restaurants in cities are full to overcrowding, with elegant men and made-up, dressed-up women lounging at the tables. These people got rich

on this war, they have money and they are looking for easy ways to indulge their whims. Others are not making fortunes, and neither are they throwing money about: they cling to the remains of their pre-war possessions, closing their eyes to the privations of their compatriots. Both kinds have erected a wall of egoism between themselves and the miserable life of the entire Nation, finding numerous and tortuous arguments with which to silence their occasionally waking consciences.

It is to all those that this appeal is addressed. It is never too late to mend one's ways. In these times the Christian duty of sharing with your neighbour has become a national obligation. Whoever evades this obligation becomes a traitor."

### **May 29 overnight, 1942, Friday/Saturday**

In the ghetto German policemen killed over a dozen people. The cause of the killings is unknown. Also, tonight 914 men (including 150 adolescents, aged between 15 and 18) were taken out of the ghetto and sent in an unknown direction.

### **July 15, 1942, Wednesday**

127 prisoners were transported from Pawiak to Auschwitz [...].

### **July 22, 1942, Wednesday**

Posts have been set up alongside the outer wall of the ghetto, manned by the German police, Navy-Blue police and collaborationist Ukrainian, Latvian and Lithuanian formations. At 10.00 hours SS Sturmbannführer Herman Hoefle arrived at the Jewish Council building to announce, in the capacity of plenipotentiary for the removal of population from the Warsaw ghetto, that the deportation operation would commence forthwith. [...] The initial stage of the operation was conducted exclusively by the Jewish Organization for the Maintenance of Public Order, under German supervision.

On the same day carts and lorries appeared in the streets and street beggars and begging children were loaded on them.

[...] On the same day a collecting point was set up in Stawki Street, a site to which all those rounded-up were driven; from there, via a “trans-shipment centre” (Umschlagplatz) accessed by the rail siding at the Warszawa Gdańska Railway Station, they were taken in an unknown direction” – wrote Adolf Ber-  
man. [...]

### **Late in July 1942**

Day in and day out, at 7.00–7.30 hours German and Ukrainian companies and detachments of the Jewish Organisation for the Maintenance of Public Order set out for action from 17 Ogrodowa Street. The cordoning off of houses and the herding of people to the Umschlagplatz lasts till 17.00 or longer. Every day several thousand people are transported to the Treblinka II extermination camp. [...]

### **August 17, 1942, Monday**

Announcements have been pasted on walls in the ghetto, of the leadership, officers and functionaries of the ghetto police having been put under injunction by the Jewish underground.

### **September 1 overnight, 1942, Tuesday/Wednesday**

A new raid by Soviet bombers, markedly stronger and more effective than the previous one [...].

According to the underground *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (September 10, 1942, No. 36), about 300 demolition bombs were dropped along with (unlike during the first raid) some heavier bombs. The worker district of Wola sustained the most intensive bombing and had the highest casualty and fatality count. [...]

### **September 12, 1942, Saturday**

The day-after-day deportation of the ghetto population is completed. In the course of this operation over 310 thousand people were driven from the ghetto to death. Officially, the number of those remaining in the ghetto is about 35,000; their

work in various workshops for the Germans. In practice, about as many are in hiding there. [...]

### **October 14, 1942, Wednesday**

A large article the underground *Rzeczpospolita Polska* (No. 18) entitled “In the Face of the German Crime Perpetrated on the Jews” and, directly below it, a note from the editors, reading:

“[...] a Civic Assistance Committee to provide aid to Jews suffering from the results of bestial German persecution is being organised. The Committee will attempt, within such means and opportunities as are available in the conditions of a country living under occupation, to bring relief to the victims of Hitlerite violence.”

This communication refers to the activities of the “Żegota” Provisional Committee (established on September 27 [...]) to evince official support by the Government Delegation for Poland of the relief action already underway. [...]

### **October 29, 1942, Thursday**

[...] In the evening Eliasz Róžański, a member of the Jewish Combat Organisation (ŻOB), carried out a sentence given by this organisation and killed advocate Jakub Lejkin, deputy commander of the Jewish Organization for the Maintenance of Public Order in the latter’s flat in Gęsia Street. The execution of sentence was followed, on the next day, by ŻOB members’ posting in the streets of the ghetto a proclamation on “following persons having been indicted:

“[T]he Directing Board and the Jewish Council in Warsaw, for collaboration with the occupying enemy and for signing the deportation document; the workshop directors and administrative managers who are exploiting and oppressing workers; and the Werkschutz group leaders and functionaries for bestiality towards workers and towards ‘illegal’ [that is, residing outside the ghetto and unbeknownst to the German authorities] Jewish people.”

### **November 16–20, 1942, Monday–Friday**

On November 16 sixty men were transported from Pawiak to the Auschwitz (Oświęcim) German concentration camp and assigned in the camp, on November 17, numbers from 75,767 to 75,826; on November 17 – 44 more men, registered in the camp on November 18 [...]; on November 18 – 63 men [...]; on November 19 – 80 men [...]; on November 20 – 50 men [...].

### **November 21 and 24, 1942, Saturday and Tuesday**

Major round-ups were organised in the city centre and in the Central and Eastern Railway Stations; several thousand people were seized. Of these, several hundred were eventually transported for forced labour in Germany.

### **December 4, 1942, Friday**

[...] A Council for Aid to Jews (code name “Żegota”) of the Government Delegation for Poland has been established to replace the former Provisional Committee. [...]

### **December 29, 1942, Tuesday**

“In the synagogue in Tłomackie Street in Warsaw auctions of furniture confiscated from Jews are held several times a week. These, of course, are pitiful remnants – broken-up junk for which no takers were found among Germans,” notes the underground *Nowy Tydzień* (No. 455).

### **End of December 1942**

In the suburbs of Warsaw and in neighbouring locations many flats were searched for unregistered dwellers; presumably Jews in hiding were one of the targets.

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### **January 14, 1943, Thursday**

A combat group of the Directorate of Civil Resistance, in execution of a sentence given by the Special Underground Court, shot in his home Izydor Ossowski, sentenced to death two days earlier for active participation in the operation of transporting young people for forced labour in Germany and for extorting ransom. This was the first death sentence given by the Civilian Special Court to have been carried out. [...]

### **January 15–17, 1943, Friday–Sunday**

German police and SS detachments conducted several large-scale round-ups in Warsaw, detaining more than ten thousand people.

“A round-up! A sweeping round-up, such as has not been mounted for a long time,” noted Ludwik Landau on January 15. “It was centred on Praga – the Praga railway stations, both of the bridges, Poniatowski and Kierbedź; the neighbourhood of Ząbkowska Street; the Saska Kępa [residential district] – but it spread also to the other Warsaw railway stations, to various streets, including Krakowskie Przedmieście, to Żoliborz (or so rumour has it) and to Żelazna Brama Square. In all these places whoever was seized, was taken – no certificate, no employment card ensured release. In the afternoon cinema theatres were dragged. The operation, conducted exclusively by uniformed German police and plain-clothed agents, without the participation of the Polish police, was carried out with utmost brutality and utmost ruthlessness. [...]”

### **January 17, 1943, Sunday**

[...] A transport of 1,005 men and 311 women went from Pawiak to the Majdanek camp near Lublin, which for several months now has been turned into a huge concentration camp. [...] At the same time several thousand victims of street round-ups were transported from Warsaw to Majdanek. [...]

## **January 18, 1943, Monday**

At 7.30 hours the German police launched another deportation operation in the ghetto. The Jewish Combat Organisation<sup>1</sup> Staff published a short proclamation to the inhabitants:

“Jews! The occupying enemy has launched the second phase of your extermination. Do not go meekly to your death! Defend yourself! Grab an axe or a knife, barricade yourself in your houses! Let them get you this way... Fighting is your chance of salvation. Fight!”

Organised ŻOB groups are putting up resistance in the house in 30 Gęsia Street, at the corner of Zamenhoff and Niska Streets, at the corner of Dzika and Niska Streets – throwing grenades, shooting, defending themselves with crowbars and cudgels. The attackers have suffered casualties, the Jewish side, despite heavy losses, has achieved a considerable success. [...]

## **First decade of February 1943**

The German operation of suppressing food trade and the bringing of food into the city is becoming sterner.

The Warsaw Chamber of Industry and Commerce has been instructed to start the liquidation of a vast proportion of distributive businesses (80 percent of the shops) and artisan shops which do not do work commissioned by the Germans.

The eviction of people from certain streets situated in the presently organised German residential area goes on. [...]

## **February 6, 1943, Saturday**

In the early hours detachments of German police surrounded the building in 44/46 Długa Street. There, in an outbuilding, the secret printing press of the *Szaniec* paper was found – allegedly accidentally – when the building was searched. After a siege which lasted more than half a day and following a shoot-out with the printing shop staff, all tenants

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa – ŻOB.



seized in the course of an immediately instituted search of all flats were arrested. [...]

### **February 12, 1943, Friday**

This morning 70 men were executed in Las Chojnowski near Stefanów – among them all those arrested on February 6 in Długa Street, irrespective of whether they were involved in any way in the secret printing operation.

### **February 15, 1943, Monday**

Under a sentence of the underground Civilian Special Court an officer of the Polish Police (known as the navy-blue police), Sub-lieutenant Roman Leon Świącicki, was shot to death in Waszyngton Roundabout by a combat group of the Executive Committee of the Directorate of Civil Resistance. He had been sentenced on a number of charges which included

“active participation in mid-1942, in the capacity of deputy head of the 15<sup>th</sup> Police Station in Warsaw, in the rounding up of Polish people for forced labour in Germany and organising the participation of the Polish uniformed police in this operation” and “detaining, in the process of rounding up Polish people, certain numbers of people with the intent of releasing them for a ransom for his personal gain.” [...]

### **February 21, 1943, Sunday**

[...] In the ghetto, in the grounds of a brush-making workshop in Świętojerska Street, a Jewish Military Union<sup>2</sup> combat group killed five Gestapo collaborators. [...]

### **March 8, 1943, Monday**

A transport left from Pawiak to the Auschwitz (Oświęcim) concentration camp, with 49 men [...].

The German police, using numerous plain clothes agents and informers, have been vigorously hunting down and seizing Jews hiding outside the ghetto. [...]

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<sup>2</sup> Editor's note: Żydowski Związek Wojskowy – ŻZW.

### **March 25, 1943, Thursday**

Two transports left the Pawiak and [the so-called] Serbia prisons for the Majdanek camp, one with 375 men and 109 women, all of whom had been seized in a street round-up in January, the other with about 200 men and 133 women. [...]

### **April 6, 1943, Tuesday**

“One hears all the time about sentences carried out on Gestapo agents; they are getting frightened, and so are the navy-blue police. Allegedly the Warsaw police are having a change of heart about the Jew hunts they have been engaging in so zealously so far. With all this, the Germans have enough nerve to paste all over the country a poster with a call to fight Bolshevism and, by way of encouraging the Poles in this, to cite in a special issue of a village board-bulletin examples of other nations. Honestly, there is more stupidity behind this than effrontery,” notes Ludwik Landau.

Ten people suspected of Jewish origin were executed in the vicinity of the Pawiak prison. [...]

### **Second decade of April 1943**

With Easter approaching, food prices are rising sharply: butter – to 270 zlotys or more, milk to 14 zlotys per litre. [...]

### **April 13, 1943, Tuesday**

Soldiers of the “Osa-Kosa” combat group of the Directorate of Operations [Kedyw] of the AK High Command, kill in Rysia Street a senior Arbeitsamt official, Hugo Dietz.

Teams of the “Wawer” Underground Small-scale Sabotage Organisation have been distributing a leaflet with instructions how to protect oneself against conscription for force labour in Germany and, if transported there, how to conduct oneself.

### **April 18, 1943, Palm Sunday**

Rumours abound that in next few hours a major police operation will begin in the ghetto. This is implied by a conside-

rable concentration, in the vicinity of the ghetto, of Ukrainian-Lithuanian-Latvian collaborationist auxiliary troops. “In April 1943,” narrates Marek Edelman, who was a member of the Jewish Combat Organisation for the Bund and whose special operating area was the “brushmakers’ quarter” (demarcated by Świętokrzyska, Wałowa, Franciszkańska and Bonifraterska Streets), “we had 22 combat groups with a total force of no more than 220 men who had no combat experience and no proper training. [...]”

### **April 19, 1943, Monday**

At dawn 850 SS-men and sixteen Waffen-SS officers enter the central ghetto through the Nalewki Street gate. SS-Oberführer Ferdinand von Sammern-Frankenegg is personally in command. The Hitlerite forces move down the seemingly asleep Nalewki Street under the cover of a tank, two armoured personnel carriers and a group of Jews of the ghetto police. At the corner of Nalewki and Gęsia Streets and of Miła and Zamenhoff Streets Jewish Combat organisation fighters throw grenades and incendiary bottles at the Germans. The tank burns. The SS offensive breaks down. After the first attack the Hitlerites have lost 12 men and the German force is withdrawing from the ghetto.

At 8.00 a newly appointed SS and Warsaw District Police commander, SS-Brigadeführer Jürgen Stroop, replaces von Sammern in command. [...]

German artillery starts shelling the ghetto. Jewish Combat Organisation and Jewish Military Union groups put up fierce resistance in Muranowski Square and in Muranowska Street. On the top of a house in Muranowska Street two flags are waving: a white-and-red one and a white-and-blue one<sup>3</sup>, both visible from behind the ghetto wall, from Bonifraterska Street. [...]

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<sup>3</sup> Editor’s note: white and red are the colours of the Polish national flag, while white and blue were the colours of the Jewish community – today these colours make up the Israeli national flag.

At about 19.00 hours first shots are fired on the Polish side of the ghetto wall, in Bonifraterska Street between Konwiktorska and Franciszkańska Streets. This is an attempt by a diversionary-sapper group of the Warsaw District's "Kedyw," led by Captain Józef Pszenny "Chwacki," to break a hole in the wall across from Sapieżyńska Street. In the fight against the overwhelming German force two AK soldiers who took part in the attack died (Eugeniusz Morawski "Młódek" and Józef Wilk "Orlik") while three were heavily wounded. [...]

### **April 20, 1943, Tuesday**

[...] The Jewish Combat Organisation (ŻOB) turns down a German ultimatum to lay down arms, conveyed to the insurgents through the Judenrat. [...]

Jewish Military Union groups defend for several hours strongholds in Muranowski Square and in Muranowska Street. A special SS assault group tries to tear down the white-and-red and white-and-blue flags. [...]

In the afternoon a Special Group of the General Staff of the People's Army of the PPR, under Franciszek Bartoszek "Jacek," attacks a German machine gun position in Nowowińska Street, inflicting fatalities on the Germans. [...]

### **April 22, Thursday**

[...] ŻOB Command members in the ghetto [...] listen to Świt, a radio station re-broadcasting from Britain information about the ghetto rising transmitted by the Government Delegation for Poland. "The heroic struggle of the Warsaw ghetto continues. A number of strongly fortified positions are still holding on. The Jewish combat groups are showing great combat experience and courage [...]."

### **April 23, 1943, Good Friday**

[...] The commander of ghetto liquidation operation, SS-Brigadeführer Stroop, signs an announcement in German and Polish warning that whoever enters the "former Jewish resi-

dential area” while incapable of showing a “new, valid pass” will be shot. This announcement is meant to discourage those Poles who have been helping the fighters from beyond the ghetto walls. Placards with this announcement are posted on the outer side of the wall on the next day, on April 24.

The Jewish Combat organisation issued an appeal to the Poles, written by Ignacy Samsonowicz-Leszczyński of the Bund. The appeal, in the form of a leaflet printed on a duplicating machine, is distributed and pasted on the walls on the Aryan side:

“Poles, Citizens, Soldiers of Freedom,

Amidst the roar of the guns from which the German army is shelling our houses, the homes of our mothers, children and wives;

Amidst the rattling of the machine guns which we capture as we fight the cowardly gendarmes and SS-men;

Amidst the smoke, fire and bloody dust of the murdered Warsaw ghetto we – prisoners of the ghetto – send you fraternal, heart-felt greetings.

We know you have been watching with heart-felt anguish and tears of compassion, with admiration and fear for the outcome of this fight, the war we have been waging for many days with the cruel enemy.

Know, too, that – like to date – each threshold in the ghetto will be a stronghold; that we may all perish in this fight, but we shall not surrender; that, like you, we breathe the desire for revenge and punishment of all the crimes of our common enemy.

This fight is for your F r e e d o m and ours.

For your and our human, societal and national honour and dignity. We shall avenge the crimes of Oświęcim, Treblinka, Bełżec, Majdanek.

Long live the brotherhood of arms and blood of the Fighting Poland!

Long live F r e e d o m !

Death to executioners and tormentors!

Long live the life and death struggle against the occupying enemy!”

The Jewish Combat Organisation commander, Mordechaj Anielewicz “Malachi” (Little Angel) writes from the ghetto to his deputy on the Polish side of the wall, Icchak Cukiermann “Antek”:

“I cannot describe to you the conditions in which the Jews are living now. Only a handful of individual people can endure them; the rest will perish, sooner or later. [...]”

[...] At noon a group of AK<sup>4</sup> officers under Captain Jerzy Lewiński “Chuchro,” the Warsaw District Kedyw chief, mounts an operation by the ghetto wall in Okopowa Street near Pawia Street. Captain Zbigniew Lewandowski “Szyna” kills in the fighting several German police officers driving towards the ghetto. At the same time another AK diversionary group under Sub-Lieutenant Zbigniew Stalkowski “Stadnicki” attacks German military and police posts by the ghetto wall in Leszno and Orla Streets, killing two guards.

Probably on April 23 (and, again, on April 27) members of the underground Socialist Combat Organisation (Leszek Raabe, Maciej Weber, Jan Pohoski, Stanisław Zielenkiewicz, Mieczysław Maślak-Joffe and Jan Rosieński) opened fire on Hitlerite posts by the ghetto at Bonifraterska and Okopowa Streets, with success.

An assault group of People’s Guard-PPR, under Henryk Stachel “Gustaw” (a member of the People’s Guard Warsaw City Command) throws grenades at a car with German police in Freta Street, in the rear of the German troops surrounding the ghetto. [...]

### **April 25, 1943, Easter Sunday**

From a daily report on the situation from the Coordinating Committee of the Jewish National Committee and of the Bund:

“Leaflets of various bodies of the Underground Poland appeared today, condemning the heinous German bestiality perpetrated before the eyes of the whole Warsaw and extolling the fearless courage and the invincible spirit of the heroic fighters.” [...]

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<sup>4</sup> Editor’s note: AK (Armia Krajowa) – Home Army.

### **April 28, 1943, Wednesday**

[...] At 17.00 hours a group of cadets from the underground Military School of Infantry Reserves of the AK Warsaw District, Żoliborz Circuit, under Lieutenant Tadeusz Kern-Jędrychowski “Szrapnel,” attacked with success SS-men on a guard duty in Zakroczymska Street.

The ghetto is on fire, houses in an area of several hundred square kilometres are aflame.

In the morning 420 men (including 90 prisoners kept at the disposal of the criminal police) and 107 women were transported from Pawiak to the Auschwitz (Oświęcim) concentration camp. Some of the men were killed on the way, in an escape attempt. [...]

### **April 1943**

In Warsaw the ratios of average market prices of basic consumer goods to their pre-war prices stood at: 5,164:100 for wholemeal rye bread, 8,306:100 for wheat flour; 6,181:100 for beef, 9,546:100 for pork, 14,646:100 for pork fat; 610:100 for butter, 5,575:100 for eggs; 6,943:100 for peas, 2,251:100 for potatoes, 9,911:100 for sugar. [...]

### **May 4, 1943, Tuesday**

The Prime Minister of the Polish Government in London, General of Arms Władysław Sikorski, spoke in a radio broadcast to Poland of the struggle of the Warsaw ghetto:

“In mid-April at 4.00 hours Germans launched the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto. They cordoned off the remaining Jews with the police, they entered the ghetto in tanks and armoured vehicles, and they are carrying out their work of destruction. Ever since then fighting has been going on. Bomb explosions, shooting and fires continue round the clock. The greatest crime in human history is being committed. We know that you are helping the tormented Jews to the best of your ability. I thank you, my fellow Poles, in my own name and in the name of the government. I ask you to give them all kind of assistance and, at the same time, to fight this monstrous cruelty.” [...]

### **May 7, 1943, Friday**

[...] 77 men and 5 women brought from the [Pawiak] prison and 5 women brought from downtown were executed by shooting in Dzielna Street, across the street from the Pawiak prison. [...]

### **May 8, 1943, Saturday**

[...] “On the ‘Aryan’ side,” notes Ludwik Landau, “the hunt for Jews is in full cry, with executions performed in the streets and Jews being shot not only by Gestapo agents, gendarmes, Ukrainians and their ilk, but also by volunteers from the army, clerks, etc. Jews are pointed out to the Germans by various agents: navy-blue policemen, plain-clothed agents – but cases are also known when a woman walking with a child pointed out the victim in passing! On the other hand, in an incomparably greater majority of the population the reaction is one of the utmost horror, each execution leaving a harrowing impression on its accidental witnesses.” [...]

### **May 10, 1943, Monday**

“Everything is still revolving around the push to annihilate the remaining Jews,” notes Ludwik Landau. “[...]In the remaining parts of the city Jew hunting goes on. Whoever looks Jewish to a Gestapo agent, a Latvian, or a German (or non-German) amateur is waylaid and explanations or documents are of no use – the execution is done on the spot. Therefore, it is not at all a rarity for corpses – the products of such executions – to be seen lying about in various quarters of the city.” [...]

### **May 12 overnight, 1943, Wednesday/Thursday**

About 23.30 hours there was a strong Soviet air raid on Warsaw, lasting more than two hours. The German garrison was caught unprepared:

“It was only after first bombs had fallen that alarm was sounded,” notes Ludwik Landau in his chronicle.



“Masses of flare rockets were thrown to illuminate the whole city and its environs – in this respect the Germans had made things easier for the attackers by having set a great fire in the small ghetto. The fire certainly illuminated a vast area and helped [the incoming bombers] get the bearings of the city layout. High-explosive and incendiary bombs were dropped in large series by Soviet planes, which are said to have been coming in waves over a vast area, targeting mainly the railway line and a part of Marszałkowska Street around Zbawiciela Square. On the periphery, Okęcie was bombed and set on fire. In the city itself there were many fires too. Bombs were showered on the neighbourhood of the railway track cutting across Jerozolimskie Avenue and Grójecka Street [...].”

### **May 13, 1943, Thursday**

At dawn a transport, formed since the previous evening in the Pawiak prison, left for the Auschwitz (Oświęcim) concentration camp. It consisted of 337 men and 119 women.

“Ours was a barefoot transport, the Germans having ordered all the prisoners to remove their shoes,” reminisces a Pawiak prisoner Leon Wanat. “We arrived at Oświęcim on May 13 at midnight and were put in an empty barrack. On the next day we found ourselves in quarantine in Birkenau [...].”

### **May 16, 1943, Sunday**

Throughout the day German units have been hunting for Jews in hiding. At 20.15 hours the sound of a massive detonation rolled throughout the city: Stroop has completed the “major action” (*Grossaktion*) in the Warsaw ghetto by blowing up the Great Synagogue at Tłomackie Street. This building of historical value has been turned into a huge heap of rubble.

### **May 17–19, 1943, Monday–Wednesday**

For three days now, in particular on May 17 overnight, the Gestapo have been making pre-planned, sweeping arrests

according to long lists prepared in advance. Special police detachments brought from Radom, Cracow and other locations take part in the arrests and, subsequently, in interrogations. Altogether, about five hundred men and well over a hundred women, many of them active resistance workers, have been taken to the Pawiak prison. In many cases whole families fall victim to arrest. [...]

### **May 29 and 30, 1943, Saturday and Sunday**

A tragic settling of the fate of most of those arrested between May 15 and May 19. Since early morning prisoners had been dragged out from their cells in Pawiak and “Serbia.” About 500 men and 25 women were assembled in the prison courtyard. From there, they were loaded, in groups of thirty, on a covered lorry which ferried the sentenced from Pawiak to the ghetto, probably to Gęsia Street. For several hours the sound of machine-gun fire was heard in the prison.

“Shortly thereafter,” narrates Leon Wanat, “a Ukrainian guard sergeant spilled the beans: the whole transport had been liquidated on several sites in the ghetto and, to obliterate the traces, the corpses had been burned on wood piles sprinkled with kerosene.”

### **Early in June 1943**

Nearly every day several Jews or people suspected of Jewish origin, or Poles captured together with the Jews whom they aided, are executed in the ghetto ruins. The bodies of the victims of these murders are either buried in the Jewish cemetery in Okopowa Street or – this more frequently – simply incinerated in the ghetto ruins. [...]

### **June 24, 1943, Corpus Christi**

About 220 Pawiak prisoners were murdered in the ghetto ruins; so were, on June 25 or 26, some of the 1,000 people brought to the prison from the town of Sokołów. [...]

### **July 7, 1943, Wednesday**

The underground *Rzeczpospolita Polska* (No. 11) and, on the next day, *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (July 8, 1943, No. 27) publish a proclamation of July 5 announcing the imminent establishment of a unified Directorate of Underground Resistance [Kierownictwo Walki Zbrojnej, KWZ] (formed on July 15). [...]

The proclamation warns that the crimes of collaboration, banditism and similar will be brought before underground Special Courts.

“The Special Courts will prosecute in particular the extortion of money by blackmail, the obtaining of money on the false pretence of ‘efforts to cause the release’ of interned or imprisoned Poles, and the extortion of money by blackmail from Jews in hiding.” [...]

### **July 20 overnight, 1943, Tuesday/Wednesday**

The Gestapo have made arrests in townships around Warsaw, in Świder and Otwock while searching, among other targets, for “non-Aryans” in hiding.

### **August 19, 1943, Thursday**

Two AK soldiers were killed and one arrested during a failed AK action in Poznańska Street to liquidate a Gestapo agent. Thereafter, dozens of inhabitants of houses in the neighbourhood were dragged out from their flats and taken to Pawiak. [...]

### **August 24, 1943, Tuesday**

[...] After a large transport left from Warsaw to the Auschwitz (Oświęcim) concentration camp, of 875 men and 141 women, only somewhat over 600 men and less than 400 women are left in Pawiak. [...]

### **In August 1943**

A proclamation-leaflet *To the General Public in Poland!*, issued in Warsaw by the member organisations of the “Żegota”

Council for Aid to Jews, is distributed in Warsaw. It stresses, among other things:

“The whole world, filled with admiration and appreciation for our stance and our selflessness, is watching us and looking to us for actions showing, besides our heroism and determination, that we are mature enough to live up to the role which events assign to Poland in a post-world war. Indeed, the future of Poland lies not in hatred or brutal power, but in feelings permeated with humanitarianism and in humane ideas which must come to dominate our life if Poland is to be a member of the great family of civilised peoples of Europe.

[...] we call on all Poles to extend – in the name of this appeal and of these great ideas which are the opposite of hatred, a feeling foreign to the Polish spirit – aid and generosity to those whom a quirk of fate tore from the hands of the German tormentors and who, hunted, are seeking among us shelter from certain death.

Evry Pole who is in any way a party to the murderous German operation, be it by blackmailing or denouncing Jews, or by taking advantage of their tragic situation, commits a grave crime against the laws of the Republic of Poland and can be certain that a time is near when he or she will be brought to reckoning by the court of a Poland Reborn.” [emphasis in the original] [...]

### **September 2 overnight, 1943, Thursday/Friday**

About three hundred men and women have been incarcerated in the Pawiak prison.

Five hundred men – Jews transported on August 31 from the Auschwitz-Birkenau (Oświęcim-Brzezinka) concentration camp – have arrived at the camp in Gęsia Street. [...]

### **September 7, 1943, Tuesday**

At about 7.00 hours ten soldiers of the “Agat” operations detachment of Directorate of Diversionary Operations, AK Head Command, successfully carried out an attack on SS-Oberscharführer Franz Bürkl, deputy commander of the Pawiak prison and a notorious Jew slaughterer. He was shot dead at the corner of Marszałkowska and Litewska Streets by the operation leader, Jerzy Zoborowski “Jeremi” and Bronisław Pietraszewicz “Lot.”

In revenge for the death of Bürkl thirty-six Pawiak inmates were shot in the ghetto ruins. [...]

### **October 4, 1943, Monday**

A massive transport to the Auschwitz (Oświęcim) concentration camp, of over 1,000 people, is being formed. [...]

### **October 13, 1943, Wednesday**

Street round-ups of exceptional intensity have begun in the city. They are conspicuous for the participation, alongside a vast number of German police formations, of Wehrmacht, Luftwaffe and Hitlerjugend detachments. A large section of a major street, or a part of a residential quarter, is suddenly cordoned off by police and military troops, and literally all men – pedestrians, tram passengers, shoppers – and some of younger women are detained. [...] Some four hundred people captured in this way were transported directly to Pawiak; those who attempted an escape or failed to obey promptly enough on order to halt, were fired at without warning. [...]

### **October 28, 1943, Monday**

At 18.00 hours two proclamations of the SS and Police Commander for the Warsaw District were announced on loudspeakers: one about twenty people having been executed “publicly” by shooting (in fact, they had died in the ghetto ruins), the other about thirty-five new hostages. [...]

### **In October 1943**

Food prices continue on the rise, with few exceptions (sugar, potatoes, flour and bread). Taking the pre-war price index as 100, the price of beef is now 5,524, of pork – 7,960, of pork fat – 13,245, of butter – 8,488, of milk – 5,185, of eggs – 7,538, of peas – 7,306, of rye bread – 3,464 (in July 1943 – 4,658), of wheat flour – 6,426 (in July 1943 – 7,898), of sugar – 8,040 (in July 1943 – 9,177). [...]

### **November 12, 1943, Friday**

In the morning two groups of men were taken from Pawiak to be executed. The execution was carried out on two sites: near the house in 49 Nowy Świat Street, against the wall next to the offices of a branch of Bank Zachodni (across from Savoy Hotel) and at the corner of Kępcza Street and Jagiellońska Street in Praga. Posters (affixed only on November 14) give the names of sixty executed people and forty more names of those “to be granted pardon.” In truth, close to 300 Pawiak prisoners were murdered, a majority of them in the ghetto ruins. [...]

### **December 8 overnight, 1943, Wednesday/Thursday**

A painful Gestapo strike against Division II (Information-Intelligence) of the AK High Command. Nineteen members of the Bureau of Analysis and Estimates were arrested in one of the Bureau's secret premises in 23 Marszałkowska Street, apt. No. 1.

### **December 9, 1943, Thursday**

The underground *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (No. 49) explains in an article “PPR – Sowiecka Agentura” [The PPR [Polish Workers' Party] – A Soviet Agenture] that we are fighting the PPR “not because of its social programme, but because it is a Poland-based agenture of a foreign and hostile power. It stands up not for Polish, but for Soviet interests” and it concludes:

“Even though the nation is bleeding from blows dealt it by the German beast, tomorrow's danger must not be myopically

overlooked. We must not be deceived by the patriotic and social slogans of the PPR, that agenture of a foreign power which has yet to renounce its predatory policy towards this country.”

### **December 10, 1943, Friday**

Another murder in the ghetto ruins: of 42 men and five women, inmates of the Pawiak prison.

A transport left for the Auschwitz (Oświęcim) concentration camp, with 72 men [...].

### **December 25–26, 1943, Saturday-Sunday, Christmas**

A new underground Catholic bi-weekly *Prawda Dnia* ran on December 25 an article with an unusual content, entitled “Potrzeba chwili” [The Need of the Moment]:

“The numbers of prisoners in Pawiak and in all other prisons throughout Poland have been rising daily; every day new groups of victims are unloaded from ‘cattle’ railway trucks at Oświęcim and Majdanek; every day tens or hundreds of Poles, some of the best among them, are killed in public and secret executions regardless of their sex, age and occupation. The concentration camps gates and prison doors slam shut behind our acquaintances, friends and brothers, cutting them off from their nearest and dearest and from their work. It is the latter that is the most painful for many – for those, who have lost their freedom as a result of having consciously chosen independence activity. There are also hundreds and thousands other Poles suffering penance just for being a Pole. [...]”

## **1944**

### **January 6 overnight, 1944, Thursday/Friday**

New sweeping arrests by the Gestapo, in Warsaw and in neighbouring locations (Legionowo and other).

### **January 7, 1944, Friday**

[...] the price of the golden dollar has shot past 650 zlotys, of the golden rouble stands at about 350 zlotys, some 70 times over the prewar exchange rate. [...]

### **January 12, 1944, Wednesday**

*Głos Polski*, the underground bi-weekly (No. 1/257,) published a name list of fifty women from Warsaw, prisoners of the Ravensbrück concentration camp, who had been subjected to experimental surgical operations by criminal Hitlerite physicians. [...]

### **January 13, 1944, Thursday**

Over 400 men and several women were executed: 40 men or less in an execution carried out today in 14 Górczewska Street, the rest in the ruins of the ghetto. [...]

### **January 28, 1944, Friday**

Some 200 men, many of whom had been recently brought from Łowicz, were taken from Pawiak to for execution. About half of them were murdered in the ruins of the ghetto, the rest were transported to the centre of the city and shot there. [...]

### **February 1, 1944, Tuesday**

At about 9.00 hours the “Pegaz” (formerly “Agat”) operations detachment of the Directorate of Diversionary Operations [Kedyw], AK High Command, acting on the order of the Kedyw Chief Commander Colonel August Fieldorf “Nil,” carried out a successful attack on General Kutschera, the SS and Police Commander for the Warsaw District responsible for mass crimes committed in Warsaw in recent months, including the street executions. [...]

The shooting of Kutschera has been received in Warsaw with nearly unconcealed satisfaction, even though the general public reckons with retaliatory actions by the occupying enemy. This coup has utterly overshadowed two other combat actions carried out on the same day.



At 8.00 hours a patrol of the Warsaw District Kedyw killed, at the corner of Traugutta and Mazowiecka Streets, Willi Lüb- bert, a department head in the Warsaw Arbeitsamt co- responsible for the street round-ups, for transporting people for forced labour in Germany, and for the imprisonment of many workers in concentration camps.

At noon another Diversionary Operations patrol, "DB-19" of Kedyw Mokotów, AK Warsaw District, led by Lieutenant Ta- deusz Jaegermann "Klimek," shot in the Prudential Building in 9 Napoleon Square Dr. Albrecht Eitner, advocate, the receiver for the real property confiscated from Jews and a dangerous Abwehr collaborator.

### **February 1 overnight, 1944, Tuesday/Wednesday**

Gestapo arrests in Żoliborz and other quarters of War- saw.

### **February 2, 1944, Wednesday**

Since early morning the German police have conducted round-ups in busy streets in suburbs. About 11.00 hours 100 men brought from Pawiak were shot in Ujazdowskie Avenue, next to lot No. 21. At the same time about 200 prisoners were executed in the ghetto ruins, bringing this day's victim count to about 300.

### **February 10 and 11, 1944, Thursday and Friday**

There are already over 2,700 inmates in the prison in Dzielna Street, including about 700 women. A large group of men has been transported for execution [...] – altogether, about 470 people have been killed in the city and in the ghetto ruins [...].

### **March 4, 1944, Saturday**

400 men and 4 women – Jewish Pawiak prisoners – were executed in the ghetto ruins. Prison guards returning from the execution said that the bodies of the execution victims were

thrown into the cellar of a ruined house in the corner of Nowolipie and Karmelicka Streets, doused with an inflammable substance and set fire to.

### **March 7, 1944, Tuesday**

A sizable group of Jews (probably 16 men and 24 women), discovered in a camouflaged hiding place in 81 Grójecka Street on a property of a market-gardener Władysław Marczak, was brought to Pawiak. Among the captured there were: Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum (born in 1900) – a prominent historian of Polish Jewry, member of the Poalei-Zion-Left Party, the founder and director of the underground Archives of the Warsaw Ghetto (code name “Oneg Shabbat” – Hebrew for “Joy of Saturday”), a worthy chronicler of the ghetto; his wife Judyta Ringelblum, neé Herman; and his son Uriel. All of them, including Marczak and his family and another gardener, Władysław Wolski, who had helped hide the Jews, were shot three days later in the ghetto ruins.

### **March 28, 1944, Tuesday**

A transport of 580 men has left from Pawiak for the Gross-Rosen concentration camp. [...]

### **April 19, 1944, Wednesday**

From a report by SS-Gruppenführer Heinz Kammler, the head of the C group in the SS Central Office for Economy and Administration, for SS-Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler on the progress of demolition of the Warsaw ghetto:

“To date 6,730,000 cubic meters have been pulled down and detonated. Following materials have been recovered through the pulling down: 22.5 million bricks; 5,006 tonnes of iron scrap, of which a part has been stored and the rest promptly turned over to steel mills; 645 tonnes of utility iron (stored); 76 tonnes of copper, brass and lead scrap.”

To mark today's first anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto's struggle a volume of poems devoted exclusively to the martyrdom and fighting of the Jewish nation, *Z otchłani* [From the Abyss], was published underground in March 1944 and has been distributed for weeks. This anthology, edited by "Jan Wajdelota" (Tadeusz Sarnecki), contains 11 poems [...].

[...] The underground *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (April 20, 1944, No. 16) marks the events of a year ago in a note On the Anniversary of the Fighting:

"The manly, soldierly resolution to sell their lives dearly found strong response among the Polish society, which had been previously dismayed by the Jews' passivity in the face of the slaughter. By raising Polish flags in the fighting ghetto the Jews asserted their bond with the Republic of Poland and their awareness of the common struggle against the enemy.

Of the 3.5 million-strong community of Polish Jews, only about 40,000 are left in ghettos (in Łódź, Radom, Borysław) and about the same number in slave labour camps and secondary places of incarceration. The children have been murdered in nearly 100 percent and the adults have been sentenced by the Germans to impending annihilation.

To help any individual who has managed to escape death and is hiding from the German tormentors is the duty of the human being, of the Christian – and of the Pole." [...]

## **Second half of May 1944**

Wire entanglements are being laid around nearly the whole German residential area. Many of the Polish families still resident these have been ordered to leave immediately. [...]

## **May 28–29, 1944, Sunday–Monday, Pentecost**

German police units have been conducting large-scale round-ups on the river beaches on the Miedzeszyn Embankment and in Bielany Woods. About 300 people have been transported to a transition Arbeitsamt camp in Skaryszewska

Street. 260 men and 81 women have been taken to the Pawiak prison on May 28 and 160 men and 61 women on May 29; they had been arrested at home or seized in street round-ups. [...]

### **June 8, Thursday, 1944, Corpus Christi**

Another transport, of 60 women, left from Pawiak to the Ravensbrück concentration camp [...].

### **July 4, 1944, Tuesday**

687 Pawiak prisoners were sent to the Gross-Rosen concentration camp, where they arrived on July 5.

### **June 30–July 5, 1944, Friday–Wednesday**

13 Germans and 2 Gestapo spies were shot in Warsaw. [...]

### **July 7, 1944, Friday**

About 30 men, 7 Polish women and several Jewish women were shot in the ghetto ruins. In the morning 58 women were sent to the Ravensbrück concentration camp [...].

### **July 21, 1944, Friday**

[...] 154 prisoners of Division III of the Pawiak prison were shot in the ruins of the ghetto. This brings the number of Division III inmates murdered in the last two-and-a-half days to 173. [...]

### **July 25, 1944, Tuesday**

Colonel Antoni Chrusciel “Monter,” Commander of the AK Warsaw District, receives from Division General Tadeusz Komorowski “Bór,” AK Chief Commander, an order to be ready to start a battle for Warsaw. “The news delivered to me at noon indicated that the situation was getting more and more tense,” narrates the Head of the Bureau of Information and Propaganda of the AK High Command, Colonel Jan Rzepecki.

“In the city, there had already been incidents of mobs looting German shops and food warehouses, and in full daylight too.

These incidents had been bloodily suppressed by the German emergency police, for instance the looting of the Meinel shop in Narutowicz Square. Even Navy-Blue policemen were having a hand in the looting. [...]"

### **July 27, 1944, Thursday**

[...] All Jewish inmates of the infirmary in the concentration camp in Gesia Street were executed, altogether about 400 people. [...]

### **July 28, 1944, Friday**

About 4,000 Jews, prisoners of the concentration camp in Gęsia Street, were driven on foot from Warsaw in the direction of Kutno, convoyed by armed SS-men. After ten days they reached the Dachau concentration camp. [...]

### **July 28 overnight, 1944, Friday/Saturday**

Another Soviet air raid on Praga and the Western Railway Station. [...]

### **August 1, 1944, Tuesday**

On August 1 the German forces in Warsaw consisted of some 20,000 armed men, half of them regular troops, and frontline armoured units deployed on both sides of the Vistula, in far-off suburbs. The forces of the eight wards of the AK Warsaw District assigned to insurgency operations, the District's Kedyw and Sapper units, and the AK High Command forces (the Division of Diversionary Operations of the AK High Command under Lieutenant Colonel Jan Mazurkiewicz "Radosław" and the "Baszta" regiment under Lieutenant Colonel Stanisław Kamiński "Daniel") numbered between 40,000 and 45,000, including backline forces and women's military formations. However, throughout August 1 no more than two-thirds of this force was in mobilisation readiness.

The tens of thousands-strong insurgent army had, at the time of undertaking the fighting, barely about 1,000 rifles, 7

heavy machine guns, about 20 anti-tank rifles, 500 machine pistols (of which some 30 percent home-made), 3,700 pistols. In addition, they had 15 English-made anti-tank projectors and less than 25,000 grenades, of which 95 percent made in underground ammunition works. The ongoing production of weapons and ammunition was to be an important source of supplementing the supply during the rising.

The stock of ammunition held by the insurgent units on August 1 was sufficient for two to three days of fighting. [...]

### **August 2–4, 1944, Wednesday–Friday**

[...] It is becoming obvious that after the failure of the attempt to seize by the initial impetus important military sites, such as bridges, railway stations, the airport, and many German barracks, there is no chance whatever of defeating the Germans in Warsaw, not unless significant outside support is provided and unless the general situation on the front changes.

The AK High Command has asked London by radio, on August 2 and henceforth, for air support for the rising. [...]

On August 2 an SS detachment murdered over 600 prisoners (about 200 managed to escape) in the prison in 37 Rakowiecka Street in Mokotów, and several dozen people, including 17 monks, in the Jesuit's Writers Home in 61 Rakowiecka Street [...].

### **August 5–11, 1944, Saturday–Friday**

[...] At noon the slaughtering of civilians and the setting on fire of houses began in the captured streets of the Wola quarter. At about 14.00 hours SS-men broke into the Wola hospital in 26 Płocka Street and, after shooting on the spot Professor Marian Piasecki (born 1894), the hospital director since 1940 and an AK soldier; [...] they proceeded to shoot the staff and the patients – about 60 staff members and about 300 sick and wounded – in the courtyard of the house in the corner of Górczewska and Zagłoby Streets. This courtyard has become one of the mass execution sites, with about

2,000 people murdered there. Another execution site is the Franaszek factory in 41 Wolska Street. At about 20.00 hours the massacre of patients, staff and population in the St. Lazarus Hospital in 217 Leszno Street began, ending in the killing of about 1,000 people. During the Saturday of August 5 a total of 20,000 Wola inhabitants were murdered. [...] On August 5 the “Zośka” battalion freed from the Hitlerite concentration camp in Gęsia Street about 350 Jews kept prisoner there, a majority of them foreign citizens, who subsequently withdrew with the fighters to the Old Town. [...]

In the first days of the rising a group of Jewish Combat Organisation (ŻOB) members, most of whom had fought in the Warsaw ghetto in April and May 1943, headed by Icchak Cukierman “Antek,” the deputy and successor to Mordechaj Anielewicz, came out from hiding in the Old Town. The ŻOB soldiers wanted to join the common fight against the occupying enemy in Home Army ranks. Eventually, they fought as a ŻOB group attached to the AL<sup>5</sup> force in the Old Town.

“Antek” issued a call, in his August 3 proclamation *To the Defenders of the Warsaw Ghetto! To the Surviving Jews!* (published on August 11 in a PPS-WRN daily *Warszawianka* (No. 4) and subsequently reprinted by centrist insurgent papers):

“For three days now the people of Warsaw have been waging armed struggle against the German invaders. This struggle is also ours. Today, a year after that glorious resistance in ghettos and in ‘labour’ camps, after that defence of our lives and our dignity, we are joined with the entire Polish Nation in the fight for freedom. Hundreds of Jewish youths and ŻOB fighters are standing on barricades arm in arm with their Polish comrades. Our greeting to the fighters.” [...]

Counselor Szymon Gottesman “Józef” wired Anselm Reiss of the World Jewish Congress London, on behalf of the group of Jews freed from the Gęsia Street concentration camp:

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<sup>5</sup> Editor’s note: AL (Armia Ludowa) – People’s Army.

“We are taking part in the fighting. The Home Army liberated several hundred Hungarian, Czech, Greek and French Jews; they gave them freedom and an opportunity to work and fight for the common cause. [...]”

### **August 12–18, 1944, Saturday–Friday**

An insurgent paper *Barykada Powiśla* (August 14, 1944, No. 8) warns in a note “Paskarze, uwaga” [Food Profiteers, Beware!]:

“Some traders seek to capitalise on the present high market, demanding extortionate prices for the products they supply. By these profiteers’ reckoning, pork fat cannot possibly cost less than 1,000 zlotys a kilo, and potatoes – no less than 90 zlotys a kilo.

This is to remind these profiteers that they are in a war zone where all offences are punishable under martial law. Whoever supports profiteering prices shall be interned, alongside Volksdeutsche and Ukrainians, for endangering public security.”

### **August 19–September 2, 1944, Saturday–Saturday**

The more than dozen bomber air raids destroyed the cloister of the Blessed Sacrament Sisters in the New Town (about a thousand people perished under the ruins), St. Hyacinth Church (with many wounded), St. Martin Church in Piwna Street and many other edifices. [...] Throughout Saturday the enemy has been deploying forces in the entire Old Town quarter. About 35,000 civilians and 7,000 heavily wounded have fallen into German hands. SS troops and eastern collaborationist formations commit murders, looting and rapes. Some wounded were burned alive in hospitals located in cellars (in 7 Długa Street, in 10 Freta Street, in St. Hyacinth Church, in 1/3 Kilińskiego Street, in 24 Miodowa Street, in the house “Under the Crooked Lantern” in 25 Podwale Street, in “The Black Swan” house in 46 Podwale Street); others were shot [...].

“One of the most painful problems of today is the feeding of the masses of Warsaw inhabitants. Food supply from the outside has ceased altogether. Everybody must fend for themselves.



Some – lucky ones! – are living on what they stored earlier; others are reduced to seeking welfare aid or subsisting by any means available.

Though trade appears to have died out altogether, this is not so. There are still, in various parts of the city, fairly big quantities of food and these are being sold, literally, for their weight in gold.

Obviously, there are among us people who, taking advantage of the buoyant market, are feathering their nests on the suffering and misfortune of their fellow citizens. These people are profiteers. [...]

These people – the term ‘vampires’ describes them better – can, without blinking an eyelid, demand from a person who has lost everything 100 zlotys for a kilogramme of potatoes, 80–100 zlotys for a kilogramme of flour, 1000 zlotys for a kilogramme of pork fat, 2,400 zlotys for a kilogramme of butter... Some will sell their food for gold and jewellery rather than for cash – obviously, pricing both to their own advantage.

This is an outrage! Why, these vultures are making profit on goods they bought at pre-Rising prices. It is nothing to them that some people have neither the hundreds and thousands of zlotys, nor gold, nor valuables. Let them starve, then. [...]

(*Szaniec*, No. 21, 25.8.1944)

“[...] Many of our archives, library collections and all kinds of works of art have fallen victim to the fires and the bombing of Warsaw. The bombings destroyed partly the Central Archives; the Treasury and Municipal Archives and the Zamoyski Library have been burnt down. A similar fate threatens the rest of our collections, public and private alike [...].”

(S. Płoski, “Ratujmy archiwa, biblioteki i dzieła sztuki” in: *Biuletyn Centralnego Komitetu Ludowego*, 25.08.1944)

### **September 3–11, 1944, Sunday–Monday**

On September 9 the BBC broadcasts (and subsequently re-broadcasts on September 10 and following days) a warn-

ing from the British government to the Germans guilty of a conduct in breach of the law of military conflict and of crimes committed on the population of Warsaw. In the same broadcast 28 war criminals are identified by name, the first names on the list being those of General von dem Bach, General Stahel and General Reinefarth, who are to be prosecuted after the war for acts committed in Warsaw. [...]

### **October 1–5, 1944, Sunday–Thursday**

[...] The 1,859 days of the wartime life, struggle and suffering of the people of Warsaw are now a closed chapter. [...]

In the morning of October 3, Tuesday, insurgent press still appearing in the Centre bring the news of the signing of the capitulation agreement. As the dismantling of barricades the closest to German lines commences according to plan, in the military units work begins on securing (or destroying) ammunition and part of the weapons, putting in order documents (promotions, distinctions), verifying identity cards, hiding the archives. The soldiers are getting ready to march to captivity. [...]

Now that all hope is lost, people are leaving the city in droves, heading in the direction of the Western Railway Station. Together with the civilians at least several thousand of Rising fighters leave the city illegally, determined to evade German captivity. There are among them the civilian Rising authorities and General Leopold Okulicki “Niedźwiadek” with his staff; he has been designated to take over from General “Bór” as the AK Chief Commander after the capitulation of Warsaw and to head the AK’s further struggle in the occupied country.

*(Abridged by Sebastian Rejak)*

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## II. Interpretations

Grzegorz Berendt

### **The Price of Life: The Economic Determinants of Jews' Existence on the "Aryan" Side**

The primary sources for this paper were witness accounts recorded in the archives of the Yad Vashem Institute. Additional material came from published narratives. Available data on the living conditions of the general public under the German occupation provided an important point of reference. Using these sources, I have limited the discussion to the territory of the occupied Second Republic of Poland. The term "the Aryan side" is used to describe any area not specifically designated by the Nazis as a compulsory place of residence for Jews.

The reason for choosing the subject matter in the title was that, although some amount of information on this issue is found in almost all known accounts by Polish Jews who had existed clandestinely for some time outside the ghettos and camps established by the German occupying authorities, yet, on the whole, in these narratives these themes are not presented in a systematic manner. Rather, they come up in the context of events of different years and it is difficult to obtain from a single account a full picture for the entire occupation period. This paper focuses on three issues:

- the first is the impact of the occupying authorities' economic policy on the ability to help Jews seeking escape from the Holocaust;
- the second deals with the question of how the survivors had obtained for a number of years the means with which to meet their everyday living costs, considering that robbing Jewish property had constituted one of the principal elements of German policy since the first days of the occupation and that living on the Aryan side sometimes required quite substantial means;
- the third is the economic relations between the Jews, who were hounded and sentenced to death, and the non-Jewish population.

### Outside Determinants

Most authors who write about the Holocaust disregard the overall economic situation of the civilian population in the German-occupied territories. Up to now, the main focus of research has been on the Germans' anti-Jewish policy, as viewed through the prism of ideological determinants, and on the stages and methods of its implementation. Historians' attention has also been captured by the attitude of a people sentenced to annihilation, with particular focus on the forms of resistance, and, last but not least, on the local non-Jewish communities' attitudes towards the tragedy of the Jews. The latter aspect is most often considered in the context of a discourse on the moral condition of the societies which, though not through their own choice, became witnesses of the Holocaust.

As Polish public institutions and industrial and commercial enterprises were being closed on a mass-scale by the German authorities in 1939–1940, unemployment soared, bringing in its way the impoverishment of wage and salary earners,

who were deprived of sources of livelihood.<sup>1</sup> Late in 1939, in the Radom District alone as many as 400,000 people registered as unemployed; a year later an industrial census conducted in the Cracow District showed employment at just 40 percent of the prewar level.<sup>2</sup> A decline in unemployment registered at the end of 1941 was only partly due to the Germans' having launched military production and investment; in fact, it largely reflected people's unwillingness to register, so as not to be put on lists of those to be deported for forced labour in Germany. As an expert on Poland's economic history pointed out, "in 1941 industrial output in the General Government sunk to 63 percent of the prewar period. Thereafter, it picked up because, with the air bombing of Germany, the Germans started moving certain industrial facilities into the territory of Poland. Towards the end of the war, production dropped again due to the contracting supply of raw materials, lack of sub-assemblies, and the like."<sup>3</sup>

The number of economic entities, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, was declining steadily. The reduced supply of manufactured goods to the market drove an increase in prices. Food prices likewise increased. The Germans' policy of continually increasing the "quotas," i.e. quantities of food products to be delivered on a compulsory basis at low official prices, this in particular after late 1941, made matters worse. As a result, the market was drained of flour, meat, milk, eggs and other products.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Pro memoria (1941–1944). Raporty departamentu Informacji Delegatury Rządu na Kraj o zbrodniach na narodzie polskim* [Reports of the Information Department of the Government Delegation for Poland on crimes against the Polish nation], ed. J. Gmitruk, A. Indraszczyk, A. Kosecki (Warsaw–Pułtusk: 2004), pp. 51, 54, 56, 171f, 191.

<sup>2</sup> I. Kostrowicka, Z. Landau, J. Tomaszewski, *Historia gospodarcza Polski XIX i XX wieku* [The Economic History of Poland from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century] (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1984), p. 413.

<sup>3</sup> J. Kaliński, Z. Landau, *Gospodarka Polski w XX wieku* [Poland's Economy in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century] (Warszawa: Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, 2003), p. 169.

<sup>4</sup> Cz. Łuczak, *Polska i Polacy w drugiej wojnie światowej* [Poland and the Poles during World War II] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Adama Mickiewicza, 1993), pp. 222–226.

As noted by the Polish underground, peasants had already sold large stocks of food in the autumn of 1941, and the first quarter of the following year brought a new phase in the soaring increase in prices. In some of the formerly Soviet-occupied regions, the shortage of food was the result of agricultural experiments conducted there in 1940–1941.<sup>5</sup>

By mid-1941, the prices of the various commodity groups had risen 30 to 50 times (sic!) from their prewar levels.<sup>6</sup> A reporter summed up the situation succinctly: “The onslaught of high prices continues.”<sup>7</sup> The August 1939-to-August 1941 ratio of living costs in Warsaw was 100 to 4,140.<sup>8</sup> In the spring of 1943, the price indices for various products were: milk and bread – 5,894 points; meat and fats – 7,446; dairy and eggs – 5,164; sugar – 10,672; vegetable and fruit – 2,006.<sup>9</sup> A historian evaluating surviving sources concluded: “The comparison of prices before the war with those of 1944 is a revealing evidence of the scale of price increases. The price of wholemeal bread on the free market rose from 0.30 zlotys per kilogram to 12 zlotys; of butter – from 3 zlotys to 245 zlotys; of pork fat – from 1.6 zloty to 174 zlotys, while pay remained stagnant.” At the turn of 1941 there was a fuel shortage. Coal – if a shipment arrived at all – sold at 1,300–1,500 zlotys per tonne; coking coal cost 1,000 zlotys per tonne; peat and wood were several hundred zlotys per tonne, but they were difficult to obtain. The next winter the price of coal rose to 1,800 zlotys. At these prices these commodities were not affordable for the average manual and white-collar worker.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, in a certain locality the Soviets forced the peasants to give up grain farming, so as to turn the area into a tomato-growing belt instead. The failure of this crop left the peasant families in the first year of the German occupation with no stocks whatever, whereupon prices went up immediately, aggravating the situation of the non-farmer population, including thousands of Jews.

<sup>6</sup> *Pro memoria*, *op cit.*, p.18; Kaliński and Landau, pp. 167–172.

<sup>7</sup> *Pro memoria*, *op cit.*, pp. 313, 405, 407.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 295f.

<sup>10</sup> *Pro memoria*, p. 132.

Franciszek Wyszynski had been drawing a retirement pension of 157 zloty which rose to 187 zloty after May 1942.<sup>11</sup> He dismissed his 30-zloty rise tersely: “What is this, compared with the market prices.”<sup>12</sup> This situation was the result of the occupying authorities’ deliberate policy of keeping social benefits and pay, both in establishments under German administration and in private firms, at a nominal level no higher than the prewar one. Pay rises were banned by the Germans.

With the costs of living rising steeply, official earnings became meaningless as the basic source of supplying the family with food.<sup>13</sup> Very likely, this was the reason behind the by-occupation structure of a population termed by Jan Grabowski “intelligentsia bureaucrats” – those seeking the right to manage post-Jewish assets in Otwock. They were, for the most part, prewar and wartime junior office clerks drawing salaries which, in the wartime conditions, could not possibly be the only income on which to live.<sup>14</sup> Counsel Jerzy Lewiński had a similar source of income in the Warsaw ghetto, administering a property of an Aryan owner whom the Germans had forced to move to another part of the city.<sup>15</sup> Generally, the loss of previous employment and income drove some people into jobs they had never done before. Academics and actors on the Aryan side were joining the ranks of waiters and bartenders, and those in the ghetto – joined the ranks of the Jewish Organization for the Maintenance of Public Order. Hundreds of thousands – or

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<sup>11</sup> F. Wyszynski, *Dzienniki z lat 1941–1944* [Diary: 1941–1944] (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Mówią wieki,” 2007), p. 111.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Pro memoria, op cit.*, pp. 414f.

<sup>14</sup> S. Grabowski, “Polscy zarządcy powierniczy majątku żydowskiego. Zarys problematyki” [Polish Administrators of [Seized] Jewish Property: An Outline of the Question], *Zagłada. Materiały i Studia*, 2005, vol. 1, pp. 255f.

<sup>15</sup> E. Koźmińska-Freyłak, “Świadectwo milczenia... Rozmowa z Jerzym Lewińskim, byłym funkcjonariuszem Służby Porządkowej getta warszawskiego” [A Testimony of Silence... A Conversation with Jerzy Lewiński, Former Member of the Warsaw Ghetto Jewish Order Service], *Zagłada. Studia i Materiały*, 2006, vol. II, p. 257.

perhaps millions – of people had been forced by the occupying authorities to seek alternative sources of livelihood, legitimate and illegitimate, without which they would have faced penury with all of its grim consequences.

“Aware of the negligible value of pay, nominal and real alike,” noted Czesław Łuczak, “Polish employers paid their employees, illegally, wages or salaries in excess of those formally due them.”<sup>16</sup> Such arrangements, which amounted to the grant of more or less camouflaged cost-of-living pay supplements, were part of the wartime grey economy and regrettably they are not tangibly documented on a macro scale in the surviving statistical documentation.<sup>17</sup> The paramount importance of additional incomes is also highlighted by a historian who described the Warsaw realities.<sup>18</sup> These informal – or outright illegal – sources of livelihood explain, at least partly, how a majority of the Aryan population of the GG could exist at all. Judging strictly by the official earnings, paltry food rations available at regulated prices, and the free-market prices of food, a large proportion of them should have rapidly starved to death. No doubt the demographic structure of occupied Poland, with a majority of the population (70 percent) living in rural areas (even though only 55 percent had independent farms<sup>19</sup>), was

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<sup>16</sup> Cz. Łuczak, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

<sup>17</sup> So much so that in some witnesses’ minds a conviction had arisen – and persisted after the war – that these pay supplements were what one lived on, the basic pay often being forgotten. In one case, a witness comparing conditions during the First and the Second World War said that during the former conflict the word describing everyday realities had been “hunger” and during the latter – “fear.” Cf. an account by Tadeusz Stegner, whose family lived in Warsaw in 1939–1944, given to this author on June 16, 2008). However, the relatively comfortable circumstances of individual families, or of certain occupational groups (e.g. doctors, dentists, veterinary surgeons, or private businessmen) and ethnic groups (Germans, Volksdeutsche) should not be taken to refute the accounts which speak of generally progressing deterioration of living conditions.

<sup>18</sup> G. S. Paulsson, *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw, 1940–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 135f.

<sup>19</sup> J. Żarnowski, “Społeczeństwo i klasy” [Society and Classes], in: J. Tomicki (ed.), *Polska odrodzona 1918–1938. Państwo-społeczeństwo-kultura*



another reason why this fate was averted. Food – even if only potatoes – was easier to procure in the countryside. A proportion of the urban non-Jewish population had easier access to illegitimate food through relatives still living in the countryside. Goods obtained from these sources were smuggled into towns and cities, for their own consumption and for sale.

Despite various tactical ploys which enabled the over-twenty-million exploited non-German Aryans to survive, an underground analyst noted as early as in mid-1941 that a majority of the population was starving.<sup>20</sup> Dr. Klukowski, who had visited Warsaw at that time, also entered in his diaries, in the September 3, 1941 entry, a note:

“The intelligentsia and the people living on monthly wages are the worst off, these incomes being incommensurate with the exorbitant prices. Many, many people are in effect starving; they live on sub-standard food, on some Maggi [instant] soups, or on welfare-provided meals. The general public is less carefully dressed than before the war; they are obviously making the most of old clothes and footwear, the prices of these articles being exorbitant.”<sup>21</sup>

A report dated April 1942 reads: “dire poverty and hunger reign in the rural areas, among the owners of small holdings and those owning no land.”<sup>22</sup> It is a revealing evidence of the situation in Warsaw that outside the ghetto some 124,000 people were reportedly relying for their meals on cheap soup kitchens financed by the municipal authorities and charitable

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[Poland Reborn 1918–1938: State – Society – Culture] (Warsaw: „Wiedza Powszechna,” 1988), pp. 237, 250, 253.

<sup>20</sup> *Pro memoria*, p.18.

<sup>21</sup> Z. Klukowski, *Zamojszczyzna 1918–1943* [The Zamość Province: 1918–1943], vol. I (Warsaw: Ośrodek Karta, 2007), pp. 248f. Klukowski also adds at this point (p. 249): “Still, there is no shortage of smartly dressed women and men because many wide-awake people, who know how to take advantage of the wartime boom, have been making substantial profit on various commercial machinations and other ventures.”

<sup>22</sup> *Pro memoria*, p. 148.

institutions.<sup>23</sup> From August 1939 to May 1943, the living expenses of a family of four rose by over 4,700 percent.<sup>24</sup>

In Lvov, living conditions were even worse. Since the turn of 1941 the Eastern Galicia had been suffering not only from even steeper living costs, but also from the shortage of sugar, flour, fat and clothing.<sup>25</sup> In Volhynia, the food supply situation was similar and prices were much like those in the eastern districts of the GG.<sup>26</sup> In 1942, the period before the new harvest was a time of severe hunger in the GG and in the north-east of the Eastern Borderland. Thousands of people were driven by poverty to sign up for work in Germany. In the old districts of the GG (for example in the Lublin District), a proportion of the poverty-stricken population enrolled as soon as the opportunity of voluntary work in Germany emerged.<sup>27</sup> As a result of this migration and of deportations, the number of the jobless in the local labour market went down, however in many cases it were the sole bread-winners who were going away.<sup>28</sup> Subsequently, many of them found they could not support their relatives at home from the pay received in Germany. Furthermore, cases are known of labourers in Germany, voluntary or forced, asking their relatives for material support in various forms, such as food parcels and clothes.

In 1940, the daily coupon rations for the non-German Aryan population in the GG were equivalent to only 736 calories. A year later they declined to 668 calories and in the second quarter of the year, to only 400 calories.<sup>29</sup> Also, often shops did not have enough food to meet the coupon rations. To again quote economic history experts,

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 407.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 151.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 80f.

<sup>27</sup> Z. Klukowski, p. 144. Therein an entry by Dr. Klukowski dated February 22, 1944: "From several nearby communities 135 people left, all told; from Szczepieszyn alone – 45. Admittedly, in social terms they are the least valuable element and the town will not be any worse for being rid of them."

<sup>28</sup> Kostrowicka et al., p. 420.

<sup>29</sup> *Pro memoria*, p. 240.

“Compared with the prewar worker’s consumption in Poland, the coupon rations for the Poles in the General Government covered 26 percent of the calorie requirement in 1941 and only 16 percent in 1943; the rations for the Jews covered 7 percent, and for the Germans, 101 percent, of their prewar consumption.”<sup>30</sup>

For about twenty percent of workers in the GG, employer-financed free meals eaten at the workplace were a boon, providing from 200 to 700 additional calories a day.<sup>31</sup> However, these supplements were available predominately to the heads of family. Even if a man or a woman enjoying free meals was able to give a share of their home food ration to the children, such “calorie support” was usually divided among several members of the family, which made its per-head value less significant. Because of the increasingly poor performance of Polish workers, who since 1941 had been employed in increasing numbers by firms turning out production for the needs of the front, the Germans found it expedient to increase the coupon rations. From November 1, 1943 the daily ration for an average GG inhabitant was increased to 923 calories, and for workers doing lighter and heavier manual labour – to 1,726 calories and 1,992 calories, respectively.<sup>32</sup> Bread and potato rations were the first to be increased. The difficult circumstances of some families are indirectly confirmed by accounts of parcels sent by Polish officers in POW camps to their families, with gifts they had received from the Red Cross.

Until 1942, farmers who had had food surpluses, or who had been daring enough to violate German-imposed regulations, were in a relatively comfortable situation. The percentage of agricultural producers who had benefited materially from the German occupation is yet to be established. Similarly, it is not clear whether we are speaking of a dispersed set of individuals capitalising on the increase in food prices in the wake

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<sup>30</sup> Kaliński and Landau, p. 171.

<sup>31</sup> Cz. Łuczak, p. 301.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302.

of the “starvation of urban centres,” or about communities of communes – or even of whole counties, or districts. Researchers of the economic history of Poland point to the gradual strengthening of undesirable phenomena. The relatively good situation of some farmers changed for the worse following the escalation of the plundering exploitation of the rural areas in the GG and in north-eastern parts of the Eastern Borderland in the summer of 1942. Each year, the Germans’ demands for compulsory deliveries were increasingly damaging to local peasants and larger landowners. The quantities to be delivered under mandatory quotas were being steadily increased. By the autumn of 1941, the number of livestock had dropped, relative to the prewar herd count, by between 25 percent and 40 percent for the different livestock categories.<sup>33</sup> Fertilizers, tools, lubricants, and paints for equipment maintenance were in short supply. In 1943 the Germans even started requisitioning seed grain.<sup>34</sup> The slaughtering of herds had led to the shortage of manure. The cumulative result was a drop in agricultural production per hectare. At the same time, the milk, butter and eggs mandatory delivery quotas were being set above the prewar agricultural production in any given area, despite the steadily declining livestock population.

A German official responsible for food supply in the GG reported:

“In the past year [1942] a real gap, of more than 20 percent, was wreaked in livestock numbers in the GG. Cattle, though indispensable for the production of milk and butter, were slaughtered in order to meet, at least in some degree, the deliveries for the Reich and the armed forces and to supply the population with meat. To procure 120,000 tonnes of meat [in 1943], 40 percent of the remaining cattle will have to be taken.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Pro memoria*, pp. 131, 320.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 320, 377.

<sup>35</sup> Kostrowicka et al., p. 427.

Claims against farmers were ruthlessly enforced. Peasants in arrears of deliveries were imprisoned in special camps or in concentration camps.<sup>36</sup> In cases of proven violation of German economic regulations, including the ban on unauthorised slaughtering, German courts gave sentences ranging from several months to several years of imprisonment. After July 1942, when a regulation issued by Hans Frank took effect, failure to meet the mandatory delivery quota even became punishable by death.<sup>37</sup> The same penalty was also imposed (although under different provisions) in the Ciechanów Regency, which was a part of the Reich.<sup>38</sup> Inspections on country roads and in markets were stepped up. In the spring of 1943, punitive expeditions, combined with requisitioning and with the burning of farms in arrears of mandatory deliveries, came to be a widespread form of repression.<sup>39</sup> The commonplace character of terror explains the phenomenon of a nearly 90–100 percent rate of dues collection in that year<sup>40</sup>; at the same time, this rate showed the degree of terrorisation of the Polish countryside communities.

This description of the economic situation in the rural areas indicates that the peasants had less and less food left for their own needs. The situation became critical when crops were destroyed either by bad weather or by deliberate human action. Under the circumstances, the Germans' plundering policy was – apart from its other aspects – a factor that seriously hampered the provision of broader aid to “strangers.” Another facet of the same issue was the peasants' growing resentment of those who, by taking food – whether for payment, or through robbery – were making the mandatory delivery obligations

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<sup>36</sup> In January 1942 peasants from the Łowicz and Sochaczew counties were kept in the Miedniewice camp; 600 other from the Lublin region were detained in primitive conditions on the Krzna river, and inhabitants of the Biłgoraj county – in Dyle; *cf. Pro memoria*, pp. 95, 115; Łuczak, pp. 222f.

<sup>37</sup> *Pro memoria*, p. 213; Kostrowicka et al., p. 426.

<sup>38</sup> *Pro memoria*, p. 224.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 342, 521.

even more difficult and were thereby exposing the local community to German reprisals. Hatred of Soviet and GL [People's Guard] guerrillas – who, as part of anti-German operations, burned unharvested and harvested crops and grain in storage – mounted;<sup>41</sup> similarly, the hatred of the non-Polish population in the Eastern Borderland for the Home Army guerrillas. This hatred also included groups of Jews seeking survival in the forests or Jewish guerrilla bands. There is a striking concurrence of reports about peasant hunts for Jews in hiding in 1943–1944 – that is, at a time of an even steeper increase in prices, a fundamental decrease in peasant incomes, and a new wave of pauperisation and common banditry across the countryside.<sup>42</sup> Also, it appears that the time factor was making itself felt in yet another way. According to some accounts, after several months, or after more than a year, even those Jews who had had some assets were now running out of them.

Housing conditions were another important factor which determined the ability to provide aid. Workers lived mostly in small flats consisting of one room and a kitchen. This made accommodating additional persons difficult, particularly when their presence had to be kept secret from third parties, such as neighbours. This is not to say that some of them did not choose – whether out of Christian or humanitarian motivations, or for profit – to take in fugitives and, consequently, to accept considerable discomfort in everyday life. Of the Polish Righteous Among the Nations, whose data was available for research by Teresa Prekerowa, some 40 percent lived in cities, of which one-half in Warsaw. High as this figure is, it was easier to build a hiding place in the countryside, or in some

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 212, 429–431, 457–459, 484, 492.

<sup>42</sup> A majority of the cases of murder of Jews by locals in the Kielce region, investigated after the war, occurred in 1943–1944 t; cf. A. Skibińska, J. Petelewicz, “Udział Polaków w zbrodniach na Żydach na prowincji regionu świętokrzyskiego” [The participation of Poles in Crimes against Jews in the Świętokrzyskie Province], *Zagłada. Studia i Materiały* 2005, vol. 1, pp. 125–135, 143.

other less densely built-up area. This presumably is the reason why a majority of the known cases of aid occurred in the countryside (45 percent) or in small towns (15 percent).<sup>43</sup> Rent increases, which affected the legitimate and illegitimate tenants, including Jews, figured prominently among housing-related problems. Between 1940–1944, the cost of “the most modest housing” in Warsaw rose two- to three-fold, from 150 zlotys to 500 zlotys.<sup>44</sup>

Sources on the living conditions in the Dąbrowa Basin and Upper Silesia prior to the [ghetto] liquidation actions contain no mentions of mass-scale hunger among Jews, such as that present, for example, in the Warsaw ghetto. The situation was much the same in the Gdańsk–Western Prussia Reich District. This was due to the fact that in the territories annexed to the Reich the food supply situation of the Polish and Jewish populations was relatively good, since in these areas, the Germans had not created the negative economic phenomena which befell the GG population. Although they imposed a pay freeze in the Dąbrowa Basin and Upper Silesia, they also applied the same measure to prices, thereby preventing a soaring growth of living costs.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, in the Katowice Regency, for example, until September 22, 1941, the Poles had been issued food coupons equivalent to about 2,000 calories a day; these were subsequently reduced to 1,370–1,700 calories, according to the category of the recipient.<sup>46</sup> Additional rations for those performing particularly hard manual work added from 210 to

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<sup>43</sup> T. Prekerowa, “Who helped Jews during the Holocaust in Poland?” *Acta Poloniae Historica*, vol. 76, 1997, pp. 159f. The percentage shares of those who survived in the countryside could have been higher, had it not been for several hundred cases of reprisals against villagers when the rescued and rescue providers had been murdered; in consequence, no title of “Righteous” was awarded and [these cases] were not included in Prekerowa’s statistics. On the other hand, the number of Jews and their aid providers who did not survive the 1944 Warsaw Rising is unknown.

<sup>44</sup> Paulsson, p. 133.

<sup>45</sup> Kostrowicka et al., pp. 418f.

<sup>46</sup> Łuczak, p. 303.

500 calories to the daily diet. It will be noted that, despite their change for worse, these Poles' rations were at that time more than twice than those in the GG. Likewise, food supply for the Jews was better. Unlike in the Warsaw ghetto, where the Jews were issued food coupons of an energy value of 253 calories a day, in the annexed territories an average Jewish consumer was entitled to a daily food ration with a calorific value of 1,500 – and if performing hard manual work, of 1,800 calories. The ghettos in the Warta Land were a striking exception, the inmates being allowed a daily food ration of between 513 and 638 calories. In the largest ghetto of that District of the Reich, in the Łódź ghetto, the calorific value of the ration was reduced in 1940–1942 from 1,600 to 1,000 calories.<sup>47</sup>

Regardless of certain dissimilarities between the annexed territories and the GG, the Germans' policy was leading to rapidly accelerating pauperisation of a majority of the population of Poland – a country in which even before the war unemployment and the absence of strong private capital had been the fundamental social-economic problem. It should be remembered that this pauperisation resulted chiefly from massive unemployment and from the soaring prices of food and manufactured goods combined with a freeze of pay and social benefits. Ita Dimant, who had been living “on Aryan papers” since the second half of 1942, described the situation of people with whom she had been in contact:

“The Gomuła family are living in dire poverty. He has no job; from time to time he takes some wool or tobacco to [sell in] Zabraniec and earns several hundred zlotys. But this money goes fast. One has bread and saccharine-sweetened ersatz coffee for breakfast and supper and some thin soup – with or without a tiny addition of fat – for dinner.”<sup>48</sup>

In the winter of 1941/1942 the Chuses, a married couple, were living on two kilograms of potatoes that the husband re-

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>48</sup> I. Dimant, *Moja częśćka życia* [My Share of Life] (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny – Twój Styl, 2001), p. 114.



ceived as his daily pay. They ate almost no bread. There was no work or food in the neighbourhood. Small landholders in the area lived in cruel poverty.<sup>49</sup> Eliezer Pupko, who had been living together with his family at a peasant household in the vicinity of Słonim, noted briefly in his account of this existence: “Of course they were starving, and we were starving with them.”<sup>50</sup>

The situation presented here supports a thesis that already by 1941–1942 a major part of the society, in particular urban dwellers and people with no food surpluses, could not afford to provide gratuitous, long-term aid to Jews who, faced with the genocidal action, were escaping to the Aryan side in larger numbers than in previous years. Therefore, the real necessity to take money from the rescuees and to increase the amount in line with increasing prices. Only very affluent people in towns and in the country could afford to take in and maintain at a reasonably good standard – for months or, in some cases, for several years – those who had no means of support of their own. Yet cases are known of people who kept several, a dozen, or several dozen people from 1942 or 1943 until 1944 or 1945. This occurred, for instance, in Drohobycz and Sambor, as well as in Otwock and Warsaw.

Corrupting the local population was an element of the German occupation policy. As early as the autumn of 1939 and, subsequently in the summer and autumn of 1941, while the invaders were plundering Jewish firms and homes, they offered local non-Jewish residents – successfully, in the case of a proportion of the population – a share of the spoils (this happened, for instance, in Łaszczów).<sup>51</sup> Later, they encouraged collaboration

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<sup>49</sup> Yad Vashem Archives (hereafter YVA), 03/1398, pp. 7–8, a testimony by Rywka Chus.

<sup>50</sup> YVA, 03/3324, pp. 4–5.

<sup>51</sup> YVA, 03/3418, p. 4; a testimony by Fejga Wertman; YVA, 03/3481, p. 2, a testimony by Maria Rosenberg; YVA, 025/105, p.17, a testimony by Mieczysław Parker-Pokorny; YVA, 03/2566, pp. 5–6, a testimony by Berman Kopel.

with rewards in the form of vodka, cigarettes, sugar, leather, or textiles. In Częstochowa during the liquidation of the ghetto in 1943, the reward for turning in a Jew found on the Aryan side was allegedly 200 zlotys.<sup>52</sup> In March 1944 in the occupied Lvov province, the reward for seizing a Jew and delivering him or her to a police station was 1,000 zlotys.<sup>53</sup> The instigator of the betrayal of a Jewish family who had been hiding in the woods near a village in the Kielce area from 1940 until the winter of 1943 testified after the war that he had been anxious to receive the reward promised by the Germans: 50 kilograms of sugar.<sup>54</sup> Ada Pergrycht remembered that in Rozwadów some Poles had turned in Jews for 5 kilograms of sugar; Fania Laufer mentions in her coverage of 1942 events that 7 kilograms of sugar was the price for delivering a human being to his death.<sup>55</sup> The Germans introduced a form of reward with possessions taken from captured people (or even off dead Jews' bodies).<sup>56</sup> In Warsaw the reward for denunciation was 20 percent of the value of the property of a Jew seized outside the ghetto.<sup>57</sup> Collaborators who preferred to appropriate the hunted people's possessions rather than share them with Germans, did so either in a one-off hit, or – at some risk to themselves – by making the victim the source of a regularly received “compensation.” According to Gunnar Paulsson, in Warsaw in 1942–1943 perpetrators of the latter type of extortion demanded from Jews 2,000 zlotys a month on average; it seems, however, that these practices defy

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<sup>52</sup> Dimant, p. 171.

<sup>53</sup> *Pro memoria*, p. 597.

<sup>54</sup> Skibińska and Petelewicz, p. 129.

<sup>55</sup> YVA, 03/3182, p. 10; YVA, 03/3151, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> YVA, 03/3463, p. 13; a testimony by Józef Markowicz; Skibińska and Petelewicz, p. 128; J. Leociak, “Wizerunek Polaków w zapisach Żydów z dystryktu warszawskiego” [The Image of Poles in the Writings of Warsaw District Jews] in: B. Engelking, J. Leociak, D. Libionka (eds.) *Prowincja noc. Życie i zagłada Żydów w dystrykcie warszawskim* [The Night Province: The Life and Annihilation of Jews in the Warsaw District] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Socjologii i Filozofii PAN, 2007), pp. 430–437.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Paulsson, p. 143.

generalization and that the payoff rate most likely depended on the victim's affluence.<sup>58</sup>

The Germans' destructive economic policy, which made normal existence difficult in the extreme, brought in its wake the development of a grey zone and the progressing corruption of larger and larger proportions of the population. "[...] People are breaking down morally and physically," an underground analyst wrote in March 1943. "The chase for money with which to avoid death by starvation is becoming more and more ruthless and unceremonious."<sup>59</sup>

Those wishing to grab the property of others took advantage of the chaos of war. This phenomenon had already occurred during the September 1939 campaign, when abandoned state or private property had been looted. In all epochs, collecting property left on the battlefield has been an integral part of the wartime behaviour of a part of society. A chronicler of the history of the Zamość region noted on March 7, 1940:

"I cannot get used to the sight, which I find most distasteful, of crowds of people wearing various parts of military uniform: field-type hats, army coats and tunics with civilian buttons, trousers and belts – and these very often worn by people who never saw military service. Some have altered military topcoats into jackets. In the surgery I see all the time patients wearing underwear with military-issue stamps. Even women are sporting uniform shirts, some have skirts made from uniform coats, and so on. What I find particularly annoying are the commonly worn felt high boots, bottle-green and leather-hemmed, made from saddle rugs. These boots have become all the rage in the countryside, particularly among women."

With the German economic policy resulting in a reduced supply of consumer goods, Polish villagers came to supplement their war spoils with the possessions of urban dwellers who were selling more and more of their movable property to

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 148ff.

<sup>59</sup> *Pro memoria*, p. 313.

buy food. Selling became a common necessity, regardless of religion and nationality – obviously, excluding the privileged categories, i.e. the Germans, the collaborators, and those who “knew how to get by in war realities.”<sup>60</sup>

The existence in 1942–1943 of some 230,000–300,000 Jews on the Aryan side spurred the German police forces and their collaborators, as well as extortionists [known as *szmalcownicy*, money suckers] and blackmailers “in business for themselves,” into vigorous efforts aimed at detecting fugitives. The intensified activity of this kind hit both those Jews who had only recently gone to live on the Aryan side and those who had resided there for a long time. Increasing house searches and interrogations added to the risk of fugitives being detected and those who helped them being punished. Mounting fears often led to Jews in hiding being thrown out into the street.<sup>61</sup> Some hosts took advantage of this situation to demand more money. Moreover, with the demand for hiding places soaring in a relatively short time, those who had been providing aid for profit came to demand more money. In their case, the risk factor overlapped the rapidly rising living costs, the end result being that to obtain help in 1942–1943 one needed to have more money than before.

In developments in 1944, the military situation became an underlying factor in the rising living costs. As the end of occupation became increasingly likely, a flight from the currencies introduced under the Germans resulted. One example was that the holders of large sums in “*mlynarkas*”<sup>62</sup> feared that they would suffer losses when exchanging the German money for a new currency.<sup>63</sup> The prices of products and durable carriers

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<sup>60</sup> Klukowski, p. 146.

<sup>61</sup> Dimant, p. 167.

<sup>62</sup> Editor’s note: *mlynarkas* (also called *góral*s) were 500 Polish zlotys banknotes issued by a German-controlled bank in the General Government (Bank Emisyjny w Polsce, Germ. Emissionbank in Polen, Eng. Issuing Bank in Poland).

<sup>63</sup> Wszyński, p. 507.

of value (traditionally, Western currencies and precious metals and precious stones) went up. This hit those Jews who had stockpiled the occupation money. Only those who had durable carriers of value, or much-sought-after goods such as textiles or leather, were less affected by the 1944 changes.

On the positive side, aid by institutions and organisations which had participated in the creation of Polish Underground State structures, in particular by the “Żegota” Council for Aid to Jews,<sup>64</sup> had a highly positive impact on living conditions on the Aryan side. There is no unequivocal information about resources drawn for this purpose from the budget of the Polish Government-in-Exile. Estimates for the entire period of these organisations’ activity range from 28.75 million zlotys to 37.4 million zlotys.<sup>65</sup> Domestic and foreign Jewish institutions and organisations also contributed funds. However, a comparison of funds which had been sent from abroad and those which had reached the intended recipients showed that out of some 1.3 million dollars only about 600,000 reached the recipients hands. It is yet to be established who intercepted several hundred thousand dollars, and when.<sup>66</sup>

It appears from some accounts that “Żegota’s” material aid arrived after means from other sources had run out. Eugenia Nussbaum was one of these cases. She recounted that she had been receiving aid since the summer of 1944 and for the last

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<sup>64</sup> Jakow Wilner was one of the beneficiaries of aid provided by the “Żegota” Council for Aid to the Jews, cf. YVA, 03/2665, p. 17.

<sup>65</sup> M. Urynowicz, “Zorganizowana i indywidualna pomoc Polaków dla ludności żydowskiej eksterminowanej przez okupanta niemieckiego w okresie drugiej wojny światowej” [Organised and Individual Help Provided by Poles to Jews Exterminated by the German Occupiers during World War II] in: A. Żbikowski (ed.), *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939–1945. Studia i materiały* [Poles and Jews under German Occupation, 1939–1945: A Study] (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2006), p. 225.

<sup>66</sup> D. Libionka, “ZWZ-AK i Delegatura Rządu RP wobec eksterminacji Żydów polskich” [ZWZ-AK and the Governmentn Delegation for Poland Facing the Extermination of Polish Jews] in: *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką...*, pp. 126f.

time in January 1945, an amount double that of the monthly support payment.<sup>67</sup> Another financial aspect of aid that should not be overlooked was the cost of supplying of “Aryan documents” or helping Jews to move from one hiding place to another. In 1942 in Kozenice, obtaining a counterfeit *Kennkarte* [identity document] cost no less than 2,000 zlotys.<sup>68</sup> However, Michał Borowicz mentions a woman who had to pay as much as 10,000 zlotys.<sup>69</sup> Having documents prepared for an entire family at free-market rates was a heavy expense. Furthermore, the rates depended on the type and quality of the documents.

In some cases aid from non-Jewish institutions was obtained indirectly. Most common was when Jewish children were taken into Christian orphanages supported by the Central Welfare Council<sup>70</sup>, welfare departments of the local municipal authorities, or by agencies of the Underground State.<sup>71</sup> In such cases the Jewish children were beneficiaries of the general aid effort.

For many people, the most important prerequisite for survival was the readiness, shown by many Poles, to provide aid regardless of their own poverty and the destitution of Jews staying on the Aryan side. The heroism of these people merits an even greater recognition because when the rescuees had no means of their own and received no institutional support, their living costs were taken on by the aid providers.<sup>72</sup>

For the Jews facing extermination, the development of Soviet and GL guerrilla movement in the Eastern Borderland area in 1942–1943 – concurrently with the liquidation of ghettos – was fortunate. As the numbers of guerrilla groups were

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<sup>67</sup> YVA, 03/1177, p. 5; a testimony by Eugenia Nussbaum.

<sup>68</sup> YVA, 03/2523, p. 21; a testimony by Abram Szabaton.

<sup>69</sup> M. Borowicz, *Arisze papirn*, Buenos Aires 1955, vol. 1, p. 51.

<sup>70</sup> Editor’s note: Rada Główna Opiekuńcza (RGO).

<sup>71</sup> E. Kurek, *Dzieci żydowskie w klasztorach* [Jewish Children in Convents] (Lublin: Gaudium, 2004), p. 48.

<sup>72</sup> In 1943, when considering whether to leave her two brothers in hiding, Ita Dimant estimated that she needed tens of thousand zlotys for this purpose; cf. Dimant, p. 153.

growing fast, the probability of finding salvation in their ranks increased. In such cases, the guerrillas took over the sustenance of the Jewish fugitives.

Several factors could facilitate functioning on the Aryan side, most of them resulting from the degree of a given individual's assimilation. The German policy of massive resettlement of population carried out in the occupied Polish territories since early October 1939 (e.g. deportations from Gdynia–Orłowo) provided enterprising individuals claiming to be Aryan a camouflage of sorts. They could hide among the mass of several hundred thousand exiles from the territories annexed to the Reich. The “exile” cover was useful both during a sojourn in a large city and while staying in the countryside. It could also work for those volunteering for work in Germany.

Research is needed to determine how the massacre of several millions of ghetto inmates influenced the prices of essential goods in the territories east of the Reich. Those who were dying were human beings but, from the economic perspective, they were also consumers. This matter calls for a detailed analysis of the price movements in the GG in 1942–1943.

### **Sources of Livelihood on the Aryan Side**

The wartime fortunes of those who survived on the Aryan side were determined by, among other factors, the time and place where they had been caught by the German occupation. It is by no means irrelevant whether their lives in clandestine conditions began in the autumn of 1939, or in the spring or autumn of 1943.

Those residing in the territory occupied by the Soviet Union won two years, as it were. Admittedly, their material losses resulting from the occupation had begun as early as in first weeks after September 17, 1939, but this was the fate of the sectors of society labelled as hostile by the Soviet system. The nationality and religion of the harassed were of less relevance

and in these terms an equalisation of rights of the Jews and non-Jews can be said to have occurred. The main losers were private entrepreneurs, people of property, and those who had had savings in Polish currency. The businesses and assets of the first had been taken over by the state, and everybody's savings decreased in value following conversion of zlotys into roubles at an exchange rate of 1 to 1. This, combined with chaos in the economy and the shortage of goods, sent prices soaring. Many people saw their savings melt away before their very eyes and only a handful of people were getting rich by profiteering.<sup>73</sup> Even so, over 1.3 million Jews lived longer in conditions much like those of the rest of the society, a majority of them able to remain in gainful employment and to keep their prewar personal possessions, such as single-family houses with furnishings, and clothes.<sup>74</sup> Because of this, some families lost their personal possessions for the first time only through the plundering they suffered after the Third Reich's attack on the USSR. This plundering was perpetrated by both the aggressors and by local muggers.<sup>75</sup>

The people who had survived the plundering and pogroms of the summer and autumn of 1941 found themselves in ghettos. Some continued to reside in their former homes and therefore had more property than those thrown out of their former premises with nothing but hand luggage. Some had retained these possessions and assets until the ghetto liquidation

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<sup>73</sup> YVA, 03/2942, p. 7; a testimony by Jechiel Brand. It contains a passage: "I cannot say that things were as bad as that in Vilnius [in 1939–1940 – G.B.]. Indeed, there was a boom, one traded and earned money, but we realised nevertheless that we had to run. Run from Europe to Asia."

<sup>74</sup> Genia Herbenstreit recounted that the Soviets had robbed her parents of a fortune; cf. YVA, 03/4014, p. 11. Of course, firms had been nationalised already in the autumn of 1939. In some cases, former owners were employed as hired staff, in others they were ordered to leave their prewar places of residence; cf. YVA, 03/2535, pp. 1–2, a testimony by Miriam Gruenberg.

<sup>75</sup> M. Dean, "Gospodarka wyzysku: warunki życia w gettach na kresach Wschodnich" [An Economy of Exploitation: The Living Conditions the Eastern Borderland's Ghettos], *Zagłada. Materiały i Studia* 2007, vol. 3, pp. 115–118.



actions of 1942–1934 and only then gave them for safekeeping on the Aryan side, as a material basis for attempted survival after escape from the ghetto. The chance of survival depended on the timing of the Nazis' liquidation and deportation actions in a given area. The inhabitants of ghettos liquidated last had been able to subsist on pay received for slave labour, thus saving their reserves, if any, for the time when they crossed to the other side of the wall. This observation applies to the entire area of the occupied Poland. It should be noted that after June 22, 1941 the situation of the Jews in the Eastern Borderland became similar to that in the Warsaw, Cracow, Radom and Lublin Districts. One important difference was that in the east liberation came earlier – in some areas a whole year earlier, with the Red Army's crossing the former Polish-Soviet border at Sarny in January 1944.

The Jews who had lived since September 1939 under German rule had been subjected even in the first two years of the war to mass-scale expulsions, expropriation, and ghettoisation. They had been systematically deprived of the bulk of their life's possessions. By that time a majority of the Jewish population under German occupation already had no independent means on which to live on the Aryan side and were doomed to work under a slave or semi-slave system. They worked for several slices of bread, or few kilograms of potatoes.<sup>76</sup>

It has already been noted that from earliest days of the occupation Jews had fallen victim to plunder.<sup>77</sup> In the face of this some took measures to preserve at least the remnants of their movable assets.<sup>78</sup> Two methods were used the most often: con-

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<sup>76</sup> The daily pay Józef Markowicz received in October 1942 in the Gogolin country estate was 5 kg of potatoes, *cf.* YVA, 03/3463.

<sup>77</sup> Zonnenfeld, a merchant from Działoszyce, was robbed of all his assets by the end of 1939; *cf.* YVA, 03/1280, p. 2; a testimony by Marian Zonenfeld. In Żychlin near Płock robbery was the special preserve of local Volksdeutsche; *cf.* YVA, 03/10009, p. 2; a testimony by Helena Bodak.

<sup>78</sup> In September 1939 it were not Germans, but demoralised marauders (Polish soldiers and policemen), who were the perpetrators of looting; *cf.* YVA, 03/1696, p. 4; a testimony by Jakub Herzig. In Dąbrowa Tarnowska

cealing assets in various hiding places, or depositing them with Christian acquaintances.<sup>79</sup> In either case, efforts were made to reduce the risk of loss, by hiding things in several different places or depositing them with several different people.<sup>80</sup> A proportion of the assets – usually jewelry, or gems prised out of their settings – were kept on the person. Possessions had been deposited on the Aryan side and with Aryans both before the establishment of ghettos<sup>81</sup> and before liquidation actions. In the ghettos, substantial movable assets were usually held by those whose houses and homes had been situated within the perimeters of the Jewish residential area, or who had had time and means to move their chattels to the ghetto. Information on handing over items to the Aryan side in the last phases of the existence of ghettos appear in the context of different activities undertaken in different regions of the occupied Poland. Mirian Gruenberg (of Mikulińce in the Lvov province) was living since 1942 on proceeds of the sale of deposited items.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Adam Sawicki in Łuck was receiving money from a Czech acquaintance who was locating buyers for Sawicki's chattels deposited with her.<sup>83</sup> The 200 dollars Magda Teichner, hiding in Warsaw, had received for a piano left with Count Poniński helped solve many financial problems.<sup>84</sup>

In regard to cash, high-denomination banknotes or gold coins were the most popular means of hoarding. Unfortunate-

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Jewish shops were plundered by peasants who had come especially for this purpose from nearby villages; *cf.* YVA, 03/2020, p. 8; a testimony by Abram Weit.

<sup>79</sup> YVA, 03/2934, p. 7; a testimony by Zwi Menachem. The father of Szarlotta Waks had bricked up valuable objects in the wall of his warehouse in Cracow; *cf.* YVA, 03/2842, p. 12.

<sup>80</sup> Helena Cedro's family did so, depositing suitcases with their possessions with several acquaintances; *cf.* YVA, 03/2817, pp. 8–9.

<sup>81</sup> Bronia Rot remembered a cartload of furniture given into safekeeping and a Polish worker, Feliks Skoczylas, who had helped with transport; *cf.* YVA, 03/2542.

<sup>82</sup> YVA, 03/2535, p. 7.

<sup>83</sup> YVA, 03/2224, p. 16.

<sup>84</sup> YVA, 03/2514, p. 6.

ly, many of those who in 1939 had held 100-zloty and 500-zloty banknotes either lost this money in 1940 or, at best, had to pay a high margin on illegal exchange of these into lower-denomination notes. For this reason, the most sought-after foreign currencies were those on which the Germans had no influence, notably U.S. dollars and British pounds sterling. However, the increased demand immediately inflated these currencies' black-market exchange rates.

The Jews deported from their former places of residence in 1939–1941, in particular those belonging to the poorest strata of society, found themselves in the worst predicament. By law, they had been permitted to take no more than 25–35 kilograms of luggage and several marks or 200 zlotys (later, only 20 zlotys) per person. The little that they had had was taken away from them too. This happened, for instance, in the course of deportation from Grójec.<sup>85</sup> Some of the deportees succeeded in concealing some valuables in their luggage or clothes. The more affluent and provident had hoped to benefit from the nest-eggs they had concealed from the Germans, yet many found it exceedingly difficult, if not outright impossible, to draw on these reserves by themselves. Such, presumably, was the case with the thousands of deportees from the Polish territories annexed to the Reich, or the fugitives from other Reich-occupied countries. The border between the GG and the Reich, which, being Jews, they were not allowed to cross legally, was a major obstacle. Therefore, in most cases the reserves concealed from the Germans could be tapped only with the help of intermediaries, a circumstance which in some cases involved additional costs, or the risk of loss of the deposits. Nevertheless, cases are known of deportees who, while residing hundreds of kilometres away from the place where their assets were concealed, devised ways of drawing on these reserves both while residing in the ghetto and after crossing over to the Aryan side.

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<sup>85</sup> K. Panz, “Zagłada sztetla Grice” [Destruction of the Gritz Shtetl], *Zagłada. Studia i Materiały* 2007, vol. 3, pp. 22f.

Considering the scale of death by starvation in the closed ghettos, it can be assumed that reserves of cash or valuables were held only by those who had belonged to more prosperous layers of society before the war, or by those who had found ways of making money by operating in the grey zone of ghetto economic life. Those incapable of working because of age (too young, or too old) or health and lacking independent means had to rely on welfare aid. People in this category had had practically no chance of surviving on the Aryan side and were nearly all murdered during the deportation actions. Only the few who had had been offered protection by relations or acquaintances remained alive.

The deportation actions of 1942–1943 – and, in Łódź, even in the first half of 1944 – created a new situation. The annihilation of a majority of ghetto inmates was not at all times followed by immediate liquidation of a given restricted Jewish residential area. In many cases the Germans allowed the remnants of the Jewish community to exist on the site and they did not interfere in all of its members' daily activities. With the area remaining off limits to the local non-Jewish population, a majority of those Aryans who were eager to lay their hands on the victims' possessions were prevented from doing so. On the other hand, this barrier did not apply in practice to the Jews still in residence. Some (their numbers are unknown) combed empty houses and flats, taking whatever they considered necessary for a further struggle for survival: food, medicines, clothes – but also whatever money or jewellery they found.<sup>86</sup> “The situation on the ghetto site was such that money was plentiful,” wrote Maks Herz describing the conditions in the Lvov ghetto in the second half of 1942. “There was no food, but money was in abundance. Sometimes people who had money were

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<sup>86</sup> M. Bender, “Żydzi z Chmielnika w czasie okupacji niemieckiej (1939–1943)” [Chmielnik Jews under German Occupation (1939–1945)] *Zagłada. Studia i Materiały* 2007, vol. III, pp. 56–58; A. Skibińska, “Życie codzienne Żydów w Kozienicach pod okupacją niemiecką” [The Daily Life of Jews in Koznitz under German Occupation] in: *ibid.*, p. 83; Dean, pp. 123–124.

starving too. On some occasions, notably during [liquidation] actions, people did not know what to do with money or diamonds.”<sup>87</sup> Therefore, the witness added, there had been money with which to buy Aryan documents, and he commented: “Not that these were large resources, for they were not. Besides, nobody stood in any special need of this money. Travelling was still cheap, what with prewar rates still in effect.”<sup>88</sup> When working in the Działoszyce ghetto with a group of Jews who sorted and removed victims’ effects, Marian Zonefeld put aside some of the discovered money and jewellery “for hard times,” as a result of which he and his co-workers had “loads of money.”<sup>89</sup> With this money they bought revolvers, among other items, in preparation for escape to the Aryan side. The funds accumulated in this manner helped him survive until liberation in January 1944. Those still performing certain official functions in the ghetto, notably members of the Jewish Organization for the Maintenance of Public Order (*Ordnungsdienst*) were in a privileged situation. One of those, a policeman in Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, was drawing on resources he had scavenged from the ghetto and hidden on the Aryan side, selling them successively from late 1942 up to the liberation.<sup>90</sup> Bronia Szpielfogiel also mentions items buried in the ghetto grounds as a source of subsistence.<sup>91</sup>

One can justifiably speak of a similarity between existence in the ghettos and in the camps in the final phase of the Jewish inmates’ extermination. Those assigned in the camps to labour squads (*Kommandos*) which sorted the effects of the already murdered people took advantage of gaps in the supervision system to keep some of the money and jewellery.

Despite the four years of plundering, some of the people sent to the annihilation centres in Treblinka, Bełżec, Sobibor

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<sup>87</sup> YVA, 03/3392, p. 13.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> YVA, 03/1280, p. 12.

<sup>90</sup> YVA, 03/3397, pp. 83, 105, the diary of Henryk Malakka.

<sup>91</sup> YVA, 03/2219, pp. 11–12.

and other “death factories” had carried substantial financial resources on their persons.<sup>92</sup> In this case, too, a share of the things picked in the sorting houses from the victims’ luggage served to support the labour squad members’ daily existence. These assets were used to buy necessary items from corrupt guards, chiefly from members of non-German guard companies. What was left was hidden from the guards and fellow-prisoners. It appears, from accounts by members of revolts of Jewish prisoners in German ghettos and camps, that those alerted to the time of an action had carried on their persons means with which to pay their living expenses after escape.<sup>93</sup> It should be noted that many Polish Jews had been well-informed enough to realise that money was one of the prerequisites of existence outside the wire. Hania Korczak found herself working in a sorting house where the belongings of the Majdanek camp victims were handled. The luggage of people brought to the camp to be annihilated still contained considerable assets. “Gold was carried out from there by caseloads,” she wrote. “I never imagined there were Jews as rich as this.”<sup>94</sup> Afterwards, she worked in an empty camp in Trawniki, doing the same job. Years later she testified: “It was a rich camp. There were lots of all manner of good things. Ninety percent of the prisoners had been Warsaw Jews.”<sup>95</sup>

K. Grubstein remembered that thirsty Warsaw Jews, transported to their death in Treblinka during the rising, had paid with diamonds for small amounts of water as the train waited on the sidetrack.<sup>96</sup> After the revolt of labour squads in

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<sup>92</sup> When she found herself in the Płaszów camp in March 1943, Frania Siegmund still had on her, sewn in her clothes, diamonds, gold dollars, a ring and six gold wedding rings; cf. YVA, 03/2979, p. 18. She pointed out that the arriving prisoners had been ordered to hand over their valuables but, as she said, “people were hanging on to them.” Marian Zonenfeld mentions hidden money and valuables of Prokocim camp prisoners; cf. YVA, 03/1280, p. 8.

<sup>93</sup> Leociak, “Wizerunek Polaków...,” p. 430.

<sup>94</sup> YVA, 03/3420, p. 3.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> YVA, 03/3603, pp. 10, 13.

the Treblinka death camp a group of escaped barbers offered a peasant 500 dollars for shelter from the German manhunt and from “money-suckers.” The fugitives stayed at this farmer’s in the village of Orzeszówka until liberation. A witness, member of this group, mentioned that at that time he had had enough dollars, pounds sterling and gold to pay for help, even though earlier he had been robbed by fellow-prisoners.<sup>97</sup>

The fortunes of those who escaped from ghettos and prison camps during the final phases of these centres’ existence invite a conclusion that for many of the escapees, the resources left by victims who had been murdered earlier became the basis of their own existence on the Aryan side. In the material dimension, it were the Germans – and, to a certain extent, a proportion of local non-Jewish communities – who were the principal beneficiaries of the successive stages of the Holocaust. However, a small fraction of the remaining Jewish property had been hoarded by the last surviving Jews with access to them and these assets enabled some Jews to survive the war.

Here are some examples of almost spectacular aid provided in return for payment to Jews seeking survival on the Aryan side.

- In Sambor twenty-six people were kept concealed for close to two years, in the cellar of a grain warehouse. This large group was protected, for money, by the warehouse manager, a Ukrainian.<sup>98</sup>
- In Drohobycz, Zofia Hendel and thirty-six other Jews were rescued by the Włosańskis, a married couple, who had fashioned a hiding place for them under their house (in which a German official was billeted on the first floor). The rescuers were supported by a woman friend.<sup>99</sup>
- Also in Drohobycz, I.P., a drunk, concealed Jews in three hidey-holes, for payment.<sup>100</sup> All in all, in this

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<sup>97</sup> YVA, 03/3061, p. 5, a testimony by Gustaw Boraks.

<sup>98</sup> YVA, 03/4024, a testimony by Genia Herbenstreit.

<sup>99</sup> YVA, 03/3013; YVA, 03/3014, a testimony by Towa Sztok.

<sup>100</sup> YVA, 03/2187, p. 2, a testimony by Hersz Betman.

Eastern Borderland town alone about 200 Jews survived [literally – *ed.*]“under the ground.”

- The bunker in which Emanuel Ringelblum was hiding for several months held several dozen people. In cases like these, providing aid became an undertaking of an almost unimaginable logistic complexity. Although the witness made no mention of this, it can be inferred from the rescuers’ material position that they must have been using the aid recipients’ money.

There are also witness accounts of people who expended their own resources on sheltering fugitives.

- Irena Monis mentioned a prosperous furrier in Jeziarzyny near Borszczowa (in the Tarnopol province), who had kept at his own expense about seventy Jews in hiding.<sup>101</sup>
- After escaping from the Warsaw ghetto, Ezriel and Dwojra Kuczyński lived for quite a long time on 400 gold roubles given them by an acquaintance, a Home Army fighter.<sup>102</sup>

Other witnesses also cite examples of altruistic help extended to Jews – single individuals, families, and small groups – not only by Poles, but also by Czechs and Ukrainians. Interestingly, on some occasions help was provided even by people with tarnished prewar reputations.<sup>103</sup> Help was given out

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<sup>101</sup> YVA, 03/2938, p. 4.

<sup>102</sup> YVA, 03/2933, p. 7.

<sup>103</sup> YVA, 03/1180, pp. 13–14, a testimony by Celina Konińska; YVA, 03/1657, p. 3, a testimony by Szoszana Unger. Ruwen Fajkowski was concealed for eighteen months near the village of Korkuciany (the Ejszyski county) by a notorious local criminal Julian Iwaszko; *cf.* YVA, 2814, p. 2. Wąsik, a man with a prewar criminal record, kept Chana Goldberg’s family in hiding in the village of Miesoszowice in the Lublin region for almost a year, until the coming of the Red Army; *cf.* YVA, 03/3380, p. 12. Józef P., a drunk and thief well known in Wieliczka, was hiding two Jews in a bunker for as long as eighteen months. Nobody suspected that so disreputable an



of compassion for those in need, in fulfilment of the “love thy neighbour” commandment<sup>104</sup>, or as an act of gratitude for support received from a Jewish family in the past. Lola Bleiweiss’s family was one of these cases. For a long time they successfully evaded various liquidation actions by moving from one ghetto to another, supported for months supported by peasants with whom the witness’s father had done business before the war.<sup>105</sup> Among those to have received help from peasants was Rywka Chus, hiding in the neighbourhood of the village of Króle Duże.<sup>106</sup> In her case, the peasants’ helpful attitude was due to her creditable behaviour during the Soviet occupation, when she had given warnings to people in danger of being punished for falling short of mandatory milk deliveries imposed by the new administration.<sup>107</sup> Aid was provided by blood relations and relatives by marriage. For instance, Helena Goldberg’s brother in law, a German by descent, regularly brought her money from Łódź to Warsaw.<sup>108</sup> Predictably, correct or even friendly relations did not ensure help after the German invasion. Indeed, in some cases it were close acquaintances who betrayed the location of hiding Jews to the invaders.

Those who lived on the Aryan side on earned income can be classified into several categories.

- Legitimate jobs were held primarily by the holders of credible Aryan documents, or by those whose ap-

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individual would have undertaken a task like that; *cf.* YVA, 03.3007, p. 2, a testimony by Icchak Birnbaum.

<sup>104</sup> The Małkowicz family of Busko near Lvov saw giving help as their religious duty; *cf.* YVA, 03/3407, a testimony by Rywka Kochalska. The Socha family, Baptists, living near Lvov, gave aid out of the same motivation; *cf.* YVA, 03/2980, p. 10, a testimony by Natan Horowitz.

<sup>105</sup> YVA, 03/3271, pp. 7, 15, a testimony by Lola Bleiweiss-Goldberg.

<sup>106</sup> YVA, 03/1398, p. 4, a testimony by Rywka Chus.

<sup>107</sup> Her wartime experiences had caused Rywka Chus to articulate in her testimony a conclusion, which stands out as an exception against the backdrop of the other accounts surveyed: “Oddly enough, throughout the occupation period I never experienced any good from Jews, it were always Poles who helped us”; *cf.* YVA, 03/1398, p. 10.

<sup>108</sup> YVA, 03/1167, p. 5, a testimony by Helena Goldberg.

pearance, manner of speech and behaviour basically did not distinguish them. In many cases these people found clerical jobs. It was not uncommon for several such persons to work in the same firm – but they did not admit to having recognised a fellow-worker as a Jew, for fear of having their cover blown.<sup>109</sup> Because of the manner of their daily existence they were dubbed “living on the surface.” In some cases the skill with which they played their roles was amazing indeed. For instance, writer Jehoszua Szlejn, who wrote in Hebrew, survived by playing the role of “Ukrainian Orthodox priest.”<sup>110</sup> Chwedkowski masqueraded as a Catholic priest.<sup>111</sup>

- Jews who had volunteered for work in Germany claiming to be Aryan were another specific group.
- People holding “Aryan documents” but afraid, for various reasons, of functioning in public space sought jobs which could be done from home with as infrequent as possible contacts with strangers. This is sometimes known as living close to the surface. Sewing, knitting, darning, cigarette-rolling, or making envelopes and paper bags are often mentioned in this context.<sup>112</sup> A witness (name unknown), pharmacist by profession, earned his living in the Świąciany county by making up medicines.<sup>113</sup>

The man who was harbouring Marcel Reich-Ranicki and his wife, besides employing them in his cigarette-making business, hit upon the idea of making use of the hiding couple’s

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<sup>109</sup> Borwicz, p. 136; A Marianowicz, *Życie surowo wzbronione* [Life Strictly Forbidden] (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1995), pp. 153–163.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 299.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> While living in a country estate near Biała Podlaska, Pola Tur-Sternlicht earned her living by knitting; cf. YVA, 03/1282, p. 6. So did Eugenia Nussbaum earn her living; cf. YVA, 03/1177, p. 5.

<sup>113</sup> YVA, 03/2857.

knowledge and skills and he started offering his neighbours a homework-doing service. The host would bring home the exercise books and the Reichs would do the school assignments.<sup>114</sup> It should be added that Marcel's talent of narrating colourfully unknown aspects of life and stories from literature provided welcome diversion during the long evenings the hosts and the Jewish couple spent sitting together at home, thereby adding to the Reich's useful value. Before the eyes of poor and uneducated inhabitants of a Warsaw suburb a vista was spreading of a world they had never had the opportunity of knowing. Reich-Ranicki confirms the dire material circumstances of hired labourers, indicating indirectly that even the harboured people's "moonlighting" could not change it. "We were making cigarettes, hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands of them, using the crudest tools. He [the host – GB] sold them, but this brought but a paltry income. Such being the case, Bolek [a typesetter] and his family were living in poverty. Our privation was even worse. We were starving."<sup>115</sup> Yet the fact cannot be ignored that the [Reich's] hosts over-indulgence in alcohol drinking aggravated their financial plight. Mentions of this particular affliction of rescuers appear also in other witness accounts.

Tailoring or shoe-making as ways of earning an income "on, or close to the surface" were less popular because the unavoidable noise not only attracted the neighbours' attention (particularly in a block of flats) but also because it could cause public annoyance, complaints and, consequently, intervention by the police.<sup>116</sup> Quite a few women found employment

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<sup>114</sup> M. Reich-Ranicki, *Mein Leben* (Stuttgart-München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2000), pp. 282f, 286, 288f. The host was paid in vodka, for which reason his prestige among the neighbours rose considerably. Reich wrote: "He was grateful to us for help and we were glad we could be useful" (cf. p. 289).

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 283.

<sup>116</sup> After moving from the Kozenice [Koznitz] ghetto to a hiding place in Warsaw, Abram Szabaton engaged for some time in making shoes which his host sold for 300 zlotys a pair. Next, to make no noise, he switched to sew-

as domestic help, or nanny,<sup>117</sup> thus gaining a place to sleep, a registered address, and meals. Private tutors were operating on the borderline between the two groups, by preference receiving their students at home. Basically, only people hardly recognisable as Jews dared to earn income in this way, others being at risk of exposure by their students or the students' parents.

As opposed to legitimate occupations, some Jews pretending to be Aryans made their living by engaging, sporadically or periodically, in unlawful activities. Moreover, those living completely “under the surface” – having no documents and lacking the attributes which would have made it easier for them to move inconspicuously in public places – performed various jobs for their aid providers. For instance, two Jews hiding in Warsaw distilled moonshine spirits which their Polish accomplice distributed.<sup>118</sup> Both “entrepreneurs” lived to see liberation. Icchak Rosenblatt, who lived on Aryan papers, mentions that he manufactured counterfeit documents which he sold in Warsaw. He can be presumed to have prospered, as in the spring of 1943 he was able to pay a random blackmailer 200 dollars.<sup>119</sup> Henryk Malakki paid, on occasions, as much as 10,000 zlotys to get rid of a blackmailer. Dow Nowak earned substantial sums in Lvov by exchanging – with the help of an acquaintance employed in a bank – Soviet roubles into occupation-period zlotys.<sup>120</sup> The margin charged by people who were in a position to engage in this business ran, on some occasions, into tens of percent of the sum exchanged. People such as Nowak had money because they took advantage of earning opportunities regardless of prohibitions. For example, in December 1942, the said Nowak and his accomplice stole money and

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ing shirt collars and other items of clothing. He existed in this manner until the outbreak of the Warsaw Rising; *cf.* YVA, 03/2523, p. 25.

<sup>117</sup> Fryderyka Reisler worked in Sambor as an Aryan servant; *cf.* YVA, 03/1283, pp. 5f.

<sup>118</sup> YVA, 03/2512, p. 16, a testimony by Leon Bukowiński.

<sup>119</sup> YVA, 03/3228, pp. 11f.

<sup>120</sup> YVA, 03/3321, pp. 2f.

false Kenkartas from a supplier of these documents. Shortly thereafter Nowak himself was robbed by Ukrainians, but he promptly recouped his losses and made considerable money on illegal trading. Detained while attempting to cross the border and stripped of his possessions by Hungarian policemen, he escaped and was soon prospering again, robbing peasants with the aid of an acquaintance.

When Janina Zielińska and her husband left the Warsaw ghetto on September 10, 1940, they had 100 zlotys each. Soon they were able to support themselves on the Aryan side with earnings from illegal trade.<sup>121</sup> First, in 1941–1942, they smuggled food from the Sandomierz region to Warsaw; then they switched to trading in clothing accessories. Some traders travelled long distances to sell valuable goods and cash in on price differences between markets where the supply of given goods was high and those where the goods could be sold at profit. For instance, Maria Izolda Furman regularly shuttled between Kielce and Warsaw.<sup>122</sup> By travelling long distances the traders not only earned their own and their dependants' living, but – an important bonus – they also gained experience and knowledge and established contacts useful in the struggle for survival after the liquidation of most ghettos. The lack of such “know-how” was one of the reasons why people who had lived in ghettos from earliest wartime days and were ignorant of the new everyday rules of life “on the surface,” were easily detected. Some witnesses are silent about the sources of funds used on the Aryan side. Yet some mentions of the amounts involved are food for thought. Henryk Starosolec, a prewar secondary school teacher, was able to pay in March 1943 as much as 60,000 zlotys to the guides who led him into Hungary. His wife escaped by the same route in the spring of 1943/1944, paying 120,000 zlotys.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> YVA, 03/1158, pp. 5, 8, a testimony by Janina Zielińska.

<sup>122</sup> YVA, 03/3885, p. 27.

<sup>123</sup> YVA, 03/1269, pp. 10, 15, a testimony by Henryk and Helena Starosolec.

Little is known about the economic activities of people who engaged in endeavours which qualify as criminal in any circumstances, such as blackmail, corruption, extortion, obtaining gain under false pretences, or fraud (such as selling sub-standard products). Witold Meykowski described several cases of people who had collaborated closely with the Germans in Cracow, preying on the situation of their compatriots and making the plight of others a source of their own income. Some were Gestapo agents operating on the Aryan side; one woman was a mistress of a well-known Gestapo officer. Some of them survived the war, escaping the fate the Germans prepared for a majority of their Jewish agents, whom they murdered in the autumn of 1944 in a concentration camp in Płaszów.<sup>124</sup> Roman Frister remembered a Polish-Jewish gang which had lured Jews from Cracow and the surrounding area out of the ghetto by tempting them with the mirage of salvation, only to take their money on false pretences and, in the end, to murder them.<sup>125</sup> Some kinds of conduct bordered on indecency, profiteering and fraud; one of such cases was that of Jakub N. who, while acting as a middleman on a deal with people seeking admission to a hiding place where he himself had been staying, had charged them a commission five times higher than the sum agreed with his peasant host. This man survived the war.<sup>126</sup>

Employment of illegal workers known to local Christians as Jews is a recurring motif in witness accounts. The known cases all took place in the countryside. I believe that in such cases economic factors were of paramount consideration. This

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<sup>124</sup> W. Medykowski, "Przeciw swoim. Wzorce kolaboracji żydowskiej w Krakowie i okolicy" [Against Your Own People: Patterns of Jewish Collaboration in Cracow and Vicinity], *Zagłada. Studia i Materiały* 2006, vol. II, pp. 205–220.

<sup>125</sup> R. Frister, *Autoportret z blizną* (Warsaw: "Świat Książki," 1996), pp. 89–92; English edition: *Self-Portrait with a Scar* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2000).

<sup>126</sup> The Archives of the Righteous Among the Nations Department of the Yad Vashem Institute, Case No 4950, Letter of J.E., March 11, 1991.

is evidenced, among other things, by such situations having occurred even in communities in which even those known for their antisemitic views were aware of what was going on. As regards the latter's attitudes, they were determined basically by the fact that they, too, were using work of Jews residing in the area without authorisation from the occupation authorities.

The state of economic necessity had its roots in the pre-war, largely feudal, occupational structure of rural populations in the former central and eastern provinces. There until 1939, retail trade and crafts had been largely the special preserve of the Jews. Unlike trade, where new stall-holders, shop-keepers and inn-keepers soon filled the vacuum left by the ghettoisation and murder of Jews, no adequate number of highly-skilled tailors, cobblers and harness-makers could be found in a short time. In normal conditions, this lack would have been filled, at least in part, by manufactured goods imported from other parts of the country or from abroad, but the German policy of drastically cutting the production of consumer goods in occupied Poland resulted in the closure of factories and in mounting market shortages. This explains, in part, why the locals plundered abandoned Jewish homes taking away all, or most of the movables, or why they took part in auctions of less valuable items of Jewish property set aside for this purpose by the Germans.<sup>127</sup>

The Polish countryside had been faced with a significant reduction in the supply of indispensable artisan-made products and services. This made it necessary, in some localities, to fall back on the skills of specialists who knew how to mend old clothes and boots, or to make new ones. Despite penalties for contacts with Jews, some village communities made a tacit pact of silence. Jewish refugees were passed from one household to

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<sup>127</sup> Skibińska, p. 83; Klukowski, pp. 303–312. Jewish possessions, very humble in many cases, could not satisfy the huge market demand. For this reason a man's suit cost from several to more than 10,000 zlotys; a pair of boots – 6,000 zlotys; a pair of woman's shoes – from several hundred to 2,000 zlotys; a pair of stockings – 500 zlotys; *cf. Pro memoria*, pp. 321, 378.

another, rendering services not only for peasant families, but also for local labourers or salaried employees, such as teachers or post-masters.<sup>128</sup> This way of making a living was open mainly to artisans and, sometimes, to physicians. Adults were also used as domestic or farm help, and children as livestock shepherds.<sup>129</sup> Jews were employed when there was no cash, or when extreme thriftiness or greed dictated, since in this way peasants were cutting their expenses. Sometimes the peasant's own poverty was the reason: there was no money to hire hands for urgent farm work.

Some rescuers forced the Jews they sheltered to engage in criminal activities. In one known case, women were sent out at nights to steal crops from nearby farmers' fields for their host.<sup>130</sup> A gang of corrupt policemen and pimps kidnapped women who had left the ghetto illegally and forced them to engage in prostitution in secret brothels.<sup>131</sup> One hostess pressured the man she was harbouring to have sexual relations with her, even though his wife was in hiding with him there.<sup>132</sup>

Some people suspected of Jewish origin and unable to find a permanent place to stay and a job were constantly on the move, living by begging. Estera Melkanowicka was one such case: she led an existence of roaming villages in the neighbourhood of Włodzimierz Wołyński, suspected by Ukrainians of being Jewish. Later, peasants occasionally took her in to do various household jobs.<sup>133</sup> Perhaps the best-known case of a

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<sup>128</sup> Mosze Michałowski, a tailor, plied his trade for many months moving from household to household in a village in the Ejszyszki county; cf. YVA, 03/2815, pp. 5, 9–11. Awigdor Weit made his living in a similar way in the village of Gruszów Wielki (in the Cracow region); cf. YVA, 03/2020, pp. 2f.

<sup>129</sup> YVA, 03/3203, p. 6, a testimony by Fania Finkiel.

<sup>130</sup> A no-choice situation in which Chana Margulies and her cousin found themselves as they were hiding in the vicinity of Chrostkowo; cf. YVA, 03/2222, p. 20.

<sup>131</sup> L. Lenman, *Der heszbon blaiht ofn ...* (Buenos Aires, 1958), pp. 91–121; Borwicz, pp. 161–171.

<sup>132</sup> YVA, 03/2933, p. 15, a testimony by Dwojra and Ezriel Kuczyński.

<sup>133</sup> YVA, 03/2778, pp. 14f, 17.



fugitive camouflaged as beggar was that of Ber Ruczywół, who survived in this way until liberation.<sup>134</sup> Children often engaged in begging.<sup>135</sup>

For some poor families, the Jews living with them in hiding who had their own financial resources or support from friends or underground organisations, became the main source of subsistence. They spared the family an existence on the borderline between destitution and death of starvation. This was a weighty rationale for accepting the risk involved in harbouring Jews. It was so in the case of a family in the vicinity of Cracow, who kept with them three women and a child for seven thousand zlotys a month. When the cash ran out, their jewellery and then their clothes were sold to procure the sum required.<sup>136</sup> One Pole, an engineer, could not keep Jews at his own place, but for two years paid peasants to keep with them a woman from Kałusz; he also provided similar support to six other Jews. For poor farmers, previously permanently hard pressed for cash, such regular payments represented a wealth they had never seen before.<sup>137</sup> After a drought had destroyed crops on the sandy, poor fields around the village of Zdzieck (today, Stare Zdzieci) near Połaniec, the villagers were literally starving. The opportunity of helping Jews for payment came as a godsend to at least one local family.<sup>138</sup>

Paradoxically, the extra money brought additional problems and risks to the recipient families, in particular in rural areas where people were well informed about their neighbours' finances and possessions. In conditions of deepening pauperisation, sudden improvement in someone's material situation immediately prompted conjectures about the source of this neighbour's prosperity. Very soon such new prosperity came to

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<sup>134</sup> B. Ruczywół, *Wiazoj ich hob ibergelebt di Deitshn*, (Warsaw-Cracow-Łódź: Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna, 1946).

<sup>135</sup> YVA, 03/2218, p. 10, a testimony by Ida Derlachter.

<sup>136</sup> YVA, 03/1177, p. 5, a testimony by Eugenia Nussabaum.

<sup>137</sup> YVA, 03/1657, pp. 3, 32-37, a testimony by Szoszana Unger.

<sup>138</sup> YVA, 03/2317, p. 12, a testimony by Tonia Seiden.

be associated with aid to Jews. Helena Lipszyc wrote about her peasant host: "He was afraid to buy a bit of butter in the village, lest they said he kept a Jew."<sup>139</sup> Accepting non-cash payment posed another difficulty. Gold, jewellery or foreign currencies were difficult to exchange for legal tender in the countryside. This had to be done in town in order to avoid undesirable attention, yet these contacts with fences and illegal money-changers were by no means safe for an average peasant. The peasant could be mugged, or cheated on the transaction, and thugs could find out his address and start blackmailing him.

Before the war tens of thousands of Jews had belonged to the bourgeoisie and had held assets of considerable value. Upon becoming aware of the economic aims of the Germans' Jewish policy, some capital-owners had taken steps to retain, even if only in part, control over their businesses. Therefore, they had entered into unregistered partnerships with non-Jewish partners or, sometimes, with former employees. The transfer of title was to both sides' advantage. The new "owner" gained a new source of current income, and the former one – means to help him live in the ghetto or on the Aryan side. The case of a family in Otwock is worth citing: owing to such an arrangement they were receiving monthly the sixteen thousand zlotys demanded by the man who had them concealed in his house.<sup>140</sup> The money came in regularly and there was no need to deplete other reserves.

It was not uncommon that the decision to help was influenced by a promise of transfer of title to some real property, arable land, an orchard, or a lot on which residential or commercial building were situated. These transfers were either made during the war, or a promise was given to do so immediately after liberation.<sup>141</sup> In fact, some of these transactions were

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<sup>139</sup> YVA, 03/2935, p. 15.

<sup>140</sup> YVA, 03/3130, a testimony by Abram Gilboa.

<sup>141</sup> In a village near Dubie a peasant kept a Jewish fugitive in his house against a promise of a transfer of title to about 5 hectares of land; cf. YVA, 03/2935, p. 15, a testimony by Helena Lipszyc.

executed only after the entry of the Red Army. For people who had enough surplus food to feed Jews in hiding, and who were honest enough to keep the bargain, the transfer was a relatively convenient form of ensuring that the costs incurred – and profit – would be refunded. It was a long term investment, so to speak. It also had the advantage of involving no such problems as the necessity to buy food, or convert gold or foreign currencies – which transactions, as stated, were likely to draw the attention of third parties. An agreement for “payment with interest” after the war can be seen in much the same light.<sup>142</sup> For instance, the price for help extended to Dawid Feferman’s family of six had been: a sawmill, a grain mill, a lime furnace and a pond: these assets were legally transferred to the three families who had sheltered the Jews.<sup>143</sup>

Those hiding in forests had two sources of subsistence. The first source were the resources stashed away on the Aryan side or in the ghetto, or accumulated while in the ghetto or in the camp. The forests were also a refuge for people with money earned through manufacturing or service activities conducted in earlier phases of their residence on the Aryan side. Fugitives escaped from ghettos during liquidation actions lacked funds, contacts and shelter, particularly when the escape had taken place late in the autumn or in the winter. Unable to survive on their own “in freedom,” they eventually returned to restricted residential areas, or gave themselves up to the police. They were driven to these steps not only by cold, hunger and illnesses, but also by acts of aggression by local bandits.<sup>144</sup> The second source of subsistence of those determined to survive against all adversities were robbery and theft, whether committed for the perpetrators’ own account or purportedly in the name of an underground organisation. One of the reasons for thefts was the peasants’ fear of doing business with Jews voluntarily,

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<sup>142</sup> YVA, 03/2219, p. 12, a testimony by Bronia Szpigielfogiel.

<sup>143</sup> YVA, 03/2977, p. 26. The Feferman family were hiding in the neighbourhood of Łagów in the Kielce region.

<sup>144</sup> Klukowski, p. 311.

or giving them gratuitous aid. They feared punishment by the Germans, had such contacts been discovered.<sup>145</sup> The robbers took private property as well as property of various institutions (e.g. cooperatives). In many cases private property was seized in the presence of its owners, who were held at gun point.<sup>146</sup> German institutions were attacked by groups with affiliations to the political underground. Tens- or hundreds-strong forest-based detachments needed large quantities of food, which had to be obtained. A family camp protected by the Bielski brothers in the Nowogród region had to consume daily several hundred kilograms of food and many other articles indispensable for everyday existence and for fighting.<sup>147</sup>

Acceptance into a guerrilla detachment depended on political, military and economic factors, personal factors were less frequently of importance. GL/AL<sup>148</sup> and Soviet guerrillas accepted people fit to carry arms, preferably with their own weapons and means of subsistence. The skills of artisans and medical personnel were welcome. Physicians were much in demand also with other resistance groups. Ukrainians (the UIA)<sup>149</sup> treated them in fact as prisoners; they kept them under close observation and planned to eventually exterminate the Jews kept with their groups, so as to dispose of witnesses to their crimes. Polish independence-movement guerrilla forces usually recruited on the basis of recommendations from pre-war friends. Once accepted into a guerrilla detachment, the

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<sup>145</sup> YVA, 03/1161, p. 4, a testimony by Szoszana Atlasowicz.

<sup>146</sup> YVA, 03/2078, pp. 13f, a testimony by Tuwie Miller; YVA, 03/2213, pp. 18f, a testimony by Ignacy Zimmerman.

<sup>147</sup> At the time of liberation by the Red Army the Bielski brothers allegedly had 1,230 people under their command and protection; cf. Y. Bauer, "Nowogródek – historia sztetla" [Nowogródek: The History of a Shtetl] *Zagłada. Studia i Materiały* 2007, vol. 3, p. 108.

<sup>148</sup> Editor's note: Gwardia Ludowa (GL) or People's Guard was renamed on January 1, 1944 Armia Ludowa (AL) or People's Army.

<sup>149</sup> Editor's note: Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukr. *Ukrayinska Povstanska Armiya* – UPA) – the military wing of "Bandera" – a Ukrainian nationalist organisation.

person's upkeep became the detachment's responsibility, much like in other formations. This way, the material aspect of survival no longer had a specific Jewish character.

### Deadly "Jewish Gold"

The types of situation and phenomena presented in the earlier sections must be considered in connection with the behaviours and attitudes of non-Jews on the Aryan side. Viewed in this context the legendary "Jewish gold," rather than being a means of prolonging life, often brought tragedy to those living on the Aryan side. Nearly all witnesses whose accounts were used here had met both with selfless help and with ruthless exploitation at the hands of people taking advantage of the situation created by the Germans. One of the more moving narratives, about three fugitives robbed only a few hours after leaving the ghetto, is found in Ita Dimant's account. Between getting out of the "Jewish residential area" and the departure of their train from one of Warsaw's stations they had fallen prey to about twenty anonymous blackmailers: juveniles, an handsome cab driver, a policeman, and railroad station employees.<sup>150</sup> As a result, already on the first day of their life on the Aryan side they found themselves stripped of almost all their money.

Many agreements made with Jews were broken. People who had accepted Jewish items for safekeeping refused to return them, claiming either they had never received anything, or that the deposit had been taken by Germans or by collaborationist groups. Witness Monis spoke of a priest, with whom he had been friendly before the war and whom he had concealed from the NKVD for three weeks during the first Soviet occupation. After the German invasion Monis had entrusted his belongings to the priest and subsequently sent some women he knew to retrieve them. The priest denied having ever taken

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<sup>150</sup> Dimant, pp. 72–77.

any deposit and he told the women to leave the vicarage.<sup>151</sup> Dr. Rubin Pinus waited in vain for help from acquaintances living near Łuck with whom he had left all his movable assets.<sup>152</sup> Roman Frister described yet another situation: he had believed for years that the aid he was receiving from a Polish worker was financed with resources he had left with certain acquaintances of his. After the war the acquaintances' daughter told him otherwise.

"Shortly after you [the Fristers] had left Lvov," she said, "my father was arrested. The Germans accused him of collaboration with the underground movement and they shot him in prison. We were left without anything. [...] And our things? [...]. We sold everything to keep body and soul together. [...] I hope you are not going to present me with a bill, are you? I haven't a penny to my name."<sup>153</sup>

The no-choice situation of people in hiding encouraged some aid providers to act disgracefully. Housing arrangements were a case in point. The owners "first agreed to take Jews in, in return for a lump-sum advance payment, and then turn them out, or even denounced them."<sup>154</sup> Agreements were also breached by creating insufferable living conditions. For instance, a child given into safekeeping on the Aryan side for a generous compensation of 30,000 zlotys, was kept in a dirty hovel and barely fed at all. Another such case was that of a boy, for whose upkeep as much as 4,500 zlotys a month was paid in 1944.<sup>155</sup> Jochewed Ziw of Skierniewice also spoke of [Jews] having been concealed for exorbitant sums in very bad living conditions.<sup>156</sup> Another person recounted that food, initially very satisfactory, had been getting worse daily and a complaint had been punished by the complainant getting no supper for

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<sup>151</sup> YVA, 03/2938, p. 3.

<sup>152</sup> YVA, 03/1692, p. 25.

<sup>153</sup> Frister, p. 71.

<sup>154</sup> Paulsson, p. 153.

<sup>155</sup> YVA, 03/3379, pp. 38, 126, the diary of Heniek and Hindzia Malaki.

<sup>156</sup> YVA, 03/3186, p. 8.

the next four days.<sup>157</sup> Henryk Grynberg described the fortunes of a little girl sent to live on the Aryan side:

“Rysia [...] was kept in a shed, always alone, and she was fed potato peels. [...] It was cold in the shed and she was hungry, but she was forbidden to cry, or to answer even if called by anyone – just as if she hadn’t been there. She used to come out at night and search the field for some left out potatoes, but what hurt her the most was being alone. [...]”<sup>158</sup>

By the time the Red Army came, the child, kept in these conditions, was unable to stand on her feet and the attitude of her trustees was revealed by their saying: “She’s got to live, we’ll get quite a bundle for her yet.”<sup>159</sup>

Meanness was by no means the exclusive attribute of a single social stratum. Greed motivated both poor people and those in a fairly comfortable situation. There is a testimony about a Polish judge in the town of Brody, to whom a Jewish friend had entrusted a little daughter. To provide for her, money had been given and the title to a real property had been transferred. After the parents had been killed the “friend” abandoned the child in the Brody park with a tablet stating her real name. This was tantamount to sentencing the child to death.<sup>160</sup>

Similarly, some silent partners defaulted on their commitments. Some of those who had undertaken to provide help against a promise of conveyance of land, houses or businesses, were following with concern the Red Army’s advance, fearing that commitments undertaken in a situation of threat would not be kept. In extreme cases they killed the donor.

In some village communities, peasant organised hunts for Jews hiding in forests. They did this out of greed, prompted to crime by expectations of “easy profit”; or to obey orders of the occupation authorities; or – yet another motivation – to protect the supplies they had stockpiled and, thereby, the exist-

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<sup>157</sup> YVA, 025/105, p. 179.

<sup>158</sup> H. Grynberg, *Memorbuch* (Warsaw: “W.A.B.,” 2000), pp. 144f.

<sup>159</sup> YVA, p. 164.

<sup>160</sup> YVA, 03/2935, pp. 11, 23–25, a testimony by Helena Lipszyc.

ence of their families. Jews who had been hiding in the neighbourhood of Skalał in 1941–1942 returned to the ghetto after they had been robbed by peasants of all their possessions.<sup>161</sup> Immediately after the liquidation action in Stolin near Pińsk, bands of peasants descended on the woods surrounding Stolin, hunting for escaped Jews in order to rob them.<sup>162</sup>

Some cases can be classified as family-tribal struggles for survival. “Strangers” seen as exposing one’s own community to danger were fought off. In reports of underground institutions and occupation institutions, there are frequent mentions of a huge growth since 1941 of banditry and other forms of crime committed both by common criminals acting on their own and by members of armed anti-German formations, predominately Communist.<sup>163</sup> The robbers would take everything, including underwear.<sup>164</sup> Witness accounts imply that there were “good” and “bad” villages.<sup>165</sup> In the former, fugitives could count on help; fugitives had to give the latter a wide berth to. Peasants organised hunts for hiding Jews. They informed the Germans about escapees’ whereabouts, asked friendly guerrillas for help in fighting off robbers, or – if they had firearms, and sometimes even if they had not – attacked smaller Jewish survival groups. In the winter of 1942/1943, peasants destroyed a group of Jewish youths who had formed a small detachment in the forests in the Jastków community in the Lublin region.<sup>166</sup> Szoszana Ałtasowicz mentioned a Jew hunt mounted by inhabitants of a village in the Rzeszów region.<sup>167</sup> The captives had been turned

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<sup>161</sup> YVA, 03/3418, p. 11, a testimony by Fejga Wertman.

<sup>162</sup> YVA, 03/1139, a testimony by Marian Poznański.

<sup>163</sup> Libionka, pp. 98, 105, 113–121.

<sup>164</sup> YVA, 025/105, pp. 163–164, a testimony by Mieczysław Pokorny-Parker.

<sup>165</sup> S. Hurman, *Pod osłoną nocy. Wspomnienia z lat 1935–1945* [Under the Cover of Night: Memoirs from the Years 1935–1945] written and prepared for publication by H. Birenbaum (Cracow: Fundacja Instytutu Studiów Strategicznych, Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, 2007), pp. 97f.

<sup>166</sup> YVA, 03/3380, p. 3, a testimony by Chana Goldberg.

<sup>167</sup> YVA, 03/1161, p. 6.



over to the Germans. This manhunt had been prompted by recurring thefts of food. The witness himself had barely escaped death from the hands of the enraged peasants.

From striking witness accounts of murders of Jews in the Kielce region in 1943–1944 it appears that many of the perpetrators had affiliations with local structures of the AK [Home Army], BCh [Peasants' Battalions] or NSZ [National Armed Forces]. Yet, as Alina Skibińska and Jakub Petelewicz note, the court files of these cases contain no evidence by which to establish conclusively whether these criminals acted with the knowledge or tacit consent of their superiors, or at their superiors' orders.<sup>168</sup> They might have felt empowered to do this by the September 1943 order of Commander Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski on fighting banditry, yet the documentation used by the above authors provides no unequivocal indications on the basis of which to conclusively answer this question. Interestingly, among the perpetrators of crimes brought before the Circuit Court and the Appellate Court in Kielce up until 1960 there were no people with wartime GL/AL and PPR<sup>169</sup> affiliations. Tuwie Miller, who belonged to a 40-member group of Jewish partisans keeping themselves in food and money by expropriation, sees a relation between the Bór-Komorowski order and the Polish underground's stepped-up operations against Jews after the autumn of 1943. Not all commanders had reasons to mount operations in fulfilment of this order. Not at all times the operations included killing the captured Jews. Yet such cases did happen. Some fighters shared among them items and money found on Jews. Such was the case with the cited Tuwie Miller.<sup>170</sup>

The "Jewish gold," to use this conventional term, sparked envy, striking thus both at its owners and at those who were in

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<sup>168</sup> Skibińska and Petelewicz, p. 128.

<sup>169</sup> Editor's note: PPR – Polska Partia Robotnicza – Polish Workers' Party, founded on January 5, 1942 by a group of Polish communists trained by the NKVD.

<sup>170</sup> YVA, 03/2078, p. 16

a position to take it in payment for aid. Some neighbours, acquaintances, even relations, demanded their cut. Refusal carried the risk of denunciation followed by a search of premises, detention, interrogation and, at times, even graver repressions. Large numbers of those who lived to see the end of the war had been driven by demands for money to move on to yet another stage of a homeless life, or to take action to obtain a legitimate status, with very tangible financial consequences.

## Conclusions

If not for a quirk of fate, the above-described material prerequisites of existence on the Aryan side would have been irrelevant. Thousands of people who, at least theoretically, had fulfilled the requirements indispensable for living outside ghettos or camps were murdered because they had missed that little bit of luck. One denunciation or a street inspection of documents broke the aid chain.

The analysis of source accounts warrants a conclusion that the possession of very tangible economic resources was the paramount factor helping survive on the Aryan side. Aid of underground institutions was too small and not developed enough when compared with the needs. The aid reached only a small part of the fugitives. Most of them needed to have their own sources of livelihood, support arranged on a case-by-case basis either gratuitously or for payment, or a form of security for the credit, as it were, they were contracting from their aid providers.

On the other hand, the material aspects of existence on the Aryan side must be considered strictly in connection with the material situation and the degree of intimidation by terror of the society in general. Discussing separately the Jews' and non-Jews' conditions of existence is likely to lead, now and then, to misinterpretation of the events described. Sebastian Piątkowski quotes a fragment of reminiscences of a person who remem-

bered the deportation of Jews from Radom and the sight of a several-years-old girl emptying the pockets of an old man killed during the deportation. A repulsive and macabre scene indeed – but the witness added another piece of information. He had known the girl. Her father had been imprisoned in a concentration camp and the mother had been struggling alone to keep herself and two young children alive.<sup>171</sup>

Doubtless, this episode can be quoted to illustrate depraved greed, soullessness and the lack of empathy. Yet, with the knowledge of general economic conditions of existence of the civilian population one must ask whether the child was not desperately starved and looking for money with which to buy some food and alleviate her hunger. We do not know whether the mother knew what her daughter was doing and whether she would have condoned, despite her strained circumstances, the little girl's joining adults in the looting of abandoned Jewish property. In Jewish residential areas, or beyond them, hungry orphaned children also committed acts which, seen from the post-war perspective, appear objectionable. For instance, in the Warsaw ghetto thefts of food displayed on stalls or carried home by pedestrians occurred. We know the fortunes of a Jewish boy, about six years old, who survived the autumn and winter of 1941/1942 in Belarus largely owing to his having stripped clothes and boots off a killed Soviet soldier and, presumably, taking whatever was still edible.<sup>172</sup>

Without the knowledge of the soaring growth of costs of living on the Aryan side, one is likely to misinterpret witness accounts which speak of demands for more and more money

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<sup>171</sup> S. Piątkowski, "O niektórych ekonomicznych aspektach postaw Polaków wobec zagłady Żydów w dystrykcie radomskim (1039–1944)" [On Selected Economic Aspects of Poles' Attitudes vis-à-vis the Destruction of Jews in the Radom District] in: J. Wijaczek, G. Miernik (eds.), *Z Przeszłości Żydów polskich. Polityka – gospodarka – kultura – społeczeństwo* [From the Annals of Polish Jews: Politics, Economy, Culture] (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Towarzystwa Naukowego „Societas Vistulana,” 2005), pp. 175f.

<sup>172</sup> P. Głuchowski, M. Kowalski, *Nie trzeba mnie zabijać* [You Don't Need to Kill Me] (Warszawa: Agora, 2008), pp. 64–66.

for upkeep or documents, or for providing shelter for payment. I agree with Gunnar S. Paulsson's comment that the high costs of upkeep were not without a reason.<sup>173</sup> Yet, unlike Paulsson, I believe that the key to answering the question whether charges running into thousands of zlotys were or were not a symptom of exploitation lies not only in the host's behaviour after the funds had run out, but also in what he or she offered for the high payment they took: a decent standard of living and care, and kindness – or the opposite: a dismal hovel, measly food, and psychical tormenting of the concealed.

It will be remembered that as a result of the Germans' economic moves, millions of people in occupied Poland barely subsisted and had a negligible capability for providing gratuitously long-term aid. Despite this, still there were families that by their decision to provide help, were not only laying themselves open to mortal danger, but were choosing an existence full of additional everyday sacrifices. This is all the more to their credit. Yet a percentage of people capable of prolonged sacrifice for others, for strangers, is small in any society under any conditions and at any time.

**Table 1. Free-market prices in the territories included in the General Government in 1939–1944 (in zlotys)**

Product	Unit of measure	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944
Wholemeal bread	kg	0.30	1.68	2.80	7.29	10.23	12.20	12.00
Wheat flour	kg	0.47	2.42	4.48	18.79	27.30	36.60	32.80
Barley cereal	kg	0.36	1.10	3.08	15.51	18.72	21.00	19.20
Butter	kg	2.96	12.76	21.47	59.16	167.08	198.40	245.00
Milk	litre	0.27	1.07	1.40	3.89	8.93	12.30	15.65
Eggs	pc.	0.08	0.36	0.54	1.35	3.28	4.30	4.95
Pork fat	kg	1.58	6.74	15.83	56.65	155.10	190.01	174.00
Potatoes	kg	0.10	0.63	0.32	2.19	2.50	5.10	3.45

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Paulsson, p. 134f.

Sugar	kg	1.00	1.67	6.28	22.68	64.08	78.30	95.80
Kerosene	litre	0.38	.	3.83	5.60	15.73	36.60	.
Coal	tonne	48.00	.	161.00	842– 1,200	12,600	1,350	1,800

Source: J. Kostrowicka, Z. Landau, T. Tomaszewski, *Historia gospodarcza Polski XIX i XX wieku*, Warszawa 1984, p. 414; J. Gmitruk, A. Indraszczyk, A. Koseski (eds.), *Pro memoria (1941–1944). Raporty departamentu Informacji Delegatury Rządu na Kraj o zbrodniach na narodzie polskim*, Warszawa–Pułtusk, *passim*.

**Table 2. Coupon Rations: Calorific Value Compared with Prewar Consumption**

Consumer Category	Calorific Value
Polish manual worker before the war	100.0
Ration for a German in the GG in 1941	100.5
Ration for a Jew in 1941	7.1
Ration for a Pole in 1941	25.6
Ration for a Pole in 1942	22.2
Ration for a Pole in 1943	15.9

Source: I. Kostrowicka, Z. Landau, J. Tomaszewski, *Historia gospodarcza Polski XIX i XX wieku* [The Economic History of Poland from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century] (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1984), p. 416.

**Table 3. Grain Delivery Quotas Imposed by the Germans on the General Government, 1940–1943**

Year	Delivery Quota (in tonnes)
1940	383,000
1941	685,000
1942	1,200,000
1943	1,500,000

Source: I. Kostrowicka, Z. Landau, J. Tomaszewski, *Historia gospodarcza Polski XIX i XX wieku* [The Economic History of Poland from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century] (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1984), p. 425.

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**“Dear Mr. Gestapo”: Denunciatory Letters  
to the German Authorities in Warsaw,  
1940–1942<sup>1</sup>**

[...] The psychological motives for denunciation are not easy to define with any precision. For obvious reasons, there is no systematic research on informers to help construct a personality type with an inclination to such behaviours. [...]

That said, the psychological motivations behind denunciation can be presumed to be closer to envy than to sadism. I believe envy to be – at least in the case of the collection of letters under review here – the most conspicuous affective internal motive for denunciation. Among the anonymous letters presented there are dozens in which human envy stands out as the most manifest and most identifiable reason. Indeed, in some letters it is hardly camouflaged at all – such as in Letter No. 33, whose author complains to the chief executive [starost] of the city of Radom that

“Eligiusz Klimiuk, Michał Jarosz, Andrzej Sakrzyćcki, Franciszek Skarczyczki, Franciszek Goral, Szczepan Goral, Ludwik Janczak buy pork as is here at three zlotys a kilo, a car comes from Warsaw, Germans come too, and they take ready [an illegible word] to Warsaw and get 12 zlotys a kilo, they already made fortunes so big they don’t know how big themselves... [...] buyers from Karczew are at Furtak’s and Klimiuk’s every week, they get

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<sup>1</sup> In this text the proper names are spelled as in the original documents; the misspellings and grammatical errors are intended to replicate the different denunciatory letter-writers’ speech patterns.

about a hundred pigs a week from the colony in the old village and more than fifty a week from Furtak and Filipiak, Klimiuk and Michał Jarosz and Franciszek Skarżyczki at Staruwieś, a car comes every week, Thursday or Friday [...] That Klimiak, he got so rich on this war that he would like the war to go on forever, all his household stuff he got during the war, what he has at home, and his horse and his cart.”

Much in the same way, almost openly, a Jewish woman who informs against the supervisor of the Jewish cemetery in Okopowa Street [in another anonymous letter by the same author he is described as a clerk in the cemetery office] gives vent to her envy:

“I can tell you that at the cemetery in 49 Okopowa street works one Dawid Dubicki who [...] ran all this contraband at the cemetery and he has valuables hidden at the cemetery and he is very rich, he and his son live in luxurious two rooms with a kitchen in 42 Leszno, apt. 33 [...] and this man makes the best business at the cemetery and besides the cemetery he also has some business as brings him much profit. I make bold to ask you kindly, Mister Governor, to see to this swindler, I can add that I have written several times already to German Authorities” [No. 209].

The envy of “Jewish things” [soon to become formerly-Jewish property] appears a plausible reason for at least several denunciatory letters, such as the one informing against Stępień Józef who “keeps lots of valuable stuff for Jews for which he gets a lot of money from them” [No. 51], or the one against

“Sawiński Kazimierz – Koszykowa Street apt. number 5 – he bought furniture from Jews. He also took a fur, a piano and a chandelier, everything he has in his room he got from a Jew who used to live there” [No. 215]. The author of letter No. 80 writes: “Please be informed that valuable formerly-Jewish furniture and objects of art are stored in the house in 19 Koszykowa

Street, apt. 6. I fear that, with the relocations now in progress, these things will be removed and hidden.”

Logically, the fact that his neighbour has Jewish things in his keeping has nothing to do with the informer, who should not be concerned with this matter at all, has no stake in it and stands to suffer no loss or injury thereby. Neither does he stand to gain by the other’s being deprived of these things. Yet it is another’s loss that is the envious person’s gain. [...]

In the case of several denunciatory letters, a desire to see social justice meted out is easily discernible as their underlying motive. These letters project the authors’ enormous sense of injury, which is a manifestation of frustration. The author of denunciatory letter No. 69, who describes himself as “a working man,” writes:

“Be informed, dear sirs, that the Wolski brothers, Edmund as lives in 37 Nowy Świat Street, and Konrad as lives in Mokotów, at I don’t know what address [this can be got out of his brother] are professional wartime gold dealers known to the Police Station X, particularly Konrad as the king of traders. They are still buying gold and foreign currencies, only last week they bought gold five-rouble coins worth many thousands, they made their pile on this war and earlier they had preyed for a year on people’s misfortune, they have a trade but they have never worked nowhere even though they have false papers as tailors, other folk are working and cannot make ends meet but these two are living soft, it is time they got their fine hands rough with honest work, today there is no room for shady dealers, everybody’s got to work.”

Frustration emanates also from letter No. 152 addressed to the chief executive of Radzyń:

“Folks have no bread. And he has a stock of bread to last him a year and says that if he is hard pressed he can pay even a thousand zlotys, sure he can ‘cause he got rich out of this war, smuggling. The man is Antoni Scygiel, Nowodwór Tarnowska.”



The main character of letter No. 11 must have added to his neighbour's frustration, as well:

“Noskiewicz has a house as costs 600,000 zlotys, he got this money during the war. He signed the house over to his mother Noskiewicz as keeps a stock of fabrics, furs and diamonds he bought from thieves. Them things was stolen during War operations. Noskiewicz has gold coins worth a hundred thousand as he bought from Jews. In return, they give him sugar by sackfuls [...] He dabbles in politics. He stirs up the people as work for him. Noskiewicz has radios on which he listens to England, [to] Sikorski's speech about Poles getting armed. They make propaganda among the employees of their Business. Terrible atmosphere. The drivers are hand in glove with the Firm.”

Frustration, bitterness, a sense of injury and helplessness emanate from a letter signed “A poor worker.” The author asks the Landrat in Radzyń:

“to get to the bottom of these swindles through honest people as won't be bribed by this swindler, he lives soft as the village chief, does well out of Jews, this summer he never delivered 4 cows to the government and not a litre of milk, only Jews were coming evenings to get butter [...] is this justice? and him the village executive [...] now he says he has 20 metres [20 quintals = 2,000 kg] of rye to sell, who will he sell it to if not to Jews, for we, poor people, will not buy, him wanting 80 zlotys [...] me, I'm a poor worker, how can I live? a poor farmer has nothing to sell and he wants 80 zlotys, and 60 groszys [=0.60 zloty] for a litre of milk, I just cannot describe to you, Mr. Landrat, all these swindles.”

\* \* \*

Fear, after the ubiquitous envy, is the next emotion emanating from the messages presented here. The informers are afraid – for themselves. This is their reason for writing. Possibly, they write so that they are not written about. They want to steal a march on others; they fear denunciation because they

themselves violate the occupying authorities' regulations. The power they gain by writing denunciatory letters makes them feel secure.

Besides, the Germans applied the principle of collective responsibility so effectively that the fear of being made to suffer for somebody else's "wrongdoing" appears to be an important reason for over a dozen denunciatory letters, including Letter 74, a voluminous one of several pages – all in a single sentence:

"There's no need for all to suffer for several stupid Polish patriots, they had better stop blabbering that England will soon win and that they will beat the hell out of the Germans when they are on the run and cut off a hundred heads, we don't want no such people 'cause we are afraid to suffer for them."

The author of letter No. 151, as he informs against his acquaintances who "mean to go to Warsaw to join a Polish organisation to be established" offers his reason: "they could destroy many Polish people." Another author also claims to be writing in broader general interests: "I'm laying this information because regard what they do as damaging to the people whom they are trying to drag into their doings" [No. 193].

Informers fear not only for themselves, but for their families and their children. The author of [...] letter No. 106 makes no bones about this: "I don't want to do wrong by nobody but have to because I fear for my children, so that they do not put ideas into their heads [...] I'm old, what would I do without my children. Yours truly." A loyal neighbour," who informs against the Klincewicz family who listen to the radio, writes: "Being aware of what a great responsibility this is and fearing for my husband and my children, I have to report this because I personally hold the German authorities in respect and I consider it my duty to report this" [No. 201].

Obviously, informers feared revenge. They feared revenge "from them guilty parties" [No. 37]. Fear that the denounced person will find out who provided information against him or

her is frequently given as the reason for the writer's preference for remaining anonymous. The consequences could be grave, up to loss of life. "I would report this in person only I'm afraid Czesław Śledź would blow out my brains." According to the author, Czesław Śledź "has many Government things, blankets, a horse, 2 carbines and 30 pieces of ammunition" [No. 54]. Another informer offers a similar rationale: "I should have given these explanations orally, were I not prevented by fear of revenge on his part" [No. 101]. The author of denunciatory letter No. 73, in which she writes about people who have made money "trading with Jews" who smuggle food and distribute underground pamphlets, writes in conclusion of her letter:

"if they were arrested, I would write where the weapons are hidden and where the pamphlets come from and where they go to, but as things are, they could kill me in an hour, if I was sure they will not know who squealed on them I'd come and say this myself" [No. 73].

Affective motivations are no less compelling than the instrumental motivations; in most cases the informers reveal them indirectly. Some kinds of these impulses can be surmised. Certain denunciatory letters are intended to do away with a competitor, mostly a rival in business. A letter to the authorities is seen as a means of eliminating the rival; such is the purpose of [...] letter No. 28 informing against Chuna Kosower, or of letter No. 242:

"This is to tell you that in 19, Nalewki Street, in the courtyard, to the left of the entrance, there is a shop of one Bresler selling at profiteering prices goods, darning cotton and threads, that they never reported. He sells these goods under the cover of clothing accessories and stationery. He sells these goods in huge quantities at 600 zlotys a packet. Besides, they have large quantities of goods hidden at home in 9, Franciszkańska Street. Bresler, in the courtyard, left from the entrance. On the ground floor in

the same stairwell there is a closet where they have hidden cotton, threads, and fur and leather for profiteering.”

Another informer, presumably also eager to do away with a competitor, reports succinctly: “Dear Sir, in 27, Gęsia Street, [apt.] 9, there are goods, manufactures and stockings and curtains” [No. 25, No. 182].

Of course, the informers’ real intentions and motivations are difficult to identify beyond a doubt. In this study all deliberations on this subject are speculative. It cannot be said with certainty that it was the desire to get rid of a competitor that prompted the following denunciatory letter, but neither can it be ruled out:

“And now, Dear Sir, couldn’t moonshine distilleries be closed, we know they make booze from flour as could be used for bread for people, many people hunger for a piece of bread and they make vodka because they have too much bread, I ask you kindly, Dear Sir, put this right, punish these men and shut down their distillers” [No. 36].

[...] It cannot be ruled out that informers use a current pretext, real or imagined, to settle old scores. Whatever the genuine motivations for writing the letter, the reported offence is invariably disguised as concerning the present – such as in [...]denunciatory letter No. 29 in which one member of an underground organisation informs against another. Letter No. 23 is another case of score-settling – its author clearly writes more than she intended to:

“I cannot give my name but I am a german, I cannot write in german and so I write in polish what I know: a firm Boresztan and Zakrzewski, in 12 Prądyńskiego Street, they give out underground papers and pamphlets against the german authorities and Mr. Boresztan’s son Tadeusz and his mother listen to the radio in the cellar in their country house in Dotrym and in Warsaw they hold secret meetings, they are preparing a coup against Mr. Hytler, if these people are not arrested it will be too

bad, I know all this because I live there and my brother works for them and as they have been giving him a hard time I accuse them [emphasis added – B.E.] if I knew about this earlier I would have reported it long ago.”

Some old scores to settle, possibly between a servant and her employer, seem to underlie the contents of the following letter:

“14, Chocimska Street, the Jereminow widow, she’s a friend of Jews and as for herself she’s the devil knows what, she’s a Pole for Poles, for Germans she has Russian papers ‘cause Germans leave Russians alone, and for Jews she is an internationalist. This winter she was hiding a rich Jewess and Jewish money. She sits all the time at a French Jewess, married name Garlińska. First she calls her on the phone and then she goes running to her. The bitch, she starves her servants. You put her behind the wall with the Jews and her flat should go to refugees, and mind you don’t leave her much time or she’ll get everything out, she’ll call her Jewesses on the phone and they’ll help” [No. 56].

A desire to settle class scores could have impelled a letter containing the following passage: “The workers of the tram company wish with all their hearts that these social hyenas are removed and their positions filled by the fair German Authorities” [No. 169].

In most cases the personal scores settled concern man-woman relationships, for example: “This is to let you know that Jaroszewski Józef, communist, of 12, Piaskowa Street [Powązki] maltreats his wife in an inhuman way. The poor woman cannot cope with this bastard. He is as hostile as can be towards the German authorities” [No. 158].

[...] Letter No. 142 has a similar interventional nature. It recounts the following dramatic story:

“Gentlemen, this is to inform you that in the Domańskis’ flat in 11, Waliców Street hides a Yid woman, she’s Jan Domański’s mistress, she has no registered address, she’s known to all tenants under the name of Helena, she’s got some Polish married name.

Every evening she throws food parcels into the Jewish quarter, she threatens everyone, she's so grand she says: I don't give a damn about German orders, I'll be their Judith, like the historical one, only modern. Bold as brass she is, the Yid, she ought to be clapped in jail, please Gentlemen, attend to this, she's taken my husband away from me, he left me with two children, I am working my fingers to the bone to put bread in their mouth and the Jewess's living off the fat of the land."

An annotation made on an anonymous letter by an intelligence officer [name unknown], who attempted to establish the writer's identity, throws some light on the settling of man-woman scores. The denunciatory letter in question reads:

"Dear Authorities. Be informed that at 21 Żurawia Street, apt. No. 21, Częskowski Jórek, there are Polish and Russian spies there, they have machine guns, the whole family is spying, the Polish police know this, only they are afraid as Częskowski Jórek pays well and supplies lots of food" [No. 36]. The note underneath reads: "Ciężkowski Jerzy, aged 25, resident in No. 21, Żurawia, apt. No. 21. Son of the house janitor, a sailor, before the war did work for PZL<sup>2</sup> on a one-off basis. Current employment: filming in the streets. He suspects Indyk Janina of 49, Nalewki Street, a prostitute with whom he had a relationship which he broke off, of acting out of revenge. The allegations of the other party are untruthful. Ciężkowski is believed to belong to no organisation. Indyk Janina is presently under arrest. She was arrested by the Polish police. November 12, [19]40 ZN" [No. 36].

[...] Two denunciatory letters are demonstrably prompted by the authors' ambition to "have it their own way" – in other words, by the pure manifestation of power, with the hubris of an anonymous terrorist. The author of denunciatory letter No. 35 writes:

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<sup>2</sup> PZL (Państwowe Zakłady Lotnicze) – State Aviation Works, the main prewar Polish aviation factory, built in 1928.

“You want to search a Jewish house in 15, Muranowska Street, apt. No. 7, third floor, front entrance, he [the tenant] is a rich merchant, he has pretty furniture from the factory in Gęsia Street. He bragged to his in-law that he had hidden his merchandise in a dungeon, so well that even the Germans wouldn’t find it, and that he wouldn’t give up the furniture, come what may, because he had enough money to buy it back, so I want to see for myself if he spoke the truth, the Yid, or maybe the Eminent German Authority will make him confess all in some other way.”

Another informer writes, also unabashed:

“I am asking you kindly to search from top to bottom a rich Jews’ home in 29, Pawia Street, apt. 31, in the second room lives a merchant, they have hidden goods, there is a covered table there, if the goods are not there, they must be watched closely because they surely hid the goods ‘cause they expected a search, they have parents that are so rich, also merchants, before the war they had a manufacturing shop, they have nice furniture, underclothing, bed linen, they said they were not afraid of the Germans, them being rich and able to buy themselves out no matter what it costs, and I said, we’ll see [emphasis added – B.E.]. They have jewelry hidden in mattresses. In the first room the man that is rich too keeps hidden margarine and tallow to make soap from, besides he also has an oil shop in Pawia Street, bricked up under barrels, you want to check this” [No. 68].

In many – indeed, in most cases – the motives behind the denunciatory letter are difficult to establish beyond doubt. Often, several different reasons blend and coexist. Affective motivations intertwine with instrumental ones. This is particularly evident in denunciatory letters motivated by antisemitism. Antisemitism can be a feeling of dislike or hate for the Jews, which makes it an affective motivation. It can also be a manifestation of competition, or of a more complex set of emotions and stereotypes making up a concrete attitude. For this reason,

I have classified it in a separate, mixed category. It is impossible to establish in what proportions emotional and intellectual elements occur in antisemitic denunciatory letters; what's more, the facade of antisemitism often masks pure envy, like in the following letter:

“It's a shame indeed that musicians, such as Artur Gold [of] 22, Chmielna Street, Jakub Kagan, [of] 7, Al. Jerozolimskie, Rubinstein, at one time of Melody Palace in Rymarska Street are still permitted to register and, presumably for this reason, retain their work permits. These gentry used to rule the roost for years and they did not engage a single Aryan for their band. Indeed, they tried their best to prevent any Christian from working for them. Only shortly before the war, when they started feeling insecure, they rushed to engage non-Jewish musicians. Besides, as a musician, the Rubinstein mentioned above has nothing to do with music at all. He was a common swindler from Nalewki and music is just his means to an end. The above musicians regularly boycott all German hit dance tunes. I wish everyone to eat their own bread, but these musicians are nothing but common street music-peddlers. An Aryan musician” [No. 85].

[...] About 30 percent of the letters concern Jews. However, not all these documents can be said to have been prompted by antisemitism. Some, such as the one quoted above, are clearly inspired by envy, the dislike of the Jews and the anti-Jewish German laws only helping to camouflage this sentiment. However, a proportion of letters informing against Jews are of an ideological, antisemitic character, expressed either explicitly or implicitly. The hatred of the Jews is reflected, for instance, in various epithets and pejorative adjectives, such as *Yid bitch* [in letter No. 142 quoted above], *Jew cow* [No. 56], *rotten bastard* [No. 95], *fat-cat Jew* [No. 96], *damned Yids* [No. 86], *impudent and sly Jew* [No. 88], *swindler Jews* [No. 164], *dirty Yid* [196]. The author of a denunciatory letter written in Russian [No. 186] reports that “in 7/9 Piwna Street there's a Jewess hiding, a Rojza Wajcman, she claims to be a Pole and she has a false



name.” The author describes her as follows: “She’s a sly, cunning Jewess, she has remained in hiding, I stumbled upon her hidey-hole by accident, talking with her you almost don’t notice her accent being different from Polish one, its just by her mug that you know her to be a Jewess, she’s of middle height, fat.”

The author of denunciatory letter No. 24 explicitly states his (or her?) hatred of the Jews (which is not to say he reveals thereby his true feelings) as he exposes people who conceal their origin. In conclusion of the letter its author writes: “I state the above facts for ideological reasons, because I hate Jews, in particular the mekhes [converts] who trade in their nationality and their religion.”

Some writers believe [in line with antisemitic stereotypes widespread in Poland before the outbreak of the war] that Jews bamboozle Poles who, by engaging in stupid underground activities, show themselves to be “Anglo-Jewish lackeys” [No. 30], or that underground press is evidently “Jews’ doing” [No. 30], or “financed with their [Jews’] money” [No. 20]. The writers take it for granted [...] that the Jews are communists. The author of letter No. 156 writes:

“They are all hankering after a Bolshevik paradise; they got chummy with Jews and they go about saying that, let only the German army make a false step and suffer a setback, there will be arms enough to beat the hell out of them, for the weapons are ready. [...] Gentlemen, you will see from my information that all these people I have named here are blinded by the Jewry so much that they do not see on which side there is a bright future and on which side there is ruin, so it’s time you, gentlemen, opened their eyes in this way you have. Believe me, I am not prompted by hatred or by personal interests, for I ask no payment and as for hate, I could feel for one or two persons, but not for so many at the same time, and in two villages at that.”

According to the stereotype, the Jews – although humiliated and denigrated at every step and, ultimately, confined in

the ghetto – remain dangerous and are the cause of various troubles; for instance, the smuggling of food into the ghetto sends prices soaring on the Aryan side. The author of [...] denunciatory letter No. 173, describing how food is smuggled into the ghetto in Freta Street, writes in conclusion: “Sirs, you will be kind enough to put an end to this because while some people are getting rich other, the poor folk, cannot afford bread now that prices are rising due to this trade with Jews.”

There are several letters concerned with the smuggling of food into the ghetto. I have quoted earlier letter No. 84, in which the author describes in detail the smuggling technique used in Ceglana Street. Another informer writes:

“Trading with Jews goes on in Freta Street, from No. 33 to Franciszkańska Street, and the police say nothing to this, they just pocket their payoffs. Such men, healthy and fit for work, who can haul on their backs a metre [100 kg] of goods to Jews each, can as well work in Germany rather than saunter the streets with no registered address, and feed the cursed Jews. I heard told that in 30, Freta Street, in a flat entered from the courtyard, opposite the lavatory, lives a tall young man, not registered as living there, who is the father superior of all the Jew traders, that one’s fit for work in Germany” [No. 86].

Some Poles support the occupying force’s antisemitic laws and help Germans trace Jews:

“Even today there are Jews working in so important an office as Hauptzollamt for Western Warsaw. The Fürher’s idea is to eliminate the Jews absolutely. I request and hope that the Polizeiamt will deal with this Jew. Not only is he the owner of several cigarette businesses in Warsaw, but he is doing fraudulent business on concessions” [No. 10]. Another informer writes about the “Cyklop” factory in Obozowa Street, in the Wola district: “the real owner of the business is a Jew, name of Landau, who has fictitious owners fronting for him to camouflage this way the Jewish nature of his enterprise” [No. 24].

People, who attempted to conceal their origins and thus avoid persecution, had to reckon with a possibility that a neighbour, or an acquaintance, will send to the Germans a letter like the following one: “Be informed that a Jew, BLOMBERG ADOLF, with a criminal record, resident in 84, Pańska Street in a house which belongs in part to his wife Fejga, professes to be an Aryan and he wears no armband” [No. 88]. People who had been christened and considered themselves Poles also had to reckon with the possibility of denunciation: “I’ll have you know that a convert Jewess, Zofia Gronowska, formerly a clerk in the Ministry of Agriculture, is hiding in 29, Chocimska Street, apt. No. 8” [No. 245].

From the autumn of 1940, when the ghetto was established in Warsaw, anonymous letters began coming in informing the Germans about people who refused to move there. Some samples:

“Now that matter of the Ghetto has become actual in Warsaw, I consider it proper to inform you that a fat Yid, name of Dicksztein, is hiding in the “Elibor” company in No. 103, Wolska Street. He used to be deputy director in the Łódź branch of Elibor and he fled from Łódź so as not to go to the ghetto there and now he sits tight and lives on poor clerks, drawing a fat salary” [No. 96].

“Sirs, be informed that Janusz Perc of 11, 6go Sierpnia Street, apt. 8, whose father was a convert and mother a Jew, was evicted once already from his flat by the German Authorities but he has returned and lives here, he does not intend to move to the ghetto, which means that he cheats on the German Authorities, thumbs his finger at Official regulations and cheats Mr. Landrat. You see for yourself if it’s not the truth that I’m writing here” [No. 212].

[...] Taking the side of the occupying authorities (and, in different circumstances, presumably, of any other authority) – a variety of legalism – figuring prominently among the openly

disclosed social motivations for informing. [...] The law, by whoever made, has an immanent authority which is independent of its sources. For such persons, abiding by regulations is the source of their sense of security while any infraction of regulations [including by others] constitutes a threat. Perhaps it was a legalist of this kind who wrote:

“under your regulation on compulsory conscription for farm work in Germany for those from sixteen to twenty-five years old, the individual I have named to you in writing has been hiding [emphases by B.E.] from the law [emphases by B.E.], so what does he deserve and what penalty does his conduct carry? He deserves to be punished most severely.” [No. 79] [...]

Some authors of denunciatory letters identify with Germans. Some, because they are German themselves, such as the authors of letters No. 7 [“as a German, I consider it my duty to inform the German authorities”] and No. 4 [“we, as a German woman, share with you because you have many enemies whose names I have learned”]. Three authors are “converted” Germans, Volksdeutsche. Others declare their devotion and respect for the occupying authorities. Obviously, it cannot be ruled out that the avowals of support for and loyalty to the authorities are merely cynical or ingratiating ornaments, a play for making the denunciatory letter more credible and effective. It is difficult to judge the authenticity of such phrases as the following: “I, a human being, mindful of the goodness of the Great German State and the Great Leader Adolf Hitler, ask the SS in Poland to intervene in matters of several persons and wrongdoers living in houses No. 8, 10,12, and 14 in Przykopa Street” [No. 12]; “As a supporter of the present state of things I consider it my duty to inform against disloyal citizens” [No. 49]; or: “I’m a Pole but I cannot bear watching what these villains are doing, why, Mr Hitler is a peach of a man, he governs well, and they are putting a spoke in his wheel, reading [underground] pamphlets against him” [No. 105]. One of the authors notices certain deficiencies of the universally accepted

German system, but believes these troubles to be of a transitory nature: “I am your supporter and I know that your system and your views are thoroughly good, just let things get settled [...], For my part, I want to help you remove these elements” [No. 139].

One denunciatory letter projects a brand of fatalism: “I communicate the above as a loyal citizen, who has reconciled himself to the state of things which occurred as a result of Force Majeure, and not for a personal gain.” [No. 20] The author of yet another letter professes a cautious liking for the Germans as he writes: “Pray, forgive me for doing this anonymously but, living as I do among them, I cannot act openly, and, having some liking for the powerful nation the Germans are today, I find it difficult to ignore this [...]. These people won’t understand that only based on the German order can they preserve their own existence.” [No. 156]

Loyalty to Germany is sometimes strong enough to prompt the laying of information against people who have not registered as Volksdeutsche:

“Szulc Piotr and his wife Aniela are members of a Polish secret organisation and they act to the detriment of the German State. They distribute pamphlets, periodical press and radiograms – he in the city and she in the hospital in Książęca Street. The very fact that they are both of German origin and have not registered as Volksdeutsch gives much to think.” [No. 223] [...]

*(Abridged by Sebastian Rejak)*

Text originally published in a book form: “*Szanowny panie gestapo*”: *donosy do władz niemieckich w Warszawie i okolicach w latach 1940–1941* [“Dear Mr. Gestapo”: Denunciatory Letters to the German Authorities in Warsaw and its Vicinity, 1940–1942] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, 2003).

## **Antisemitism, Extortion Against Jews, Collaboration with Germans and Polish-Jewish Relations Under German Occupation**

### **“Existential” Collaboration**

This article deals with the phenomenon of Polish citizens – individual men and women or, perhaps, also groups or factions of the Polish society – condoning of the policy of oppression of the Jewish people enacted by the German invaders. This phenomenon has historically, and inadequately, been termed, *szmalcownictwo* (money-milking), which referred to the blackmailing of Jews in hiding, threatening to turn them in to the Gestapo unless they paid the blackmailer. [...]

By its definition, any form of action perpetrated against the outlawed Jews can be said to fall under the category of actively helping the occupying enemy to proceed with their ultimate goal, namely “the final solution of the Jewish question.” Furthermore, it was a display of tacit approval and acceptance of the rules of the game enforced by the invaders, a gesture of pact-making and can be viewed as a breach of any declared repudiation of collaboration. Such conduct proved that, under the enemy occupation, it was possible to support concretely-articulated antisemitic aims even while rejecting the enemy’s anti-Polish policy.<sup>1</sup> This claim that there were anti-Jewish at-

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<sup>1</sup> Israeli historians Israel Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski follow a similar reasoning. In *Unequal Victims: Poles and Jews During World War II* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1986, pp. 176–177) they wrote: “The German au-

titudes and actions among Poles reveals itself to be true, even if not on a mass-scale, at the very least widespread enough to have been acknowledged both by Jews in need of help and by Poles willing to provide it. In particular, it was also noted by the nation's elite remaining within the orbit of influence of the Underground Polish State. In this article, I shall endeavour to substantiate the veracity of this claim.

My belief that these phenomena were very widespread is supported by recent works by Polish and foreign historians. I will refer at this time to a Dariusz Libionka article "Polska ludność chrześcijańska wobec eksterminacji Żydów – dystrykt lubelski" [Polish Christians' Attitude towards the Extermination of the Jews: The Lublin District].<sup>2</sup> Libionka presents, chronologically, over a hundred pieces of primary source information, narratives of Jewish survivors and Polish witnesses, reports of Polish underground organizations and of the German police and the Polish "Navy-blue" police – bearing witness to many instances where German troops' deportations of Jews to death camps were viewed "positively" by the local Polish population, and to even more cases of collaboration with the Germans in tracing and capturing Jewish escapees.

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thorities in the GG were aware that anti-German sentiments were strong in the Polish society and that the occupation itself and the police measures used in dealing with the Poles would only boost the anti-German moods. Only antisemitism and an anti-Jewish policy could help the Germans enlist approval and aid from a meaningful part of the Polish society." The authors acknowledge that "progressive elements" of the Polish underground soon saw through this game and alerted broader underground press. They quote extensively from an article entitled "Antisemitism," published by a socialist paper *Informator* (8 March 1940): "Not only do many Poles refrain from opposing the barbarous antisemitism imposed by the German occupying enemy against Jewish Polish citizens, but a push to revive the antisemitic movement under the aegis and protection of the Germans has been in evidence." [retranslation]

<sup>2</sup> In: Dariusz Libionka (ed.), *Akcja Reinhardt. Zagłada Żydów w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie*, [Operation Reinhardt: The Destruction of Jews in the General Government] (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2004), pp. 306–333.

Compared with these numerous accounts, the few observed cases of aid extended to Jews in hiding can seem diminutive by comparison. Libionka's most-quoted source is *Dziennik z lat okupacji Zamojszczyzny: 1939–1944*<sup>3</sup> [A Diary of the Occupation Years in the Zamość Region: 1939–1944] by Zygmunt Klukowski, a Polish physician from the town of Szczebrzeszyn. This very personal document can be regarded as one of the strongest condemnations of soulless cruelty written during the occupation. To quote one entry:

“November 26, 1942. The peasants, fearing repressions, have been catching Jews in villages and bringing them to town or, in some cases, killing them on the spot. Generally, an odd bestiality towards Jews has come to prevail. People have submitted to a psychosis and, taking a leaf from the Germans' book, they often fail to recognise human beings in the Jews, regarding them instead as pests to be destroyed by any means, like so many rabid dogs, rats, and the like.”<sup>4</sup> [...]

In the debate on collaboration [...], Andrzej Paczkowski's contribution is worth noting. [...] Paczkowski makes a clear distinction between political collaboration and an “existential” collaboration

“underpinned by this or that short-term interest, whether of an individual or of a group, whereby advantage is taken of the occupation system to obtain some material gain or to further a career [...]. Hence, this category would include extortionists, spies, informers (regular, or occasional), barrack supervisors and kapos in the camps, Navy-blue policemen, and civilians who took part in round-ups and manhunts, or otherwise carried out the occupation authorities' criminal orders. It would also include those who acted in anti-Polish plays or films, wrote anti-Polish articles, or edited anti-Polish papers. Last but not least, it would

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<sup>3</sup> Zygmunt Klukowski, *Dziennik z lat okupacji Zamojszczyzny: 1939–1944* (Lublin: Lubelska Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1959).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292.



include those who engaged in blackmail and ‘money-milking’ for near-ideological reasons, e.g. antisemites who betrayed Jews not for money, but because of hatred. Similar to the betrayal of members of underground movements or guerrillas, betraying and murdering Jews amounted to playing into the hands of the invaders. Obviously, the ‘existential’ cooperation (except for extortion) also occurred in the Soviet-occupied territories.”<sup>5</sup>

While this is correct, but the difference here in German-occupied Poland lies in the viewpoint of the majority of the public.

If all that the Germans demanded of the Poles in the General Government was the acceptance of their rule and the supply of a requisite number of specialists and labourers, they must have realised that they had to pay for this by confining their castigation to the recalcitrant alone (in practice, to a proportion of the political and social elites) and by suitably rewarding the collaborators. Of course, in the territories annexed to the Reich the scale of oppression was initially vastly larger, since no form of collaboration from the local Poles was counted on. The invaders, who were continuously waging costly wars and planning to give Poles a very inferior status in their Third Reich, as evidenced by the policy of ever-increasing economic exploitation and of retaliation for any act of resistance, had a limited capacity for rewarding loyalty. In fact, only a slice of the assets left by the mercilessly persecuted and ultimately murdered Jews could be used to this end. I contend that such assets were not limited to material goods, to real estate and chattels,<sup>6</sup> but, arguably most importantly – to the Jews’ place in the social structure of exchange of goods and services. Admittedly, one did not need to collaborate with the Germans to be able

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<sup>5</sup> “Kolaboracja zinnym okiem,” *Tygodnik Powszechny* 2003, No. 21.

<sup>6</sup> *Biuletyn Informacyjny* of July 19, 1940 noted in the “Warszawa” column: “Warsaw solicitors and judges have been given receivership of Jewish houses as “bonuses for supporting the legitimate authorities.”

to open a shop or a tailor's establishment, but – given common destitution – such tools of trade as scales or sewing machines were easier to obtain as a reward for loyalty to the Germans than by purchase on the free market. A job of receiver and administrator (Germ. *Treühandler*) of a Jewish building or workshop was very lucrative.<sup>7</sup>

The “reward” referred to above should be taken first of all in a figurative sense, as an opportunity to obtain certain gains. In practice, the murdered Jews' material possessions were used primarily to reward *Volksdeutsche* and Germans resettled in the GG lands from the Soviet Union, Bessarabia and the Baltic states; local Poles could bid for leftovers only.<sup>8</sup> Neither should it be forgotten that the gradual isolation and subsequent destruction of the Jewish population were fragments of a broader process of demographic and economic transformation in the occupied eastern territories. Once set in motion, the process was gaining its own momentum, with consequent after-effects never expected by the German authorities. In planning the “use” of the space vacated by the Jews, the authorities had to deal with the realities. Replacing the Jewish craftsmen and middlemen removed from towns with either German immigrants from the East, or even with Poles expelled from the lands annexed to the Reich, was unfeasible, due to the fact that

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, in all districts it was mainly the Germans – even regular security police staff (*Sipo*) – who stole Jewish property; (see Włodzimirz Borodziej, *Terror i polityka. Polityka niemiecka a polski ruch oporu w GG 1939–1944* [Terror and Policy: German Policy and Polish Resistance in the GG, 1939–1944] (Warsaw: Pax, 1985), p. 37).

<sup>8</sup> Under Operation “Reinhardt,” the Economic and Administrative Main Office of the SS [*SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt*, WVHA – editor's remark] established, on the September 19, 1942, a separate receivership for Jewish property, to distribute the assets thus obtained, as of December, among German settlers in the eastern occupied territories. In practice, county-level representatives of *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle*, an organization responsible for the coordination of supply for the German population in the occupied territories, continued to handle this task. Valuables – gold, money, jewelry – were taken over immediately after the executions by the security police, to be deposited with the Reich Bank in a special “Reinhardt” account.

a majority of these people were farmers unprepared for living and working in urban centres. Yet the fact remains that the Germans were controlling, as much as possible, the unavoidable changes in the occupational/social structure in the wake of the annihilation of the Jewish population, and were using these changes to pacify the Polish population's negative sentiments.

Individuals or entire social groups could collaborate in the "management" of Jewish assets. Those desirous of Jewish possessions could rationalize their actions in multiple ways: from "I'm taking this so that it does not go to waste" to "I'm taking back what was earlier robbed from us, Poles"; in the latter case blackmail and denunciation were usually the means of acquisition. This "domestication" of the appropriation of others' possessions began at the time when ghettos were being established. At that time many Jews had entrusted their assets to their Polish acquaintances for safekeeping; the fact that only few subsequently repossessed part of their possessions is the narrative of hundreds of surviving Jews. I will address this matter in later sections of this article; at this point, I only want to emphasize that my interest lies in the largely elusive motivations of those who engaged in such transactions and the circumstances in which "doing business" turned into common robbery, than in the scale of magnitude of the assets acquired this way. [...]

I want to emphasize that all structures of the Underground State were, at this point already, strongly critical of the extortion against Jews, addressing this travesty extensively in studies prepared for internal use or for the government in London and in articles published in underground papers. It is not my aim to judge whether this "extensive" attention was sufficient, or whether the Jewish community has been justified in their negative assessment, ever since the occupation, of the inherent value of this activity. Neither can I answer the question of whether all that could have been done in this matter was done. My primary interest is in the significance the leaders of underground resistance attached – in the light of underground reports and publications – to the problem of extortion and blackmail, of Poles'

participation in German manhunts, or to refusals to help those in hiding; in their descriptions and assessments of these phenomena; in their evaluations of the effectiveness of their efforts to fight the wave of blackmail and extortion.<sup>9</sup>

The officers of the occupation-era oppression machine, Germans and Poles in their service, are the collective author of the second discourse. The sources on which I am drawing are relatively poorly researched; in the literature of the subject there are only a handful of German reports and special courts judgments giving reasons for the sentence given. To date few publications have appeared on this subject, e.g. on German law enforcement institutions in the occupied Poland. First analyses of German press and official Polish papers (known as vermin press) have come out only recently. Archival materials of the Polish Navy-blue police shed light on the issues of greatest interest to this author.

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<sup>9</sup> I do not propose to address in this article the very complex matter of Jewish guerrilla groups' difficult situation. On this subject see A. Puławski, "Postrzeżenie żydowskich oddziałów partyzanckich przez Armię Krajową i Delegaturę Rządu na Kraj," in: *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość* 2003, No. 2 (4), pp. 271–300. Puławski analyses this problem not only in the light of reports of Home Army (AK) Command and the Government Delegation for Poland, but also based on reports and instructions of the AK Command for the Lublin District and its inspectorates. His conclusions are very critical of the Polish underground. He writes: "The reasoning seems to have been: the Jews have the right to hide, but they may not resort, for this reason, to 'bandit' methods of obtaining means of survival. This view was right. [...] At the same time, in the order on fighting banditry and in [general Bór-] Komorowski's reports supporting this decision there is no mention of the fact that the inhabitants of these 'manors, banks, commercial and industrial firms, houses and flats, peasant households' could have helped the hiding Jews of their own free will. It follows that the AK Commander-in-Chief, rather than fight the causes of this (in)action (nothing in these documents shows that issuing an appeal for common aid to the Jews was considered), gave an order to fight its affects. AK's equating Jewish guerrillas with Communists was much the same case, yet Jewish guerrillas were joining Communist detachments not because they had succumbed to their ideology, but to save their lives; turned down by AK groups, they had no option." (p. 295).

Obviously, the Jewish discourse is no less important than all the other discourses. However, since it is best known, I have decided to cite it in this paper only to a limited extent. [...]

### Anti-Jewish Unrest in Warsaw: Spring 1940

For a long time, historians' debate on Polish-Jewish relations in the first two years of the occupation has focused on anti-Jewish riots in Warsaw in the spring of 1940. Tomasz Szarota devoted a chapter of his very important work to analyzing these events.<sup>10</sup> He meticulously used all available sources: Jews' narratives (Emanuel Ringelblum, Adam Czerniakow, Chaim Kaplan, Szymon Huberband, Marek Edelman, Bernard Goldstein); materials of the Polish underground; Poles' diaries (Ludwik Landau, Halina Krahelska, Stanisław Srokowski, Włodzimierz Sznarbachowski, Zygmunt Przetakiewicz); as well as Home Army Command's *Biuletyn Informacyjny* and, on these bases, he reconstructed in great detail the genesis and development of these events, identified its Polish organizers, and identified with a high degree of probability its German instigators. His argument can be summed up as follows: the attacks on Warsaw Jews and the devastation of their shops, which started on Good Saturday, March 23, 1940, were an organized provocation by marginal Polish groups – the extreme-right “Atak,” and the National Radical Organisation – a stump party established already in October 1939, led by Andrzej Świetlicki, a prewar activist of the “Falanga” National-Radical Camp. Supporting the riots was a group of persons with affiliations to Professor Zygmunt Cibichowski, a well-known Germanophile, and Father Stanisław Trzeciak, a fierce antisemite. National Radical Organisation ac-

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<sup>10</sup> Tomasz Szarota, *U progu Zagłady. Zajścia antyżydowskie i pogromy w okupowanej Europie*. Warszawa. Paryż. Amsterdam. Antwerpia. Kowno [On the Threshold of Destruction: Anti-Jewish Riots and Pogroms in Occupied Europe: Warsaw, Paris, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Kovno] (Warsaw: “Sic!” 2000).

tivists had drawn into the anti-Jewish action groups of youths (including students of a Polish crafts school located in 72 Leszno Street), whom they paid. Szarota emphasises that in the light of the preserved source documentation it is impossible to answer the question whether the Germans had been behind this pogrom from the start, or whether they simply turned a blind eye to it, aware that the unrest could be used for propaganda purposes (young people were occasionally brought to the scene in cars; some events were filmed).<sup>11</sup> Świetlicki was arrested soon thereafter and shot at Palmiry on the night of June 20, 1940. The Polish underground believed the entire operation to have been directly led by the Germans, its true object being to compromise Poles in the eyes of public opinion abroad and, possibly, to provide yet another rationale for isolating Jews from Poles, i.e. for establishing a ghetto in Warsaw. On March 30 the Germans themselves put an end to the continuous rioting. As the ending note, an article published on April 3 in *Warschauer Zeitung*, the official paper of the [Warsaw] District, declared that the Jews had come by their just desserts “for pushing up prices of goods, hoarding supplies, engaging in illegal trade.” In short, the Poles had done well to stand up for their rights with the support of the German authorities.<sup>12</sup>

It is only fair to emphasise after Szarota that the Polish underground was unequivocally against collaboration with the Germans in anti-Jewish actions. *Biuletyn Informacyjny* of January 19, 1940 – i.e. before the Easter events – stated, with reference to comments about the emergence of a mysterious group named “Atak”: “Let it be known that any direct or indi-

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<sup>11</sup> Another report (*ibid.*), “Sytuacja Żydów w Polsce 1939–1940 [The situation of Jews in Poland: 1939–1940],” 349 k. 34, reads: “There is manifest, constant tendency of the Germans to deepen differences and hostility between Poles and Jews. The Germans carry on a campaign, particularly among rural and urban proletariat, encouraging or inciting excesses. Before Easter they organized a quasi-pogrom in Warsaw; I saw gangs of adolescents smashing windows of Jewish shops and, bustling among them, inciters with *Hitlerjugend* armbands and uniformed Germans filming the incident.”

<sup>12</sup> Szarota, p. 73, see also the whole first chapter “Warszawa,” pp. 19–82.

rect collaboration with the Germans in the persecution of Jews is as much an act of subversion as any other form of cooperation with the mortal enemy of Poland.”<sup>13</sup> *Informator*, the paper of the PPS-WRN [Polish Socialist Party “Freedom-Equality-Independence”] spoke up in much sterner terms<sup>14</sup>:

“The fracture, which the propaganda of Polish Hitlerism was cutting even before the war in the Polish society’s awareness, is getting steadily wider. Not only are many Poles indifferent to the beastly antisemitism practiced by the invaders towards the Jewish Polish citizens, but in certain quarters attempts to resurrect a Polish antisemitic movement under the patronage and protection of the Hitlerites [are finding response]. Certain professors are already tailoring the ideology of Hitlerism for Polish use, there are ‘activists’ dreaming of establishing a radical-Hitlerite party. We may add that many prewar antisemitic activists of their ilk have reported at the Gestapo (no more, no less!) and are now working for them and getting good business out of plundering Jewish property. These symptoms must be fought without compunction. If the invaders succeed in widening this gap of human vileness, all that is healthy in Poland could drown in this dirty tidal wave.”

I will add that thereafter, in years much worse for Polish Jews, statements in this vein were to appear regularly in underground press. Of course, even the loftiest statements and manifestos are of less relevance than the public’s real reactions to *pogroms*. With regard to the Easter of 1940, there is no accord between the Jewish and the Polish narratives. Both Ringelblum and Huberband emphasised that almost no one had taken the side of the Jews beaten up by juveniles; on the other hand Landau, who was closely connected with the Home Army underground, noted in his *Kronika* several instances of such positive behaviour. Such ambivalent judgments will continue to be in evidence as we analyse the following years’ events.

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<sup>13</sup> AAN, AK, 203/X.58. k. 45.

<sup>14</sup> “Antysemityzm,” *Informator*, March 8, 1940, No. 2.

Szarota speculates whether or not Archbishop Stanisław Gall spoke for the beaten-up people to the head of the Warsaw District. Maybe he did, and maybe the Bishop admonished the faithful in one of his sermons, but no unequivocal answer to this question has been found in sources. On the other hand, the Warsaw Self-Help Committee expressly stated its disapproval. As for active defence of the Jews, only a small group of Polish socialists took an active stance, supporting their Bund comrades in thwarting juvenile rioters' assaults. Some underground communities adopted a position of reserve. Szarota quotes extensively from an article in *Polska Żyje!* [Poland Lives!], which, while condemning plundering and pogroms, expressed an opinion that "in the rebuilt, free Homeland there will be no room for these occupying forces (i.e. Jews) either."<sup>15</sup> [...]

### Opinions of Polish Underground Communities About Polish-Jewish Relations in Early Years Under Occupation

As one reads the above pronouncements by the Polish underground, two possibilities come to mind: either the underground communities failed to fully recognize the tensions in Polish-Jewish relations and tended to take them too lightly, or they were unwilling to take position on this matter so as not to alienate those sizable sectors of society who actually welcomed the German oppression of the Jews. The former may be inferred from the marginal incidence of active anti-Jewish hostility and from the fact that most prewar ONR [National-

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<sup>15</sup> "Nie naśladować Niemców!" [Do not Imitate the Germans!], *Polska Żyje!* 1940, No. 41/42, quoted after: Szarota, *op.cit.*, pp. 78–80. A weekly under this title was published by a military organization Komenda Obrońców Polski [The Command of Poland's Defenders] founded by pre-war officers of the Border Defence Corps. See Paweł Szapiro, *Wojna żydowsko-niemiecka. Polska prasa konspiracyjna 1943–1944 o powstaniu w gettcie Warszawy* [The Jewish-German War: Polish Underground Press Between 1943–1944 and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising] (London: "Aneks," 1992), p. 432.



Radical Camp] hit squads were not involved in them. The latter appears to me more likely, particularly as it is corroborated by a very important report from the emissary Jan Karski (who had no affiliations to any political faction of the underground) delivered to the Government-in-Exile in February 1940.<sup>16</sup>

Karski admits in the opening section that he made no special study of “the Jewish issue” before setting off on his mission. The idea that he should write down his observations originated with Stanisław Kot, one of General Władysław Sikorski’s closest co-workers and one of few ministers who appreciated the importance of Polish-Jewish relations both in internal policy and on the international scene. Karski wrote about the Jewish people’s situation under the German occupation with compassion: The Jews have been robbed of dignity, of all rights, dispossessed of property, denied earning opportunities. He found particularly appalling the situation of expellees from “the lands annexed to the Reich,” who had been re-settled to the neighbourhood of Lublin. [...]

Many interesting remarks can be found in an October 1940 report prepared by the Polish underground, *Activities of the Occupation Authorities in the Territory of the Republic of Poland Between September 1, 1939 and November 1, 1940*, which reached France at the turn of 1940.<sup>17</sup> It says, among other

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<sup>16</sup> The report had been discovered in the Hoover Archives at Stanford (Polish Government Collection, box 921, Akta Ministerstwa Informacji i Dokumentacji, N/55 – Żydzi; Stanisław Mikołajczyk Papers, box 12, next: Raport Jana Karskiego) and published by David Engel (“An Early Account of Polish Jewry under the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Presented to the Polish Government-in-Exile, February 1940,” *Jewish Social Studies* 1983, No. 45, pp. 1–16). [...]

<sup>17</sup> *Działalność władz okupacyjnych na terytorium Rzeczypospolitej w okresie 1.IX.1939–1.XI.1940. Raport z archiwum politycznego prof. Stanisława Kota* [The Activities of the Occupation Authorities in the Territories of the Republic of Poland in the Period of September 1, 1939–November 1, 1940. A Report from the Political Archive of Professor Stanisław Kot], prepared for publishing by J. Gmitruk, J. Mazurek (Warsaw: Muzeum Historii Polskiego Ruchu Ludowego, 1999), in particular the chapter “Stosunek do Żydów” [The Attitude towards Jews] pp. 174–177. [...]

things, that “the fate of Jewry in the occupied territories has been, from the first days of September to this day, a chain of suffering, humiliation, harassment and expropriation [...]. The Jews, who are *de jure* subjects of special laws, are *de facto* outlawed.” Like Karski, the authors of the report emphasise that the German authorities have sought to put the “Jewish theme” to propaganda use. According to official declarations, the occupying authorities “tolerate no pogroms, street violence, or harassment of Jews” which took place [...] in the days of [independent – ed.] Poland. At the same time, the Poles are being constantly incited against the Jews, antipathy of the Jews as profiteers, demoralisers and exploiters is being fostered.”

The report lists all major regulations discriminating against the Jews; it emphasizes that “these regulations have no formal basis whatever in the occupation laws.” It points to the significance of the action of receipt of property belonging to Jews; it notes that as often as not the receiver of a block of flats will collect rent without remitting any of it to the owner. In Warsaw, extra incomes obtained this way totalled 50 million zlotys per year. The report does not state, however, who – Poles or Germans – replaced the former Jewish owners and administrators. On the other hand, it observes that in some respects the Jews were in fact privileged, because they were not sent to Germany and not destroyed “violently, bloodily, integrally.” This chapter ends with a surprising comment: “The Jewish people themselves perceive a certain advantage of their position compared to that of the Poles, the wrongs they suffer being to a certain extent of an external nature (criminal acquisition of their property, injury to their personal dignity).”

About a year later another report in a very similar vein reached London via the Vatican. Its authors (regrettably, I have failed to establish which political circles they represented) wondered why the German persecutions had not taken the edge off the “Jewish issue.” They wrote: “The developments have exacerbated the differences and mutual animosity; hatred of the Poles on the one hand and antisemitism on the other

hand have now become burning.” What was the reason for this? Primarily, it was the Germans’ different policy towards the two nationalities. The Poles were persecuted “politically and nationally”; the Jews – only economically, but “they are not tortured or ferried in great numbers to martyr’s death. In this respect theirs is a better fate.” [...]

### The Jewish Issue in “Vermin” Press

Of course, the Germans prepared the Poles for the “second phase” of the Holocaust, primarily through antisemitic publications in the vermin [collaborationist – *transl.*] press. While – amazingly – this matter is yet to become the subject of a separate study, Tomasz Głowiński devoted over a dozen pages to it.<sup>18</sup> Many of his observations are of crucial importance. In 1940, the vermin press abounded with articles which emphasised the “infestation of Jews” in prewar Poland. Their authors explained to the readers that the Jews, as a “decomposing factor,” were intent not on working in the fields which they had dominated, but on drawing benefits from them without effort. Hence in the vermin press, the Jew became a synonym for the middleman, profiteer or any other kind of “freeloader.” Predictably, “de-Judaization” of an increasing number of sectors of economic life was deemed a great success.

Yet the true focus revolved around showing that the society fully supported German undertakings. *Nowy Kurier Warszawski* suggested as early as February 1940 – and *Goniec Krakowski* as early as November 1939 – that the sealing of the ghetto “reflected the preference of a majority of Varsovians

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<sup>18</sup> Tomasz Głowiński, *O nowy porządek europejski. Ewolucja hitlerowskiej propagandy politycznej wobec Polaków w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie 1939–1945* [For a New European Order. The Evolution of Nazi Political Propaganda Against the Poles in the General Government: 1939–1945] (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2000), pp. 76–77, 159–170, 199–254, 335–337, 341.

who “desired to separate themselves in this way from squalor and infectious diseases.” At the same time, readers were told that the Jews had not learned anything from the lesson of the war; that they continued to speculate on food prices and hoard flour in synagogues, while Christians were starving; and that under the circumstances the German authorities’ systematic operation of confining Jewish people in ghettos and labour camps was the only solution.

Moreover, the vermin press emphasized that the oppression of the Jews was by no means a German whim. The entirety of Europe, convinced of a “Jewish plot” which had dragged the world into the war, was treating them in much the same way. Głowiński notes that in successive years of the occupation, propaganda turned “from a fundamental of fundamentals – i.e. explaining the causes of antisemitism, the role of the global Jewry, their domination in capitalism, and their blame for unleashing the war – into a propaganda of particulars, which not so much incited the hatred of Jews in general as reported ever new examples in support of the thesis that antisemitism was a litmus test of progress and ‘new order’ and that it evidenced political realism of the nations practising it.” For this reason, from the second half of 1940 onwards, articles devoted to “solutions of the Jewish question” in different European countries, portraying these as independent initiatives of these countries’ rulers, dominated in the vermin press. Głowiński notes that the press “sought to ‘accustom’ the society of the General Government to total antisemitism, so that it would be accepted as a commonplace – not a sensational, extraordinary phenomenon but as a concern of the German authorities for the well-being of the general public in the General Government.” Readers were thus told that confining the Jews in ghettos was “a blessing to all Aryan inhabitants.” Still, every anti-Jewish regulation, however minor, was punctiliously acknowledged. There were sarcastic notes about the “setting up of 68 Jewish camps whose inmates are to apply for river management work.” Sometimes a different chord would be struck – the German rulers showed

themselves “fundamentally benevolent and understanding towards the Jews” by allegedly allowing them internal autonomy and by overseeing sanitary conditions in the ghettos.

Curiously, immediately after June 22, 1941, the Jewish topic seldom appeared in anti-Soviet propaganda. Głowiński mentions only one newsreel with a news story “Soviet Murderers in Lvov” showing “not only the bodies of murdered prisoners, but the ‘horror and indignation’ of inhabitants who ‘turn over to the German authorities for punishment of the mob of Jewish murderers’ – their animal faces are a proof by themselves.”

Reading the chapter entitled “Antisemitic Propaganda of the Holocaust Era” in Głowiński’s book, one becomes perplexed. There are surprisingly few references to the vermin press of these momentous months. Głowiński explains this as follows: “The Germans took practically no new steps to conceal, or at least to explain in Polish-language propaganda in the General Government, the fact that physical elimination of Jewish people, or those categorized as Jewish, had been going on in this territory – on a mass scale since 1942 and earlier – selectively and at random.” The “Jewish plot,” which had allegedly caused the outbreak of war, was not getting much coverage either. Only *Gazeta Lwowska* used to deal, rather at length, with “Judeo-Bolshevism” and the Jews’ dominant role in Russia. [...]

### **Jews Temporarily Residing Beyond Ghettos: The Issue of Denunciation**

Archives of the German police and courts – and of special courts (Germ. *Sondergericht*) in the General Government – are an invaluable source of knowledge not only about the procedures applied by the occupying authorities, but also about the biographies of particular escapees from ghettos and their Polish rescuers. They also contain information about the manner of

detection of those in hiding. A majority of these materials date from 1943–1944.

Not many “archives of repression,” to use Grabowski’s term, of the same type as the Warsaw Prosecutor’s Office files have survived; besides Warsaw there are also special courts’ files in Rzeszów, Radom and Kielce.

Out of a group of 80 criminal cases preliminarily processed by Jacek Młynarczyk, 78 concern Jews; in two cases Polish women were sentenced for aiding Jews. Of the 78 Jews, 29 received death sentences, in most cases for unauthorised departure from the ghetto – but some might have been for smuggling goods into the ghetto, or for not wearing an armband. Lower sentences were given for illegal trade, illegal livestock slaughtering, and for the evasion of compulsory work. For the purpose of this paper, the most significant information is the manner in which the Jews came to be caught in such acts, highly dangerous to the invaders, such as departures from the ghetto. Regrettably, only a few files include information about the apprehender. Yet we do know that several people were caught by the Polish police of Piotrków, Opoczno and Chęciny. The Poles who were doing business with Jews were also punished, but their sentences were lighter. [...]

### **The Role of Navy-blue Police in the Oppression of Jewish People: The Case of Warsaw**

Another important issue signalled by Grabowski in his works is the Navy-blue police involvement in blackmailing Jews, or “covering up” for the extortionists.

The Navy-blue police (Germ. *Polnische Polizei*) had a notorious reputation among Warsaw Jews from the outset. These sentiments are well-reflected in an anonymous report from a Jewish Community official to the German authorities, dating from before the “great action” of 1942:

“Everyone is terrified by the doings of Polish policemen in the ghetto. A majority of them are believed to care for nothing except finding sources of income in the ghetto. They confiscate possessions without any reason. People who go out into the street are detained and allowed to go free only after they have paid a toll of 2 zlotys.”<sup>19</sup>

There is a more serious problem concealed behind the information about Polish policemen engaging in violent confrontations with Jews in the streets. The German police force was sparse and until the ghetto was sealed and law-enforcement duties within the boundaries taken over in full by the Jewish Order Service [Germ. *Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst*], the Navy-blue policemen had been the true authorities in the city.<sup>20</sup> They had to deal with many different problems, the northern part of Warsaw having been, even before the war, nowhere near an oasis of peace and order. Their ostensibly justified actions often produced deplorable results. The first such result was the execution of 53 male Jews taken from 9, Nalewki Street. As reported by *Krakauer Zeitung* of December 1, 1939<sup>21</sup>, Pinchas Jankiel Zylberger, a Jewish thief, had been tracked down in this house by two Navy-blue policemen, one of whom he killed another of whom he wounded. In reprisal, the Gestapo arrested 53 male residents in this house and shot them two days later.<sup>22</sup> In February 1940, following a December 1939 attack by Kazimierz Andrzej Kott (a Polish socialist, co-founder of the Polish Popular Independence Action, a Catholic of Jewish descent) on a Navy-blue policeman, 255 members of Jewish intelligen-

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<sup>19</sup> AP m. st. Warszawy, Der Kommissar für den jüdischen Wohnbezirk in Warschau, 2 Polnische Polizei in Ghetto, k. 30.

<sup>20</sup> There were four Navy-blue police stations in the ghetto.

<sup>21</sup> See Jacob Apenszlak (ed.), *The Black Book of Polish Jewry. An Account of the Martyrdom of Polish Jewry under the Nazi Occupation* (New York, 1943).

<sup>22</sup> The execution took place even though the Gestapo had demanded from the community a ransom of 300 thousand zlotys to be paid within two days on the threat of killing the hostages.

tsia were arrested as hostages. The Judenrat was ordered to seize the culprit and turn him over to the authorities on threat of arrest of another five hundred people.<sup>23</sup>

Such drastic cases of abuses of authority were certainly rare at that time. Navy-blue policemen were a much greater menace to Jewish people outside the Jewish residential area because apprehending Jews illegally staying outside the ghetto was their primary duty. They were quite successful at this, certainly the most successful in Warsaw.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Emanuel Ringelblum, *Kronika getta warszawskiego. Wrzesień 1939 – styczeń 1943*, prepared for publishing by A. Eisenbach (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1983), p. 83; English edition: *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto: The Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum*, edited by Jacob Sloan (New York: Schocken Books, 1974).

<sup>24</sup> Adam Hempel utterly disregards this thread of the Navy-blue police activities (*Pogrobowcy kłęski. Rzecz o "policji granatowej" w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie 1939–1945* [The Posthumous Sons of Catastrophe: On the "Navy-blue Police" in the General Government from 1939–1945] (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1990), pp. 168–171). [...] Although the Navy-blue police had been under orders since 1941 to guard the ghetto walls, Hempel writes that the Germans "noticed that the policemen were highly passive, did not react when Jews were crossing to 'the Aryan side' or when goods were smuggled in." Complaints were made for this reason by the German administration chief for the Siedlce county (February 12, 1942) and the commander of Warsaw security police (*Schutzpolizei*) Lt. Colonel Alfred Jarke. Hempel cites only one sentence given by the court of the Underground Polish State, of mid-1944, sentencing to death Lt. Michał Piskozub (attempts to carry out the sentence failed) on charges which included "collaboration with the Gestapo and blackmailing hiding Jews" (*ibid.*, p.208). Hempel totally overlooked the Navy-blue police participation in deportations and in the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto. Yet it is known from "Raport Stroopa o likwidacji getta warszawskiego w 1943 r." [Stroop Report on the Liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943] (prepared for publishing by J. Gumkowski, K. Leszczyński), *Biuletyn GKBZHwP* 1960, vol. 11, pp. 113–208) that on April 19, 1943 an officer of the 14<sup>th</sup> Police Station Julian Zieliński was killed fighting on the German side, and two other Polish policemen were wounded. Thereafter the insurgents wounded four more. Yet the most terrifying part of the report is found in the closing section of the general part: "The Polish police were authorized to give to any policeman who apprehended a Jew in the Aryan part of the city of Warsaw one-third of the Jew's cash. This regulation proved effective."



The scale of this phenomenon is revealed by the remnants of 1942–1944 records of the Headquarters of the Polish Police for the Capital City of Warsaw.<sup>25</sup> In March 1942, the Commander of the Polish Police called on his subordinates, in Special Regulation No. 3617, to be more conscientious in counteracting young Jews' forays into the "Aryan" part of the city. Detained Jews were to be brought to the round-up station in 5/7 Stawki Street.<sup>26</sup>

In 1943, after the ghetto uprising had been stamped out, Jews were apprehended in large numbers. One file contains a fragmentary report on the number of apprehended Jews. The police in the Praga quarter apprehended 23 people (three were killed on the spot) between May 23 and June 23, 1943 and thirteen people between the June 23 and July 22, 1943.<sup>27</sup> Another file contains a vast amount of information, including lists of unranked policemen who brought in Jews in hiding; the lists set apart policemen who brought in Jews carrying some assets on them, and those who brought in Jews who had nothing. Some policemen received financial rewards for conscientious performance of duty.<sup>28</sup>

Presumably, the effectiveness of the Polish police was rising in line with the sternness of the German anti-Jewish policy. Before November 20, 1941, a Jew staying outside the ghetto would face only an administrative penalty and their Polish contacts usually went unpunished. This offered corrupt policemen various blackmailing opportunities.<sup>29</sup> [...]

From its inception the Navy-blue police had attracted, for various reasons, the attention of underground communities.

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<sup>25</sup> AP m. st. Warszawy, Komenda Policji Polskiej m.st. Warszawy, 10, 11, 15, 17. See also AP Kraków, Starosta Miejski, No. 346, April 1940, k. 2–4 (65 reports on arrests of Jews wearing no armbands).

<sup>26</sup> AP m. st. Warszawy, Komenda Policji Polskiej m.st. Warszawy, 11 k. 52.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, k. 3, 11.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, k. 12, 17, 19, 33, 64, 68, 90.

<sup>29</sup> I have published a voluminous selection of materials on the extortion of bribes, by a fairly common method, by two policemen of the 15<sup>th</sup> Police Station on August 1941.

As the underground structures developed the vigilance of this force was increasing. The surviving archives of the Union for Armed Struggle – Home Army [ZWZ-AK], though small, provide much information about the role the police force played in the persecution of Jewish people, even though this aspect of the Navy-blue police's activities was of lesser interest to underground intelligence.

From ZWZ-intercepted<sup>30</sup> minutes of a briefing at the headquarters of the Commander of the Police for the City of Warsaw (Lt. Colonel Aleksander Reszczyński) on December 16, 1941 at 16.00–17.30 it appears that the commanding officers were dissatisfied with the attitude of many policemen for reasons of the latter's "trade pursuits."<sup>31</sup> Reszczyński's second-in-command, Major Przymusiński, added:

"Police officers, far from properly discharging their duties, facilitate the plying by some individuals of their criminal trade, for instance by giving warnings to those running contraband into the Jewish residential area and showing them convenient passages, or alerting usurers so that they are not caught red-handed by German officers. What is more, policemen roam the city at nights, after 24.00 hours, with the intent of smuggling."

A fragment of other such minutes reads: "The Polish police are known to have indiscriminately arrested and put in prison Poles on the suspicion of [being of] Jewish origin, even though the groundlessness of the suspicion could have been established on the spot."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Editor's note: Związek Walki Zbrojnej (The Union for Armed Struggle) was created on November 13, 1939; renamed Armia Krajowa, AK (Home Army) on February 14, 1942.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, AK, 203/III, k. 1–2.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, k. 3.

## The Navy-blue Police in German Extermination Operations

As mentioned earlier, “Jewish” issues appeared more frequently in ZWZ-AK documentation from mid-1942 onwards, as extermination operations were accelerated. From time to time, one can find information in reports concerning the employment of the Polish police in these actions, and the confirmation of a widespread public opinion, often in hindsight, that the Germans did not fully trust the “Navy-blues” and tended to treat them as a backup. A section of a report on the situation in Rzeszów, for the period from July to October 1942, reads: “July 17–23 [19]42. Troops movement by rail – no change. Duties of the Polish uniformed police: to guard the ghetto and the effects of deported Jews against looting by Poles.”<sup>33</sup>

The Home Army’s underground intelligence workers kept records of incidents (however, we cannot know if their coverage was absolute) when Poles had been shot for harbouring Jews or for smuggling food into the ghetto). With regard to the actions of the Polish police, a report of September 2, 1943 noted that police officers from the 11<sup>th</sup> Police Station in Warsaw were blackmailing many people with accusations of non-Aryan origin. A handwritten annotation reads: “These to be absolutely threatened with liquidation.”<sup>34</sup>

Reports of intelligence cell “993P” of the Home Army Command’s Department II (intelligence and counter-intelligence) covering the period from the beginning of May to the end of June 1944 render surprisingly little information about matters of interest to this paper, even though the Navy-blue police were especially involved with the cell’s activities.<sup>35</sup> An overwhelming majority of these documents are reports on trailing Poles suspected of collaboration with the Gestapo, but

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<sup>33</sup> AAN, AK, 203/III-17, report signed “Małgorzata i Bodgan,” k. 12.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-III-118, 119.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-III-111, 113.

other significant information can be gleaned from them, for instance regarding an Adam Karolak who

“finds out where Jews live and turns them in to the Gestapo. Thereafter, he indicates to an interested party, through Gestapo officers, the [Jews’] vacant officially sealed flat and acts as intermediary for the allocation of the same, for vast sums of money.”<sup>36</sup>

There is also a report of a Jewish woman who had been informed against and whom a Navy-blue policeman offered to permit to commit suicide if she, in turn, gave him the money she had in her possession (the failure of this attempted suicide led to widely known status of this case).<sup>37</sup> Sergeant Ignacy Zięba of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Police Station in Warsaw admitted to having obtained money from a convert Jew but he claimed that the bribe he had taken “was not of the nature of extortion, but of a gift willingly offered by the injured party.” Zięba “had apprehended the injured party in the street as a result of a denunciatory tip. The injured party, anxious to ascertain that the matter did not take a perilous course, made the offer voluntarily.”<sup>38</sup>

This is not to say that Polish policemen at all times performed only secondary tasks. A report has survived in Home Army files by an anonymous policeman from the town of Miechów, who, with his fellow-policemen, took part in over a dozen pacifications organized by county criminal police [*Kripo*] between March 1943 and September 1944. The report describes in much detail the conduct of the Germans and the Poles taking part in these operations. During the actions Poles suspected of unlawful activities (in a majority of cases, of “economic” crimes, i.e. smuggling) and all detected Jews were shot with firearms for trifling reasons. [...]

Research on everyday life in Polish territories during the occupation is not yet advanced enough to offer an answer to the question of whether the Miechów county was only a sin-

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-III-111, k. 97.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-III-111, k. 97.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, k. 31.

gular case or not. The contents of one report imply that the Jews hiding in this area were in danger not only from Germans and Polish Navy-blues but also from some fractions of the underground. On July 3, 1944, Miechów socialists wrote to the circuit delegate for civic resistance about “a Home Army operation against the WRN in the Miechów county.”<sup>39</sup>

“Besides assaults and robbery, there have been murders by the AK of Polish citizens of Jewish origin living in hiding. The operation of apprehending and murdering Jews goes on. AK members Zieliński and Szelong have taken a prominent part in it. Biel of AK murdered, on Zieliński’s orders, two Jews (name of Melechowicz). On June 26 overnight an NSZ<sup>40</sup> and AK detachment attacked the house of a woman with whom three Jews had been hiding. The woman was killed and the Jews (Adler, his wife and Feinkopf’s sister) were taken out and shot dead close to the house. Suder of AK was recognised on the site of the crime [...]. The local WRN leadership’s overt campaign for aiding Jews (in place of previous on-and-off aid) launched through appropriate propaganda was immediately pronounced to be the work of communist agents but this did not prevent the same AK members from disseminating information about the harassment of Jews by socialists. Piotrowski has been accused of murdering Jews even though he is one of the few Poles in the Miechów county who during the liquidation of Jews in 1942 engaged in transporting Jews to Cracow, at peril to his life, and kept several hiding with him. At first we were taking care of these Jews and later the Circuit Council for Aid to Jews came up with financial support. After two AK attacks at Piotrowski’s house the Jews were taken to another place, for their own security. Three

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<sup>39</sup> AIPN, MBP, PPS. 40. Letter from the Kazimierz Pużak Archives (Archives of the WRN National Centre). Editor’s remark: here the acronym WRN signifies the military arm of the Polish Socialist Party PPS-WRN; its full name was Gwardia Ludowa-WRN (People’s Guard-WRN).

<sup>40</sup> Editor’s note: Narodowe Siły Zbrojne (National Armed Forces) was a right-wing, strongly anti-Communist underground military organization fighting not only the German occupiers but also the Soviets.

of them were tracked down by AK members and shot dead on the night of June 26.”

In other counties of the Cracow District the situation of Jews was sometimes better:

“Information has been coming from the neighbourhood of Cracow that peasants treat hiding Jews very kindly. This is said to be the influence of popular parties. Peasants have been concealing and taking care of many Jews, notably craftsmen, providing them with food and shelter, in return for which the Jews perform for them work in their respective trades. For instance, in one village eight tailors are hiding on such terms.”<sup>41</sup>

I shall quote the two notes from a Navy-blue police report on the situation in the Lublin District which Marek J. Chodakiewicz mentioned (in a somewhat amended form).<sup>42</sup>

“On January 11, 1943 in the evening, the head of the village of Korzuchówka<sup>43</sup> detained six Jews loitering in the village and brought them to the local police station. The head of the village of Janiki brought three Jewish men and one woman. The head of the village of Sarnów in the Tuchowicze community brought three Jews and some we had to catch and deliver ourselves to the arrest of the Tuchowicze Community Board; all in all, 23 people were delivered, two females among them. One of the Jews died in jail, which left 22 Jews. Of these, eleven were shot on January 12, 1943, leaving eleven. The policemen discontinued firing because of faulty ammunition, i.e. a large number of unexplod-

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<sup>41</sup> AAN, 202/II-28, Note signed: “Ż/105. Wac./A-9 [Henryk Woliński “Wacław” of the Information Department of BIP KG AK],” 5 August 1943, k. 116.

<sup>42</sup> M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Żydzi i Polacy 1918–1955. Współistnienie – zagłada – komunizm*, Warszawa 2000, p. 198.

<sup>43</sup> Not only in the Lublin District were the heads of village and community administration under orders to apprehend hiding Jews, see *AP Siedlce. Ekspozytura w Łukowie. Akta zarządu gminy Dąbie. 989. Sprawy ogólnogospodarcze 1943* – a report by the head of community administration of the 7<sup>th</sup> of May 1943 on the apprehending of Jews by village guards.

ed bullets. On January 12, 1943 at 11.00, when I and platoon Leader Wagner were on our way to Łuków to collect carbines, I encountered a Jew who did not stop as ordered and started running. He was shot in an escape attempt in the village of Józefów in the Tuchowicze community. The apprehended Jews had escaped from a rail transport between Dęblin and Łuków. Near the Sarnów railway station in the Tuchowicze community five dead Jews were found by the railway track. They were buried on the site. Items found on the killed Jews: 86 (eighty six) zlotys in cash; 10 (ten) German marks; a pocket watch, damaged; thirteen wedding rings [...].”

Dariusz Libionka found in the sources he researched only three cases of a compassionate, positive approach on the part of Polish policemen towards persecuted Jews. In his opinion, the Polish underground’s record of fighting traitors and collaborators is just as unimpressive. Libionka knows only one order – issued by “Kłós,” Home Army Commander for the Tomaszów Circuit – “to influence the population, through the press [...] so that they refrain from apprehending and delivering people to be transported for labour in Germany [and] for work squads [...] and from collaborating with the Germans in hunting Jews. Terror is to be applied against zealous hunters” [abridgements by D.L.].<sup>44</sup> Libionka failed to discover any corroboration of information from the Commander of Peasants’ Battalions (BCh) in the Podlasie region “that in the Łuków county alone four death sentences and sixteen sentences of flogging for collaboration with the Germans in the persecution of Jewish people were carried out.”<sup>45</sup> In Zygmunt Klukowski’s collection of Home Army-related materials he found only one piece of information, from the Zamość region, about a sen-

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<sup>44</sup> AP Lublin, AK, Okręg Lubelski, Obwód Tomaszów Lubelski, 20, vol. 2, k. 153.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted after W. Bartoszewski, *Z. Lewinówna, Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej. Polacy z pomocą Żydom 1939–1945*, Kraków 1966, p. 280; English edition: *Righteous Among Nations: How Poles Helped the Jews 1939–1945* (London: Earscourt Publ., 1969).

tence carried out on one Kuklik of the town of Zwierzyniec. Apart from this, he describes the case of the head of the village of Kurów who “had initiated a hunt which resulted in the apprehension and subsequent shooting of over a dozen Jewish people of both sexes” for which he was punished by the underground court with a warning.

### **Underground Polish State Institutions: Attitude Towards the Blackmailing of Jews**

As already mentioned, reports of the Polish underground often referred to the activities of the Navy-blue policemen, many of whom figured on the lists of those suspected of collaboration with the Gestapo. It makes one think that these proscription lists of the underground intelligence and counter-intelligence services hold almost as many names of people of Jewish origin suspected of contacts with the Gestapo or with the Communists, as of those delivering Jews into the Germans’ hands.

Some archive folders – now kept in the Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance and, earlier, in the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ Archives – contain lists of names of Gestapo agents from unidentified Home Army counterintelligence files.<sup>46</sup> One of these lists names 135 suspects; listed under number 119 is “Olczyk Michał, head of the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Kripo* Station – aiding and abetting in armed blackmailing of Jews.”<sup>47</sup> Another list, of close to 700 names, includes: Jerzy Nomarski, described as “the leader of a gang of Jew blackmailers”; Marian Nowiński, police sergeant accused of “blackmailing a hiding Jew”; Wincenty Jankowski – blackmails Jews and has contacts with the Gestapo; Stefan Jazmiel, “police corporal, badge No. 2632, engages in tracking down Jews”; a Liebich, who blackmailed

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<sup>46</sup> AIPN, MBP, Central Archives, 1578, k. 1–46 (6 lists).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, k. 4–20. Therein information No. 120: “Panuszewski Stanisław born on April 20, 1894, of Warsaw, 39, Hoża Street, apt. 53, suspected of denouncing Jews.



Jews arrested by the Gestapo; Irena Miłoszowa of Boernerowo near Warsaw, who laid information against hiding Jews; Mira Krajewska, suspected of collaborating with the Gestapo, earlier arrested as a Jew; Zbigniew Krajewski, suspected of similar crimes as Krajewska; Kobierzycki, senior sergeant of the Navy-blue police, accused of “delivering several Jewish families to the Gestapo”; and one Kieliszek, who denounced Jews.<sup>48</sup>

Jewish Communists were of particular interest to Department II, both on the Home Army Command and the AK Warsaw District level. Given below are some examples: in a Summary of AK Warsaw Command report for February 5–11, 1943, there is a note: “There are many Jews resident in Boernerowo. They all have official identity documents. Should they be turned over to the German authorities, or what should be done about them? Wysoki.”<sup>49</sup>

A report for August 18–25, 1943 includes a note: “On August 18, 1943 at 19.50 hrs in Wola, in Wenecja Square, a Jew, communist, was shot by a member of the PSZ [Polish Armed Forces]. The Jew died in the hospital in Płocka Street. The sentence was carried out on the order of the PSZ. Pilny.”<sup>50</sup>

In the archives of DR “Stożek”<sup>51</sup> counter-intelligence [unit] discovered by security services after the war there is a file, presumably one of many, on Gestapo officers and collaborators. It included entries on: “Fijałkowski Władysław (false name) of 22, Widok Street, employed at the Gestapo;” “Jan Miller – a christened Jew, employed at the city abattoir, aged about 26. Arrested by the Gestapo and exposed as a Jew, he came out of prison with a Gestapo card and a nighttime pass issued to Dr. Jan Miller. Lives at 91, Saska Street, apt. 1;” “Jerzy Porębski (false name), aged about 25, belongs to an independence organization, claims to be an officer in hiding. He was arrested by the Gestapo and released as informer-agent;” “Ro-

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, k. 21–44.

<sup>49</sup> AIPN, MBP, AK, Department II, 47, k. 27.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 47, k. 29.

<sup>51</sup> AIPN, MBP, AK, KG, Department II, 45.

man Krausse of 23, Przemysłowa Street, employed as driver [at the Gestapo Headquarters] in Szucha Street. Known to have identified himself by showing his service card. Wears an SD uniform. Brags he will contribute to arrests of Jews. Suspected of collaborating with the Gestapo”; “On March 16, the Gestapo released a Jew presently going under the name of Leszczyński Henryk. There are reasons to suspect he was recruited to work for the Gestapo.” [...]

### Sources about the “Aryan” Side

[...] Most Jews attempting to hide from the Holocaust sought refuge among seemingly anonymous crowds of city dwellers; on farms isolated from neighbours; or in various remote, sparsely populated areas, notably in the forests. The hiders’ defensive strategies were largely determined by the type of space, or by the moral standards and capabilities of the community on whose help they were depending. Let us take a look at a large city, for there only – or so the more perceptive Jews believed - could one try to hide one’s identity before the invaders embarked on the final solution of the Jewish question.

As signalled at the beginning of this article, Jews’ memories are a fundamental source for the assessment of Jewish survival strategies in cities. Despite the very substantial advancement of research on wartime situation of the Jewish population in Polish lands, an analysis of the entire stock of personal narratives is yet to appear. By my estimates, there are some 10,000 individual accounts; the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute alone hold over 7,000 accounts, memoirs and diaries, and the archives outside Poland, notably of Yad Vashem and YIVO, contain hundreds of accounts of people who had not previously given testimony before officers of Jewish Committees in Poland. A proportion of these materials, e.g. survivor accounts collected in displaced persons camps, or evidence given by Jewish witnesses in post-war trials of German criminals and

Polish collaborationists, are largely unresearched. Also, a statistical analysis has yet to be made of the extremely important collection of registration cards of people who had approached the Jewish Committees in the first two years after the war. This collection, held in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, consists of nearly two hundred thousand items [...].

### The “Aryan” Side in Warsaw

Of the entire body of partial research done to date on the matter of interest to this paper, Gunnar S. Paulsson’s work devoted to the Warsaw Jews “on the Aryan side” is the most relevant.<sup>52</sup> Paulsson’s research perspective stands out for its original concept of the birth of an “underground city” in Warsaw, of its struggle for survival, and of its inhabitants’ resistance, which was increasing and decreasing in rhythm with German regulations. This Warsaw underground was inhabited by Jews in hiding and by Poles – those involved in aid-for-Jews efforts, as well as the blackmailers, by German agents and policemen intent on swindling, robbing or killing the former. Between these groups a never-ending play for life went on, often unbeknownst to the rest of the metropolis’ population. Both sides were weaving networks of contacts, the threads of which were often intertwined. In the event of a crossover someone could get killed, or at least lose access to the resources necessary to stay in the game.

Paulsson devotes more attention to the hidiers than to ghetto escapee hunters; the latter’s profiles and concrete actions serve only to illustrate the types of threat the former were exposed to. He starts by describing the consecutive stages of organization of the Jewish community “on the Aryan side.” The main circle was comprised of people who had never moved into

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<sup>52</sup> Gunnar S. Paulsson, *Hiding in Warsaw. The Jews on the “Aryan” Side in the Polish Capital, 1940–1945* (Oxford, 1998).

the ghetto – or, if they had, they maintained regular contacts with Poles. The nucleus of this group consisted of a relatively small number of totally Polonized Jews and first- and second-generation converts, most of whom were in mixed marriages. Naturally, there was also a number of their Polish well-wishers, friends or relations. Over time, this circle was surrounded by Poles and ghetto Jews maintaining frequent contact, bound chiefly by business done together, be it smuggling food or selling Jewish possessions and goods produced in the ghetto. Some Poles held in safekeeping assets entrusted to them by Jews moving into the ghetto. It appears that they were the most numerous group and that the greatest number of Jews got out of the ghetto owing, in large part, to these contacts. Last but not least, there were workers of ideologically-kindred Jewish and Polish political parties and social organizations. The Jews from all these circles had a much better chance of surviving in hiding among Poles than the religious Jews (often described as Orthodox), who accounted for a vast majority of the Jewish community.

Numerical estimates of these groups are interesting, even if not at all times convincing. Paulsson calculates that in March 1941, when the ghetto population numbered about 464,000, there were about 4,200 convert Jews in Warsaw (one-half of whom had never moved into the ghetto) and that in the ghetto there were about 62,000 assimilated and 66,000 acculturated Jews (that is, with a fairly good knowledge of the Polish language and with Polish acquaintances). The two groups (somewhat artificially distinguished) differed by the degree of assimilation to Polish culture. Paulsson assumes that the number of Poles with whom these Jews had maintained more-than-fleeting contacts before and at the beginning of the occupation and the number of those to whom they later looked for help were comparable.

More difficult to estimate is the number of Polish inhabitants of Warsaw definitely ill-disposed towards the Jews. Historians hold no key to the consciences of the people of those times. Antisemitic utterances of a proportion of the under-

ground press are addressed in further sections of this article. At this point I only propose to cite a very risky estimate so as to give an idea of the uppermost number of Varsovians upon whose help those people in hiding would be ill-advised to depend. In the 1938 municipal election the National Democrats and the ONR<sup>53</sup> had received jointly 22 percent of votes, a figure corresponding roughly to 150–200 thousand people. Of course, in the long run not all of these people acted in an “unfriendly” way; in fact, sometimes the war changed even rabid antisemites and there are numerous examples of people who “turned decent” in those times.

There are estimates of people who fled the ghetto or never resided there at all. This estimate is linked with the equally important chronology of escapes and their correlation with such events as: a) the sealing of the ghetto; b) the proclamation in October 1941 of death penalty for [unauthorized] leaving the ghetto and for extending help to an escapee; c) the great deportation action of the summer of 1942; d) the January 1943 operation; e) the ghetto uprising. However, it is difficult to trust Paulsson’s estimates because he admits to have researched in detail only 224 cases. From the proportions he had established within this group he arrives at a hypothetical maximum number of Jews hiding “on the Aryan side.” There are flaws in this approach, though, for no data is available to show how this population was fluctuating during different periods due to arrests or returns to the ghetto. While it is not unexpected that the largest number of documented escapes from the ghetto occurred between January 18 and April 18, 1943, the extrapolation of 61 escapes to 7350 people who allegedly escaped in that period must give rise to doubts. The author himself is aware of some of the doubts, and notes that, in such a case, the number given in his report of those killed or captured in the ghetto by Jürgen Stroop troops must be revised (and reduced). Moreover, and very significantly, an intellectual construction

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<sup>53</sup> Editor’s note: Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny – National-Radical Camp.

based on accounts of the rescued does not necessarily reflect wartime reality. We are relying on information predominately stemming from the accounts of people with an above-average education, who moved in intelligentsia circles. That said, this estimate merits attention – if for no other reason, then because no other is available. Paulsson puts the number of people who got out of the Warsaw ghetto or had never moved there at a little over 24,000 as a maximum (three-fourths of them after the commencement of the “great action”); in addition, about 2,650 Jews from localities other than Warsaw allegedly sought salvation in Warsaw. [...]

Of the 16,000 Jews hiding in Warsaw who did not live to see liberation, 6,800 perished or died before the outbreak of the Warsaw uprising of 1944 – a majority of them between May 1943 and July 1944. This, according to Paulsson, gives an attrition rate of about 2.2 percent a month – or an average of 473 dead per month or 18 per day. Assuming that only 10 percent of these deaths resulted from denunciation, this would mean that Polish blackmailers were turning in to the German police two Jews a day. During the Warsaw uprising, about 5,300 hiding Jews perished, tens of them at the hands of Poles.

Paulsson further catalogues the threats the hiding Jews were exposed to and the requirements which had to be met for them to stay alive. He presents these in three logical scenes: things indispensable for living (documents, a place to live, money, job); threats to the hiding Jews from the Germans; and threats from Poles. Not all of these categories apply in equal extent to the entire period of existence of the “Aryan side.” For instance, before November 1941 blackmailers and Navy-blue policemen certainly had not hunted for assimilated Jews, being too busy with smugglers and the Polish-Jewish black market. Likewise, obtaining an official identity document became imperative only after July 6, 1941 (Hans Frank regulation), any document having sufficed earlier. Incidentally, the introduction of new identity documents had dragged on till 1943 and even then the Gestapo estimated that fifteen percent of identity

certificates (*Kenkarten*) and 25 percent of employment certificates (*Arbeitskarten*) in use were forged.

In what way could a Jew betray himself or herself to the unfriendly environment? This aspect has been discussed by nearly all chroniclers of the occupation. It can be safely assumed that anything could give one away, even when one had been immersed for years in the Polish environment. According to Emmanuel Ringelblum, an unhappy face or frightened eyes were very often the betraying signs. Not all cases of discovery of the true identity of a person hiding [on “the Aryan side”] – indeed, perhaps not a majority of them – resulted from denunciation. [...] One cannot but agree that the hiding Jews lived in fear of not only city scum and German agents, but also of a “silent majority” and, at times, active workers and supporters of the Underground Polish State.<sup>54</sup>

In his assessment of the blackmailers’ and denunciators’ motivations, Paulsson subscribes to the thesis, dominant among historians, that greed was the prevalent drive, disinterested hatred of the Jews being a much rarer motive behind their actions. From such source information as has been discovered about individual cases it appears that a proportion of the Navy-blue police force did not differ in this respect. In the opinion of a majority of people who remembered these years, they had simply switched from blackmailing smugglers to blackmailing hiding Jews. Most of the Jews who lived to see the end of the war had had to deal with “Navy-blues” more than once,

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<sup>54</sup> A sentence from *Informacja Bieżąca*, a bulletin of the Information Department of the Information and Propaganda Bureau of Home Army Command (September 1, 1942, No. 32, prepared mid-way through the deportation from Warsaw operation) is revealing: “In the Aryan part of the city denunciations of escapees from the ghetto proliferate. Alongside career spies, many amateurs engage in this for gain (blackmail).” Quoted after Barbara Engelking, Jacek Leociak, *Getto warszawskie – przewodnik po nieistniejącym mieście* (Warszawa: Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii – Polska Akademia Nauk, 2001), p. 686; English edition: *The Warsaw Ghetto: A Guide to the Perished City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

but they had succeeded at buying themselves out – even after spending two weeks or more in arrest.

Blackmailers were much the same case. Paulsson estimates that during the two years most critical for the Jews hiding in Warsaw (from the beginning of the “great action” on July 22, 1942 to the outbreak of the Warsaw uprising on August 1, 1944), between 50,000 and 100,000 cases of blackmail might have occurred, i.e. from 2,000 to 4,000 a month, on average. Blackmailers are known to have come in many varieties, from amateurs hunting in the streets, to well-organized gangs. Their earnings varied, but most of them were satisfied with moderate sums roughly equivalent to the monthly living cost of a Jewish family in hiding. The problem was that there were great numbers of those anxious to engage in the extortion business – according to Paulsson, between three and four thousand organized in a thousand gangs. From the underground’s notes on Jan Bogusław Pilnik, a Gestapo agent killed in August 1943, it appears that he had blackmailed many people, mostly Jews.<sup>55</sup> Some of them had paid enormous sums for his silence – for instance, Jerzy Pakulski and his wife Salomea had paid 50,000 zlotys. [...]

For those in hiding and those who were helping them or considering such a possibility, fear was the constant companion. Poverty, common among the Polish population, was no less important a reason for refusing help. The compact layout of the city, the smallness of most flats, and the neighbours’ intimate knowledge of each others’ business were grave obstacles to harbouring people who stood out for their facial features or their imperfect knowledge of Polish. Thus, there was the necessity to move often from one hiding place to another and keep moving through a list of known people of goodwill. At the same time, rumour was highlighting the Germans’ successes in exposing and punishing severely those who hid Jews.

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<sup>55</sup> AYW, 06/48.



Obviously, Poland was not the only country with an “Aryan side.” In the Netherlands, problems stemming from Jews’ going into hiding among Christians in order to escape the Holocaust have been discussed by Marnix Croes.<sup>56</sup> I am referring to his research fully aware that it is not valid for comparative use. The German occupation in Holland in no respect resembled the conditions in the GG – in no respect, that is, except for the fate of the Jews hiding among the Christian population. Yet the difference is fundamental and must be kept in mind. In the GG, German terror was the predominant factor behind the withholding of help; in Holland, it was willingness to cooperate with the occupying authorities.

Croes reminds us that in the Netherlands, 27 percent of Jews survived the occupation, compared to the neighbouring Belgium’s 60 percent and France’s as much as 65 percent. To account for the surprisingly low percentage of those who survived the war, historians cite

“the SS’s paramount influence on the progress of deportation operations and an acceptance of this policy – up to cooperation in executions – on the part of Dutch bureaucracy and a sizable proportion of the general public, and prominent collaboration by the Jews themselves.”<sup>57</sup>

Croes emphasizes, however, that the survival rate was particularly low in large cities in the north of the country, notably in Amsterdam, which had had the largest Jewish population in the Netherlands. This was due to the efficiency of the German political police which cooperated with various Dutch institutions in capturing those in hiding. [...]

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<sup>56</sup> Marnix Croes, *The Netherlands 1942–1945: Survival in Hiding and the Hunt for Hidden Jews*, a paper delivered at a European Science Foundation conference in Jachranka in September 2003, printout pp. 1–12.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

## Jews Hiding in the Countryside

Was the fate of Jews hiding in other major cities in the GG as difficult as in Warsaw? Yes, it was. Jews' recollections leave no doubt about this. A similar opinion can be formed on the basis of the reports (albeit scant) of the Polish underground.

The Jews' tragedy was perceived by a proportion of the general public in occupied Poland as a just punishment. A section of a 1943 report from the underground in Lvov reads:

“The bestiality and premeditation with which the Jews were murdered is universally condemned but the general opinion is that ‘historical punishment descended on the Jews.’ In the soul of the society there is no spontaneous protest against what happened, and no warm compassion; there is just a reasoned, cold condemnation of the murder of a now-weak enemy. The society feels repulsion towards the executioners and it is cold towards the Jews. People often feel warm compassion for individual Jews and rush to their aid at peril to their own lives, but with regard to the Jews in general they feel a subconscious satisfaction that there will be no Jews anymore in the Polish organism.”<sup>58</sup>

It appears that by 1943, people had become accustomed to the thought of the annihilation of the Jews; the Jewish tragedy became an accepted after-effect, merely one of the results of occupation. Striving to consolidate these forces at home which recognized the supreme leadership of the government in London, the Home Army leadership and the Government Delegation for Poland often turned a blind eye to chauvinistic – or even extremely antisemitic – statements. In the face of threats coming from the German invader there was a broad mutual tolerance – and, presumably, solidarity – among the otherwise widely differing political and military factions, from the ONR radical camp to the PPS-WRN. Polemics were often prevalent in the underground press, but they never went as far as to call

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<sup>58</sup> ANN, AK, 203/XV-41, Raport polityczny za grudzień 1942, k. 6.

for the exclusion of antisemites from the national community. Far from this, very few statements encouraging the public to take the risk of aiding Jews in hiding have been found. Reports from the Information and Propaganda Bureau [BIP] of the AK Warsaw District Command on the situation in towns neighbouring Warsaw are illuminating in this respect,<sup>59</sup> some of which are quoted below.

In a quarterly report, the discussion about German activities against the resistance movement is followed by the note cited below:

“In the countryside the Jewish issue is almost non-existent. Affluent Jews, who have money, have long ‘got themselves snug’ and, like the rest of the population, are waiting for the war to end. The Jews hiding in forests are hated by the locals. They are the cause of Poles’ many problems and hardships. Not only do they organize robbery raids, but nearly all are Communists. A ‘forest Jew’ caught by a gendarme will almost always accuse the innocent locals from nearby settlements,<sup>60</sup> either out of revenge for having received no aid, or on the principle ‘If I’m to die, so are you.’ The most flagrant cases of Jews ‘squealing’ on villagers occurred in the Sokołów, Węgrów and Grójec counties.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 203/X-68, 69, 70, 72, Raporty i sprawozdania BIP.

<sup>60</sup> Information in much the same vein is found in a report from Poland to London prepared immediately after the war: “Jews lacked psychical and nervous resistance. Faced with danger, they immediately broke down and ‘squealed’ on all who had sheltered them. Even so, people went to their rescue. [...] Peasants were usually indifferent to the Jews’ lot. Regrettably, incidents of peasants’ delivering Jews to the German authorities were frequent. The peasants succumbed to German indoctrination that the Jew was not a human being.” (AIP. A.9.III.2c/69). Similar information is found in nationalistic underground press. For instance, *Polak* of October 3, 1943 reported the arrest in Stoczek Węgrowski of seven Jews who had been hiding in a cellar. Five were shot on the spot and two were kept for interrogation. Allegedly, they named the people who had been concealing them and “because of their evidence eighteen Poles were shot and the house in which the Jews had been hiding was burnt.”

<sup>61</sup> ANN, AK, 203/X-68, Raport kwartalny BIP, 25 X 1943 r., k. 31.

In another report, a chapter on “the political attitude of the society” reads:

“As the war drags on, the moral standard of the society is falling steadily. In June and July 1940 armed assaults were conducted in the Sokołów county, according to police reports. [...] A large number of Jews, from Warsaw and local, are hiding in the country. In some cases they fall victim to unbelievable exploitation, in others they are provided with much care and aid. Yet the overall sentiment towards the Jews is unfriendly and, what is more, they are suspected of banditry, theft and blackmail.”<sup>62</sup>

[...] The Jewish theme is present in many comprehensive 1943 reports from the Warsaw Area.<sup>63</sup> The report for April 1–30, 1943 reads:

“II. Jews. 1. The Radzymin County. Following the disclosure in the occupying enemy’s press of the murder of Polish officers in Katyń, the Jews who are hiding in small groups in the county no longer appear among Poles. In the forest near the village of Ślężony in the Małopole community, the Navy-blue police found a hide-out (an underground hut) of a group of Jews. The police shot eleven people inside; a few Jews succeeded to escape. The Jews in hiding show no activity whatever.”

The next report, for June 1943, stated that “the Jewish issue, in the sense of larger or smaller clusters of Jews in this district, is no more.”

“The Minsk county. A number of Jews are still hiding in the county. Some of them take part in assaults on locals; this happened on June 10, 1943 in the village of Trojanowo in the Kuflew community. The gendarmerie and the police shot the captured Jews on the spot.” A situation report for August 1–31, 1943 contains the following paragraph:

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, AK, 203/X-69, Raport dla “Folwark VI/3,” signed “Głuszec VI/3,” 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1943, k. 64–65.

<sup>63</sup> AIPN, MBP, AK, Komenda Okręgu Warszawskiego, 135, unsigned.

“Re Jews. The few surviving groups of Jews are hiding in the forests. Some are armed with German and Soviet short firearms. Young Jews attack Poles. During such attacks they are ruthless and they sadistically torment people. The invaders sporadically catch Jews and when they do they shoot them on the spot.”

Further on, the sub-chapter about Jews contains information that in the Węgrów, Minsk and Skierniewice counties over fifty Jews were caught and killed. Another report kept in the same file, signed “Folwark-Jur,” covering October 1943, reads:

“Re Jews. [...] The number of Jews still present in the whole area is estimated at over 300. Most of them are young, male, 90 percent are communists. They maintain contacts with neighbouring villages through local communists or their supporters, even though farmers, who deliver food to them, squeeze every last penny and piece of jewellery out of them [Jews]. After the Treblinka attack, covered elsewhere, the Jews were reinforced in numbers by fugitives and their material situation has vastly improved, the Treblinka Jews having got out with heaps of gold and jewellery.”

In an August 31<sup>st</sup> report from the Węgrów county the authors communicate:

“There are still cases of discovery of Jews, usually by locals or by the gendarmerie, evidently as a result of information about their hiding place having been laid. The Jews are always shot on the spot. After the escape of a fairly large group of Jews from Treblinka<sup>64</sup> many of the breakaways came into this area.

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<sup>64</sup> The name Treblinka appeared in the underground press in several different contexts. For instance, *Agencja Informacyjna Wieś* reported on July 19, 1943 that German gendarmes had arrested in Węgrów and sent to Treblinka seventeen so-called dentists, local Poles. They were described as follows: “They are degenerates who collaborated with the gendarmerie catching Jews, in the course of which operation they committed barbarous acts of stripping Jewish corpses and breaking out the jaws of those who had gold teeth. The local population received with relief the news about this fact [i.e. the arrest] which, however, is regarded as an attempt at covering the traces of

They are well-dressed and quite well-nourished (most of them having long held some permanent function in the camp). Many have weapons (pistols) and large amounts of money or jewelry – which, it might be mentioned, is their undoing because they are being hunted for these possessions by various village or town scum. At present no roaming Jews are encountered. Most of them have found a permanent place to stay, many have been holing up for months in some poky bunker.”<sup>65</sup>

In another report the description of robbery raids by young Jews is almost identical with those cited earlier.<sup>66</sup> In this one an interesting piece of information was added:

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bestiality.” It should be added that similar practices continued also after the war. Kazimierz Krajewski and Tadeusz Łobuszewski, in their book *“Lupaszka,” “Młot,” Huzar.” Działalność 5. i 6. Brygady Wileńskiej AK (1944–1952)* (Warszawa, 2002), p. 255, quote a fragment of the chronicle of the 6<sup>th</sup> Vilnius Brigade on a raid made by a group under Lucjan Minkiewicz “Wiktor.” “Feb. 2, 1946. We are approaching the notorious Treblinka. According to the locals the digging out and stripping of corpses has lately reached the ultimate stadium of bestiality. Teeth or whole jaws are wrenched out, arms, legs and heads are cut off to get a bit of gold. This is desecration, but the authorities are doing nothing to secure this unique burial ground where more than 3 million [*sic*] Jews, Poles, Gypsies, Russians and other nationals lie. Feb. 3–4, 1946, Chmielnik. We are three km. away from the ‘death camp’. Intelligence-gathering in the camp confirmed reports about the desecration. On Feb. 4 in the evening we set out for the village of Wola-Okólnik on a punitive expedition against Treblinka gold-diggers.”

<sup>65</sup> AAN, AK, 203/X-69. Report signed “Wilga VI,” k. 214. (document No. 17 in Annex to Dariusz Libionka’s article). “Wilga” – code name of the Węgrów district of the Home Army Warsaw Area Command’s Sub-circle East. Similar events were taking place in the neighbourhood of Otwock, A fragment of an undated report of the Government Delegation, “Manhunt. Horrible German Bestiality,” reads: “In the neighborhood of Otwock Germans encourage local scum to hunt for Jews and deliver them to German gendarmerie stations. The deliverer must dig a grave for the Jew and, after the unfortunate victim has been executed, he gets 200 zlotys in prize money and the victim’s clothes and shoes. (AYV, 20, 89 – presumed to concern the second half of 1942 or 1943).

<sup>66</sup> AAN, AK, 203/X-70, k. 56.

“The Warsaw District’s Forestry Department issued a regulation whereby all forest wardens in all Forestry Administration Regions are in duty to report any forest hideout of Jews, gangs and other marauders. The report also noted that in the town of Skierniewice a group of Jewish intelligentsia asked “to be accepted for independence work. Their request was denied.”

Other reports speak of “Jewish gangs” which take revenge for denunciations of hiding Jews, or of Jews attacking peasants and denouncing farmers who refused to take them in.<sup>67</sup>

Dariusz Libionka’s research on the Lublin region indicates that the situation was much the same there. In Polish underground materials discovered by him, traces of compassion for the exploited and betrayed Jews are just as rare. Help often lasted only as long as the hiding person’s funds. Once the money had run out, fear that Jews looking for food would lead Germans to the village and, when captured, betray their erstwhile allies, took precedence. A report of the Home Army Inspectorate for Puławy is a case in point:

“As a forest warden he was aware that there were Jewish bunkers in the woods. He tolerated them for some time; he started rather innocently: ‘Don’t get me wrong, I’m not going to betray you, but let me earn some money.’ So they gave him cash and gold and he promised to alert them in case of danger. Yet what’s the point of alerting when the money and the gold are already in hand? Some day they might bear him a grudge for this. Better liquidate them. So he organizes a formal manhunt with the gendarmerie called in and he personally takes part in it, shooting sharp. However one treats the Jewish issue, such handling of it goes against elementary humanitarian principles. This is a business befitting none but the Hitlerite thugs. Since both Jews and Poles were living in the area, he reasoned that somebody must have seen the Jews, knew about them or maybe talked to them. On this assumption, he decided that Poles who might be wise to

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 203/X-72, k. 1. 39.47.56.

some of his doings could be dangerous witnesses. Better get rid of the witnesses of this dirty business. He searches for bandits among Poles (and we know only too well whom the Germans consider bandits!). He again joins gendarmerie actions against these bandits. Since the village of Wola Przybysławska is the most likely suspect, they go there several times, with the result that entire innocent families are killed, forty people. He knows well before the expedition sets out who's going to get killed – and he is right every time, of course. [...] This way, he is getting rid of people he considers inconvenient and since many people could be aware of the whole business, many people need to be liquidated – and they are. The Mastkowiak family are next to die, three persons.”<sup>68</sup>

Many underground reports speak of the growing resentment of escapees from the ghetto, for reasons of their unpredictable conduct in critical situations. A situation report for April 1943 reads:

“Jews. [...] Until recently people were passive towards the attackers, but now that robbery has become everyday business, the society's attitude has changed to hostile. Captured Jews betray with premeditation all Poles who gave them any help or shelter. People are often heard say that it is a blessing for us that there are no Jews.”<sup>69</sup>

Appended to this report is one by “Komar”:

“On the night of the 16<sup>th</sup> of this month bandits raided the village of Zakrzówek – some 20 people strong, a majority of them Jews. They ransacked seven farmer households, took money, clothes, food – meat and pork fat; after they had gone from the Bernackis to the next house, farmer Bernacki's son led the horse out of the stable and went to alert the gendarmes in Żelichow. The gendarmes came over to Zakrzówek after thinking long and hard about it, all of the two kilometres, and they stopped at the first house while the bandits were plundering the

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<sup>68</sup> AP Lublin, AK, Inspektorat Puławy, 12, vol. 4, l 13–14.

<sup>69</sup> AP Lublin, Obwód Puławy, 12 vol. 3. k. 4.



other end of the village; they summoned the village guards and sent them out three times to find out the exact number of bandits, which house they were looting, and so on. The guards, seeing that the gendarmes did not intend to intervene at all, asked them to give them carbines so that they could chase the gang away themselves. Put to shame, the gendarmes made a token effort and then they left.”<sup>70</sup>

The scale and significance of the phenomenon described above do not render themselves easily to unequivocal judgments. Yet it is obvious that the mounting resentment of the Jews hiding in the neighbourhood was closely linked to the ever-rising terror incited by the invaders and to the increasing pauperization of the Polish rural communities.

### **Blackmailing Jews in the Opinion of Members of the Council for Aid to Jews**

This essay is devoted chiefly to Poles’ reactions to the tragedy of the Jews during the occupation. To avoid repeating other authors’ opinions, I shall confine myself to presenting several observations concerning different groups’ reactions to the denunciation and blackmailing of Jews. Doubtless, the most important of these is a protest of the Council for Aid to Jews of the Government Delegation for Poland of April 6, 1943. Reports of the blackmailing plague sounded like Job’s news: “There are almost no families or individuals who have not fallen victim to this heinous pursuit.” This plague rendered the Council’s work practically impossible and left its members in shock caused by this “symptom of the spreading gangrene of demoralization.” The Council called for fighting the blackmailers – not only because of the victims’ situation, but also “from the position of social standards and the interests of the state.” A number of death sentences given, carried out and made known

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, k. 312.

to the public “would clear the moral climate.” The Council requested that at least several fictitious death sentences be announced, for nothing of this kind had been done so far.

I want to focus for a while on the documentation left by “Żegota.”<sup>71</sup> A fairly large collection of reports and correspondence pertaining to the work of this organization has survived. Many of these materials have received barely a mention from historians, chiefly from Teresa Prekerowa, the author of the fundamental monograph. Out of approximately a hundred basic documents – reports, memorials, and studies on the “Żegota” heritage – several contain mentions of the Warsaw public’s unfriendly attitude towards the tragedy of the Jews, in regards to the blackmailing of people in hiding.

An underground study *Getto Warszawskie* [The Warsaw Ghetto] of 1942 noted the antisemitic attitudes frequently encountered in Poles, including cases of physical assault on Jews.<sup>72</sup> It also discussed a fight between Navy-blue policemen and Jews in Warsaw’s Eastern Railway Station, in the aftermath of which 110 Jews were executed by shooting. In a letter of September 2, 1942 to Ignacy Schwarzbart, member of the National Council in London, which begins “My Dear Ignacy...,” Zionist activists pronounced the Polish-Jewish relations to be very bad.<sup>73</sup> In another text, of late 1942, the author admits that Polish peasants are fairly well-disposed towards fugitives from ghettos, but their attitude towards property left by Jews leaves much to be desired – “there is also a typically Polish politi-

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<sup>71</sup> Editor’s note: “Żegota” – code name for Rada Pomocy Żydom przy Delegacie Rządu na Kraj – Council for Aid to Jews operating under the auspices of the Government Delegation for Poland.

<sup>72</sup> AAN, DR, 202/XV-1-2, k. 36, 80, 80a.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, k. 75. They wrote: “The Poles’ attitude towards us is incorrigible, on the whole. Other than left-wing elements and part of intelligentsia, the general public is hostile.” (D. Stola, *Nadzieja I zagłada: Ignacy Schwarzbart – żydowski przedstawiciel w Radzie Narodowej RP* [Hope and Destruction: Ignacy Schwarzbart – A Jewish Representative to the National Council of the Republic of Poland] (1940–1945) p. 122).

cal and ethical problem on which light should perhaps be cast from the official Polish side.”<sup>74</sup>

In a letter from the “Żegota” chairman to the Delegate of the Government of December 29, 1942, attention is drawn to the massive scale of blackmail, which the underground should fight. In another letter from about the same period the author admits that escapees from ghettos often join Communist groups and take part in raids on villages and large landowner’s houses. “This would indicate that, as predicted, the persecution of the Jewish people has indeed led some of the surviving victims of terror to seek deliverance from Bolshevik subversives or from bands of robbers on the loose in the countryside between the Vistula and the Bug.”

A reference to blackmail is also found in a letter of November 15, 1943 from Leon Feiner “Berezowski” to Bund activists in London. Similar information is contained in a letter from Henryk Woliński “Górnicki” to the head of the BIP’s Information Department Jerzy Makowiecki “Kuncewicz” of March 24, 1944. A letter dated February 12, 1943 told about gangs of Polish looters on the loose in the last vestiges of the ghetto. On May 4, 1943 Cracow activists asked the Council for Aid to Jews for funds and for stepping up actions against the spreading antisemitism.<sup>75</sup>

A broad coverage of the situation of the Jewish people was also given in the memorial from the Bund to the Bund representation in London of June 22, 1943.<sup>76</sup> Its authors wrote:

“A Jewish psychosis is developing in the public, deliberately generated and fuelled by the occupying enemy. The German pressure is mounting; the operation of hunting down and liquidating Jews is gaining intensity. Whole packs of agents and policemen of various hues, uniformed and plain-clothed, are sniffing and running to and fro, day and night, to catch ever

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<sup>74</sup> AAN, DR, 202/XV-1-2, k. 36

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, k. 84–88, 99–110, 147, 297, 334

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, k. 374–376.

new victims. This makes an excellent field for blackmail. Blackmail strips the victims of their possessions: at home – of money, valuables and other things, and in the street – of clothing and footwear. Fight against blackmail is being waged. It is in the interests of the entire Underground Poland movement.”

The role of German propaganda did not go unnoticed. A report of the Jewish underground movement, *Akcja antyżydowska 1942* [The Anti-Jewish Action of 1942], despatched to London on September 1, 1942,<sup>77</sup> describes various German ploys designed to make the Jews repulsive to the Poles as “profiteers, unproductive exploiters of others’ labours, layabouts, parasites, and so on”; this campaign was meant to “give people disgust of the Jews, set the Jews at odds with the rest of the society, destroy all feelings of compassion for them.” The authors added: “This propaganda has found small response in the Polish public opinion.” They admitted that “concealing Jews, in particular very prosperous ones, or Polonised to a high degree, outside the walls surrounding Jewish residential areas was commonplace”; these people often benefitted from “the help, some of it very kind-hearted, of Poles.” [...]

The Polish underground certainly should be given credit for their intentions, but what was the practice like? Were they to be judged only by a 1944 review report *Przegląd działalności referatu spraw żydowskich* [Review of the Activities of the Jewish Affairs Unit]<sup>78</sup> by Henryk Woliński “Wacław,” who since February 1, 1942 had been responsible for monitoring these matters in the AK Command’s BIP<sup>79</sup>, the unavoidable conclusion would be that the Home Army had not done much. Woliński mentions an underground information campaign, liaison with the Jewish underground in Warsaw and small amounts of weapons given to them, and unsuccessful attempts to establish

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, k. 40, 50.

<sup>78</sup> ANN, AK, 203/-139, k. 1–4 (document No. 29 in the Annex to Dariusz Libionka’s article).

<sup>79</sup> Editor’s note: AK BIP – Biuro Informacji Publicznej AK – Home Army’s Public Information Bureau.

contact with the Częstochowa, Poniatowa and Trawniki forced labour camps. About the “Aryan side” he writes only:

“As regards security, individual representatives (“Antek” [Icchak Cukierman], “Borowski” [Adolf Berman]) have been given protection, through the prosecution and execution of German agents who tracked down ŻOB members and threatened the security of that organization (bringing up blackmailers before Government Delegation courts).”

Yet it is known from the narrative of Basia Bermanowa that protection against blackmailers was not at all times satisfactory, even when the lives of prominent underground leaders were at stake.<sup>80</sup> The Bermans had been paying blackmail for several months before an appointed underground cell liquidated the informers. It will also be remembered that in the important 1943 “Order on Those Prejudicial to the Polish Cause” there is no mention – not a word – about denouncing Jews in hiding.<sup>81</sup> A “Register of Those Prejudicial to the Polish Cause” was to record the names of “people who have disgraced in any manner whatever the dignity of the Pole, from the outset of our captivity to this day” – that is, till January 1943. From several examples cited in this order it appears that Home Army commanders in the field had resented this task, some of them omitting to mention in their reports Navy-blue policemen who zealously collected the mandatory food delivery quotas from the peasants. Moreover, the High Command was of an opinion that not enough was written about Communists and various “riff-raff.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> B. Temkin-Bermanowa, *Dziennik z podziemia*, prepared for publishing by A. Grupińska, P. Szapiro, Warszawa 2000, p. 21, footnote on p. 245.

<sup>81</sup> ANN, AK, 203/III-105, k. 23.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. AIPN, MBP, BCh, 13, Okólnik w sprawie rejestrowania czynów karygodnych, dokonywanych przez Polaków i obywateli Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, December 1942. In this 15-point document signed BCh “Chłóstra,” enumerating representative types of culpable conduct, there is not one word about turning in Jews to the Germans.

## Underground State Authorities' War against Jew Blackmailers

Władysław Bartoszewski and Teresa Prekerowa were the first to write about the blackmailers of Jews. Prekerowa's book is a tribute to the rather small group of righteous and extremely brave people who put their lives on the line to save from annihilation as many Jews as they were able to reach. Despite political and organizational support from underground political parties (other than the National Alliance) and from the Home Army, their scope for practical action was limited. It is helpful here to remember what "Żegota" did – apart from issuing the appeals mentioned earlier – to counteract in practice the blackmailing of Jews. To quote Prekerowa: "among other things, the Council for Aid to Jews published three leaflets – appeal to the Poles, calling on the general public to provide aid and a warning that traitors and blackmailers would be punished severely."<sup>83</sup> To publish them, the Council had had to invest substantial funds in putting in working order the printing press of the Alliance of Polish Democracy [Stronnictwo Polskiej Demokracji] – a party neither affluent, nor very strong in terms of its influence and membership. The leaflets published in May, August and September 1943 warned: "A Pole who collaborates in the murderous operation [...], blackmails or denounces Jews [...] or takes part in plundering, commits a grave crime against the Republic of Poland [abridged by T.P]."<sup>84</sup> The three issues of

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<sup>83</sup> T. Prekerowa, pp. 7, 260–294.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261. The May 1943 leaflet, quoted more extensively by Arczyński and Balcerak (*Kryptonim "Żegota": z dziejów pomocy Żydom w Polsce 1939–1945* (Warszawa: "Czytelnik," 1983) p. 35), warned: "We must not forget, not even for a moment, that as the Germans perpetrate their crime they are also seeking to convince the world that the Poles are taking part in the murder and robbery of the Jews. Under the circumstances, any assistance, whether direct or indirect, given to the Germans in their criminal operation is the gravest crime against Poland. Poles who cooperate in the German's murderous project, whether by blackmailing or denouncing Jews, exploiting their dramatic plight, or by taking part in the plundering of their possessions, commit a grave crime

*Komunikaty Prasowe* [Press Notices] published by the Council in the autumn of 1943 – possibly, Prekerowa suggests, as substitutes of *Tygodniowa Informacja*, the weekly bulletin of the Jewish Department of the Government Delegation for Poland – had a narrower circulation.

It appears that, their many appeals to the Government Delegation notwithstanding, the “Żegota” leaders had little influence on the working of the underground judicial system. They had been sending respective motions to the Delegate since December 1942, to no avail. Neither the moral support received on January 5, 1943 from the PPS-WRN party<sup>85</sup> and from the Front for the Revival of Poland (published in *Prawda* in March), nor sarcastic commentaries in the Democratic Alliance’s paper *Nowe Drogi*<sup>86</sup> were of much use. The Delegate remained silent on this issue for a long time. Still, the publication of a warning by the Directorate of Civil Resistance [KWC], threatening Jew blackmailers with severe penalties, should be credited to the Council for Aid to the Jews’ achievements. Regrettably, not much is known about the amount of support this initiative received from the Directorate’s district-level structures. Only Cracow’s Tadeusz Seweryn “Socha” testified after the war that he had issued, in the name of the KWC, a “printed announcement” in which he condemned the harassment of Jews in hid-

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against the laws of the Republic of Poland and will be punished forthwith – and those who escape punishment can be certain that a time is near when they are going to be called to account for their actions by the court of a Poland Reborn.” The September 1943 leaflet declared, in a similar vein: “The German criminals are seeking to convince the world that it is we who set fire to the Warsaw ghetto and murdered Jews, and they call the German soldiery’s participation in this crime an ‘armed intervention’.” (*ibid.*, p. 155).

<sup>85</sup> For the full text see M. Arczyński, W. Balcerak, *Kryptonim...* p. 139.

<sup>86</sup> “As things are, a blackmailing police agent or an informer must be badly out of luck indeed for the judiciary of the Underground Poland to take an interest in him or her [abridged by T.P.]. With the plague of Jew-blackmailing raging in the country, notably in Warsaw and its environs, no single announcement of a sentence given for this has been made!” (*Nowe Drogi*, 20 March 1943, quoted after T. Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada ...*p. 280).

ing with anonymous letters threatening betrayal to the Gestapo unless ransom was paid. The announcement read:

“We condemn this criminal preying on the tragedy of people who are being murdered in the name of a mad racist ideology, not only as a flagrant violation of the principles of most elementary ethics and of the Criminal Code, but also as a criminal intent to collaborate with the Gestapo and other German police forces. No plea of ‘war conditions,’ ‘beliefs,’ or ‘views’ will excuse blackmail as a way of making one’s own life easier. A crime is a crime everywhere and at all times, even during wartime, and we punish crime now.”<sup>87</sup>

Yet the list of infamous acts, opening *The First Black List of Navy-blue Police* (a leaflet published in May 1943 in Cracow by the Directorate of Civil Resistance [KWC]), does not name the Jews as victims of the Navy-blue-policemen’s crimes. The leaflet says only that among those who have “disgraced themselves by their actions [...], there are blackmailers extorting ransom from Poles, bribe-takers, muggers, thugs and all manner of canaille from whom the Polish society turns away with contempt.”<sup>88</sup>

As Prekerowa rightly emphasizes, for a long time the KWC-published notices, stating that sentences on traitors had been carried out, did not identify the blackmailing of hidden Jews as the grounds for a large number of these death sentences. Accordingly, the question about the comprehension of such news by the readers of underground press must remain unanswered. A single entry in Ludwik Landau’s chronicle (April 6, 1943), noting that spies and the Navy-blues had begun to reckon with the underground, is too feeble a trace. Prekerowa suggests that

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<sup>87</sup> W. Bartoszewski, Z. Lewinówna, *Ten jest ...*, p. 106.

<sup>88</sup> *Polacy – Żydzi 1939–1945: wybór źródeł = Polen – Juden 1939–1945: Quellenauswahl = Poles – Jews 1939–1945: Selection of Documents*, ed. Andrzej Krzysztof Kunert; foreword by Wł. Bartoszewski (Warsaw: Rada Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa, Muzeum Historii Polski, Oficyna Wydawnicza RYTM, 2006) p. 178.



an important change came after July 15, 1943, after the KWC had been replaced by the Directorate of Underground Struggle [Kierownictwo Walki Podziemnej – KWP], reporting directly to the Home Army Command. This is certainly an important date, for several days earlier, on July 5, the Government's Delegate for Poland and the Commander of Armed Forces at Home had stated unequivocally that "the special courts will prosecute in particular blackmail and the obtaining of money on the pretext of efforts to cause the release of imprisoned or interned Poles, and the extortion of money by blackmail from hiding Jews."<sup>89</sup> "Żegota" members reacted energetically to this statement, demanding it to be told precisely what the special courts were doing in this matter. The KWZ's reply of August was hardly inspiring of optimism: the court had examined seven such cases; in two of them sentences had already been given and in next two judgments could be expected shortly. [...]

## Conclusion

[...] The first observation I should like to extend to the readers in conclusion of this article concerns the present state of knowledge of the Polish-Jewish relations under the occupation. Contemporary historians appear to be much better informed on this subject than their predecessors who published 20–30 years ago. Unfortunately, to date the findings of research on Jewish issues have been inadequately taken into account by the researchers of the Polish underground; a cohesive vision of the social history of the five occupation years is yet to be developed. Even so, the situation is better than in 1981 when the first edition of Lucy Dawidowicz's book *The Holocaust and the Historians* came out.<sup>90</sup> At that time Dawidowicz accused Polish historians of practising "historical revisionism" and of attempts to "appro-

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

<sup>90</sup> L. Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians*, Cambridge-London 1981, quoted after the eighth edition, 1997.

priate” the Holocaust. She quoted – calling it a prominent case in point – Czesław Madajczyk’s synthesis of the history of occupation, the first such work to have been published after 1968.<sup>91</sup> Madajczyk’s fundamental thesis was that the Germans had been planning the total biological destruction of the Polish nation. Dawidowicz argues that in order to prove this thesis Madajczyk had to push into shadow the annihilation of Polish Jews, to whom he devoted little attention save for highlighting marginal negative phenomena which had surfaced in the ghettos (the Judenrats, collaboration and denunciation, the weakness of the Jewish underground). This treatment of the Holocaust as a secondary phenomenon was, allegedly, a way of obeying the ruling communist party’s new nationalist line. From today’s perspective, Dawidowicz’s judgment of Madajczyk appears too extreme – both because, compared with other publications of that period, this prominent historian devoted to the Holocaust of the Jews the most attention of them all, and because none of the theses advanced by him have been challenged to this day.

Substantial as the progress of research on the occupation has been, much is yet to be done. We have only a tenuous conceptualization of the impact the discrimination against the Jews and, subsequently, the mass-scale deportations and massacres which the Poles witnessed, had on life in those times. Research has not yet established (even though sources, such as notaries’ registers, have survived) what percentage of the Poles had taken over houses, flats, production facilities and shops previously owned by Jews. This is a giant undertaking, which calls for joint effort by all historians for whom the Holocaust is a special area of interest. Perhaps estimates showing what percentage of local Jewish communities had been deported by the invaders to death camps, how many Jews had been killed on the spot and how many had succeeded in escaping to “Aryan” parts of towns and cities, or to nearby villages and forests, will be available in the near future.

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119–124. The work referred to is C. Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce* [Third Reich’s Policy in Occupied Poland], vol. 1–2, Warszawa, 1970.

The neglected state, which I have signalled, of the analysis of the issues situated between collaboration and cooperation with the occupying authorities, is a separate subject. Our knowledge of the activities of the Navy-blue police, the Polish and the German judicial authorities, and local administration is still sparse. The state of research regarding this area of study from the Jewish perspective seems much better, albeit not all-encompassing. As much as historians have done recently to acquire the understanding of underground activity, everyday life and its economy, the organization of self-help, and the mechanism of the Holocaust – as well as of less evidenced matters, such as the ambiguous role of the Judenrats and of the Jewish police, or corruption-breeding economic states. It is not an easy task to uncover various dark pages of the past – not only because of the respect due to the victims of murder, but also because of the nature of the sources they left behind. We are afraid – and often rightly so – to trust the invaders' evidence; on the other hand, the survivors were understandably reluctant to remember all the painful experiences they had encountered in their community. The most painful of these subjects is the presence Jewish agents among the Gestapo – often cited in Polish underground sources – whose chief targets were the Jews in hiding.

After a stage of building various catalogues of attitudes and behaviours characteristic of the occupation years are recorded in separate historical discourses, the next step will be to build synthetic approaches. I believe that a future social history of Poland during the Second World War period will devote to Polish-Jewish relations a number of pages commensurate with their significance.

*(Abridged by Sebastian Rejak)*

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## Help Given by Poles to the Jewish Population of the Rzeszów Region in 1939–1945

In the period between the two World Wars the Rzeszów region was ethnically diversified with a population of Poles, Jews and Ukrainians. For the most part, the Ukrainians inhabited the south-eastern and eastern part of the region. Most of the Jewish population lived in urban centres.

According to the 1931 statistics, the region had a population of 1,371,468, of which 901,801 were of Roman Catholic denomination, and 115,888 (8.4 percent of the total) of Mosaic denomination. Among the latter, 87,060 (six percent of the total)<sup>1</sup> used Yiddish and/or Hebrew as their first language. Since a proportion of the people of Mosaic denomination are presumed to have considered themselves Polish, or to have given Polish as their native language for reasons of expediency, the population breakdown by religious denomination did not reflect the breakdown by language. Therefore, it should be accepted that the actual number of Jews in the region is difficult to assess in detail: it ranged between the number of census respondents who gave Yiddish or Hebrew as their first language and the number of those who declared themselves to be of the Mosaic denomination<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Statystyka Polska* [Polish Statistics], C series, 68, 88. The 1931 census was hardly objective because it did not include nationality questions, relying instead on the notion of native language. The number of Jews who entered Polish as their native language is unknown.

<sup>2</sup> It should be remembered, however, that to the German occupying authorities it was irrelevant how people perceived themselves; the only valid criterion of race was that laid down in the Nuremberg Laws ("The Reich

To some extent, the pattern of residence of the Jewish population in the Rzeszów region mirrored that of the entire Jewish minority in interwar Poland. Jews were predominately urban dwellers. Early in the 1930s, the region's largest clusters of Jews were in Przemyśl (17,326), where they accounted for 33.95 percent of the population, and in Rzeszów (11,228) –41.74 percent. Towards the end of the interwar period there were about eighteen thousand Jews in Przemyśl, nearly fourteen thousand in Rzeszów and some eight thousand in Jarosław<sup>3</sup>. In some small towns Jews constituted as much as 60 to 70 percent of the inhabitants.<sup>4</sup> In all localities they had their own religious communities, trade guilds, political, charity and cultural organisations, schools, and cooperative savings-and-loan institutions.

A significant majority of the Jews in the Rzeszów region made their living in commerce, crafts and insurance. In the 1920s and 1930s they operated, for the most part, small trading and craft businesses in towns and they were seldom shareholders in large companies. It will also be noted that Jews accounted for a relatively high share of the professional community: in the mid-1930s, 45 percent of physicians and 40 percent of lawyers in the Rzeszów region were Jewish<sup>5</sup>. In the rural areas Jews made their living chiefly in trade or crafts. Only a few

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Citizenship Law” and “The Law on the Protection of German Blood”) enacted in 1935 in Nuremberg. The term “non-Aryan” was first used in an implementing regulation of 14 October 1935 to the Nuremberg Laws. These laws were imposed in the entire territory occupied by the Third Reich.

<sup>3</sup> W. Wierzbieniec, *Żydzi w województwie lwowskim w okresie międzywojennym. Zagadnienia demograficzne i społeczne* [Jews in the Lvov Province in the Interwar Period: Demographic and Social Questions] (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego, 2003) p. 67. Cf. Z. Konieczny, *Zmiany demograficzne w południowo-wschodniej Polsce w latach 1939–1950* [Demographic Changes in South-Eastern Poland in 1939–1950] (Przemyśl: Archiwum Państwowe w Przemyślu etc., 2002), pp. 20f.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, in Głogów Małopolski in the first half of the 1930s Jews accounted for 75 percent of inhabitants; in Dukla – for 72.5 percent; in Lesko and in Ustrzyki Dolne – for 72 percent, but in Dynów – for only 47 percent.

<sup>5</sup> *Rocznik lekarski Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z 1938 r.* [Medical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland for 1938] (Warsaw, 1938), *passim*; Księga adresowa

engaged in agriculture, as was the case with the whole Jewish population in the entire Lvov province.<sup>6</sup>

It should be noted that the economic significance of the Jews in the Rzeszów region was not as high as it is commonly believed to have been. A large proportion of the Jewish inhabitants in the region were hard up or destitute and they had to rely on charitable institutions for assistance.<sup>7</sup> These Jews were living among equally poor Poles and Ukrainians, particularly in the country and in small towns in the Rzeszów region. All those who owned “a house built on a plinth, with such furniture as chairs”<sup>8</sup>, counted as well off.

Before the war a majority of the Rzeszów region’s Jews resided in “life-style ghettos”; they lived in a traditional religious-social system, were ignorant of Polish customs and, in some cases, spoke no Polish<sup>9</sup>. Contacts between Jews and Poles, if any, were in most cases limited strictly to business matters.

Neither did the economic structure of the prewar Rzeszów region encourage the assimilation of Jews. The region was predominately agricultural, its level of urbanisation low. The best conditions for assimilation were in urban centres, notably in cit-

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Małopolski 1935 [Address Book of Lesser Poland for 1935] (Warsaw, 1935), *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> In 1921 Jews accounted for 10.5 percent of employment in this segment of the economy; this share declined to 9.6 percent in 1931. In trade and insurance they accounted for 45.4 percent of employment in 1921 and for 42.7 percent in 1931.

<sup>7</sup> For more on this subject see Wierzbieniec, pp. 130–226. See also *idem*, *Spoleczność żydowska Przemysła w latach 1918–1939* [The Jewish Community of Przemyśl in 1918–1939] (Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej, 1996), pp. 30–61.

<sup>8</sup> Recounted by Genowefa Kuć (from this author’s archive).

<sup>9</sup> The degree of assimilation of Polish Jews was one of the lowest in Europe. The south-eastern provinces of Poland, including that of which the Rzeszów region was a part, had the largest numbers of non-assimilated Jews. For instance, religious Orthodox Jews accounted for 80 percent of the Jewish population in Dynów, and for over 60 percent in Krosno. See W. Wierzbieniec, *Z dziejów społeczności żydowskiej Dynowa* [From the Annals of the Jewish Community of Dynów] (Rzeszów–Dynów 2003); an account by Laia Krill-Balberg (from this author’s archive).

ies. In the Rzeszów region there were at that time twenty-one urban centres, of which only Jarosław, Przemyśl and Rzeszów rated as cities<sup>10</sup>. These cities had the highest percentage of Jewish intelligentsia in the process of assimilation, or at least maintaining social contacts with Poles. Yet it should be noted that the number of assimilated Jews was low.<sup>11</sup> On the whole, in the interwar period they did not meet with manifestations of particular hostility from the people in the Rzeszów region, even though they were aware of being resented by some Polish communities.

There were several sources of this negative attitude towards the Jews on the part of a proportion of the region's population. The most prominent of these was business competition, which at times of economic depression aggravated the Polish-Jewish antagonism. This was particularly manifest in the second half of the 1930s.<sup>12</sup> It was then that the Jews came to be perceived as an element injurious to the Polish economy and, fostered by this sentiment, boycotts of Jewish shops and firms became stricter. Merchants from the Wielkopolska (Greater Poland) province were encouraged to settle in major cities of the Rzeszów region, and there were demands to have Jews banned from the Central Industrial District<sup>13</sup>. All this led to a mounting wave of anti-Jewish excesses.

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<sup>10</sup> In interwar period statistics the category of city covered towns with populations of more than 20,000. In 1931 Jarosław had a population of 22,195, Przemyśl of 51,038, and Rzeszów of 26,902.

<sup>11</sup> The author does not refer here to the baptised Jews, who were not considered members of the Jewish community by the Jews themselves (even though the communities averse to Jews were wont to emphasise their descent). The criterion applied is a European life style and integration with the Polish society.

<sup>12</sup> In the two largest cities in the Rzeszów region first anti-Jewish unrests took place as early as 1918–1919. In the second half of the 1920s Polish-Jewish relations were correct.

<sup>13</sup> For more see K. Kaczmarek, *Podziemie narodowe na Rzeszowszczyźnie 1939–1944* [Nationalistically-Oriented Underground Movement in the Rzeszów Region] (Rzeszów: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni Przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2003), pp. 221–224. Editor's remark: Centralny Okręg Przemysłowy (COP) – Central Industrial District.

Religious differences were another – and no less important – factor. Jews were commonly perceived as persisting in their error of refusing to accept the true faith, just as they were held guilty of the murder of Jesus. Not only was this belief widespread in rural areas in the Rzeszów region, but it was also shared by some inhabitants of towns and cities in the region. A comment by a Polish woman who, on hearing that Jews were being slaughtered in the ghetto, appears rather symptomatic. She said: “So there *is* God’s punishment and the Jews will suffer forever – this is the punishment for the death of Lord Jesus”<sup>14</sup>.

The Jews, for their part, saw the Polish Christians as persisting in a misguided faith. These religious antagonisms were one of the reasons why marriages between Poles and Jews were few. It was not uncommon for a Jew who decided to marry a Christian to be excluded from the family and from the religious community. This was what the Jewish religion and Jewish national separateness demanded. For the same reason children were sometimes forbidden to maintain contacts with their Polish peers. [...]

Immediately before the entry of German forces, the relations between the Jewish and the Polish communities had been shaped chiefly by economic factors, with cultural-religious differences superimposed on the former. During the war another factor was added: the attitude of some Jews to the arrival of the Red Army and to the 1939 Soviet occupation.

“On September 26, I witnessed the entry of Soviet troops into Lubaczów, a county town in the Lvov province, which had been controlled by Germans between September 12 and 14, 1939,” narrated a Polish soldier. “Two horse-drawn carriages carrying commanders were coming down Kościuszko Street from the east. [...] This column was met by representatives of the

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<sup>14</sup> M. Oster, *Gehinom znaczy piekło. Przeżyłem getto i dziewięć obozów* [Gehinom Means Hell: The Ghetto and the Nine Camps I survived] (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2005), p. 105.



Jewish Community, welcoming them with an offering of bread and salt on a tray.”<sup>15</sup> [...]

At a rally called by Soviets in the town of Ustrzyki Dolne, Bergenbaum Szmyrko, a Jew from Sanok, “shouted from the dais [...] to some 200 assembled people that Poland had been shot to hell. He snapped the [Polish – ER] flag he had in his hand and he stamped on it.”<sup>16</sup> A young Jewish woman from Lubaczów reminisced:

“After several weeks the Red Army, extending its hand to the tormented people, moved into its rightful territory up to the Bug River. For us – myself, my family and my relatives – this was a happy situation to find ourselves in. With broad tolerance and freedom to pursue my plans assured, I took an autonomous position in a spirit distillery, as the chief bookkeeper. I felt happy that distinctions between nationalities no longer mattered.”<sup>17</sup>

Doubtless, one of the reasons which prompted certain groups of Jews to collaborate with the Soviet occupying forces was that in prewar Poland their opportunities for joining the mainstream of political life had been rather limited. They believed the Soviet propaganda, which promised equality and freedom to all people. There is no denying that some Jewish youths and Communists engaged in collaboration with the Soviets; the Poles living in the southern part of the Rzeszów region saw this as collaboration by the entire Jewish community. Even though it was partly based on hearsay, this came to be the prevailing perception of the Jews. It is worthwhile to quote in

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<sup>15</sup> K. Kopf, “Polska w obliczu czerwonej inawzji. Wspomnienia żołnierza NSZ” [Poland Facing the Red Invasion: A National Armed Forces Soldier Reminisces], *Nasz Dziennik*, 18 September 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in: A. Potocki, *Bieszczadzkie losy. Bojkowie i Żydzi* [In the Bieszczady Mountains: Bojkos and Jews], (Rzeszów–Krosno: “Apla,” 2000), p. 168. Cases of Jews’ similar behaviour towards the Red Army and the Polish state were recounted by Jan Karski in his first report for the Government-in-Exile.

<sup>17</sup> Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego ([Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute] hereafter AŻIH), *Memoirs*, 165, Lola Botzner.

this context an account which grossly generalised the whole issue: “[...] I have learned about the fate of a prison warden, one Herszek, a Jew, who after the Soviets’ entry was a member of the militia and later a prison guard,” wrote Tadeusz Markowicz. “He was the epitome of the Jew-traitor of Poland.”<sup>18</sup> For their part, the communities of assimilated, prosperous and religious Jews distanced themselves from supporting the Soviet rule. It will be remembered that these communities accounted for the greater majority of Jews in the region under discussion.

On September 1, 1939, the war between Germany and Poland began. The Rzeszów region was defended by the “Karpaty” [Carpathian Mountains] Army. [...] Given the enemy’s overwhelming strength, the battle on the frontier was effectively lost as early as September 2, 1939. Encountering a weaker adversary, the Germans kept pushing both Polish armies to the north and to the east, capturing towns and villages. By the second half of September the entire Rzeszów region had fallen under German occupation.

The Jews’ attitudes towards the entering Wehrmacht troops and towards the first acts of German terror and crimes varied. A vast majority fled from the Germans to the eastern parts of Poland. Some – though these were isolated cases – welcomed German forces. This is said to have happened in Tyczyn, where Jews brought out bread and fruit to welcome German soldiers.<sup>19</sup> Many Jews admired the German culture, they expected an occupation during the Second World War to be a replica of the First World War model – and, therefore, they disbelieved news about German atrocities. A witness remembered a conversation he had had with a Jewish neighbour in the autumn of 1939. “Neighbour,

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<sup>18</sup> J. Nowakowski (ed.) *Wojenne losy Strzyżowiaków (Ziemia Strzyżowska, Sybir, Monte Cassino)* [Postwar Lives of the People of Strzyżów (The Strzyżów Land, Siberia, Monte Cassino)] (Strzyżów–Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo FD “Kontrapunkt,” 2001), p. 207.

<sup>19</sup> An account by Janicki (from this author’s archive); see also IPN Rz OKŚZpNP, The Files of the Rymanów Crime. S 18/80. Motion to prosecute of February 28, 1983, k. 64.

all these stories the chicken-hearted fellows have been bringing from the West are not true, they are just propaganda. Perhaps here and there Germans did indeed mistreat one, or several – or even a dozen – Jewish families, but such is the law of war. [...]. We, Jews, get much understanding from the Germans [...]. I'm telling you again: I don't believe in the Germans' cruelties."<sup>20</sup>

After a short period of military administration Hitler issued, on October 12, 1939, a law establishing as of October 26, 1939, the General Government (GG) divided into four districts. The Rzeszów province had been originally included in the Cracow District, as its eastern part and since 1941, following the establishment of the fifth District, Galicia, the north-eastern part of the Rzeszów province (the Lubaczów county) became a part of the Galicia District. Only the Narol community was incorporated in the Lublin District. In 1941 there were seven counties in the area under discussion: Dębice, Jarosław, Jasielsk, Krosno, Przemyśl, Rzeszów and Sanok. At that time the Rzeszów region was flanked by the Galicia District from south-east, the Lublin District from north-east, the Radom District from north-west, and Slovakia from the south.

According to the German administration's data, in 1941 (that is, immediately before the plan to annihilate the Jews was carried out) there were 1.5 million Poles and about 100,000 Jews (6.4 percent)<sup>21</sup> living in the Rzeszów region. However, according to the Central Welfare Council's December 1941 data, the number of Jews in the region was no less than 126,242.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in E. Rączy, "Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w latach drugiej wojny światowej na Rzeszowszczyźnie" [Polish-Jewish Relations in the Rzeszów Region during World War II] in: A. Żbikowski (ed.), *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939–1945. Studia i materiały* [Poles and Jews under German Occupation, 1939–1945: Documents and Papers] (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni Przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2006), p. 897.

<sup>21</sup> M. du Prel, *Das Deutsche Generalgouvernement Polen*, Würzburg 1942, pp. 251, 253–255, 257, 262.

<sup>22</sup> Archiwum Akt Nowych ([The New Archives], hereafter AAN), the Central Welfare Council [RGO], Welfare Aid Division IV, 1088, files on

Obviously, as there is no information available on the demographic structure of certain localities, these figures must be treated as estimates.

It should also be noted that about 30,500 Jews had left the Rzeszów region during war hostilities, and about 21,400 had been deported by the Germans beyond the San River, which was at that time the demarcation line.<sup>23</sup> After hostilities had ceased only part of the Jewish population returned to their homes, and many Jews were re-settled into this area from the lands annexed to the Third Reich.<sup>24</sup>

Even with hostilities still in progress, and immediately thereafter, German troops and special security police units (Germ. *Einatzgruppen*) committed many crimes in the Rzeszów region, obeying directives from Hitler, who had repeatedly emphasised to Wehrmacht commanders that “the physical destruction of the Poles as an ethnic group”<sup>25</sup> was the aim of German policy. According to Szymon Datner’s calculations, in the period before the establishment of the civilian administration, i.e. up to October 25, 1939, the Germans carried out seventeen executions in the region, in which they

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population structure in the counties and communities, 1941–1943, k.l-490. On the other hand, the Jewish side’s files contribute little to the matter under consideration. The files of the Jewish Self-Help Organisation (*Żydowska Samopomoc Społeczna – ŻSS*) and of the Jewish Councils are incomplete and the aggregated figures therein pertain to the numbers of Jews in urban centres. According to these sources at the turn of 1941 the Jewish population numbered 76,867 (AŻIH, AJDC, 13-5-10).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. T. Bieda, “Eksterminacja Żydów w Rzeszowie w latach 1939–1944” [The Extermination of Jews in Rzeszów in 1939–1944], *Prace Historyczno-Archwalne*, 1003, vol. 1 p. 151.

<sup>24</sup> Refugees from the Wartheland had been arriving in the Rzeszów region since as early as December 1939. In Rzeszów alone there were 3,084 such refugees, at 31 December 1941 figures. (Cf. W. Bonusiak, “Polityka okupanta i położenie ludności” [The Occupying Authorities’ Policy and the Plight of the Population] in: F. Kiryk (ed.) *Dzieje Rzeszowa* [The History of Rzeszów] (Rzeszów: Urząd Miasta, “Libri Ressovienses,” 2001), vol. 3 p. 560.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in K. Urbański, *Zagłada Żydów w Dystrykcie Radomskim* [The Destruction of Jews in the Radom District] (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pedagogicznej, 2004), p. 20.

murdered 933 people and burned down five towns and seven villages.<sup>26</sup>

These acts of terror were targeted predominately at inhabitants of the occupied territories.

“In the short period when the military directly exercised authority in the occupied Polish territories [...] numerous criminal acts were committed [...]; these acts, varying in the intensity of terror, cruelty and bestiality, were targeted at the general population in the seized Poland, including at Jews.”<sup>27</sup>

From the first days of German occupation of the Rzeszów region, the Jews became the target of persecution and plundering. Under the military administration many incidents of looting, extortion and ordinary theft occurred in towns. Jewish property was looted from shops and flats. Soldiers robbed pedestrians in the street, or amused themselves by cutting off Orthodox Jews' side-locks and beards. Humiliating Jews took many different forms. Mosze Oster recounted that a day after the Germans had seized Rzeszów, a group of soldiers, intent on robbery, forcibly entered a synagogue and beat up those praying there:

“[...] they ordered everyone to empty their pockets and put all the contents on a table. [...] They took from us whatever there was to take, even cuff-links and shirt-studs. One Jew had not handed over the watch he had in his waistcoat pocket. This provoked an even greater aggressiveness in the Germans, which they took out on us. We were beaten up and kicked.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Sz. Datner, *55 dni Wehrmachtu w Polsce (1.IX.–25.X. 1939)* [55 Days of Wehrmacht in Poland] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1967), pp. 83–84.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in: T. Berenstein, A. Rutkowski, “Prześladowanie ludności żydowskiej w okresie hitlerowskiej administracji wojskowej na okupowanych ziemiach polskich (1 IX – 25.X. 1939)” [Persecution of the Jewish Population under Hitlerite Military Administration in Occupied Polish Territories], *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 1961, No 38, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> M. Oster, *op. cit.* p. 19.

In other localities in the region, for instance in Dynów and Mielec, Germans set fire to synagogues with people inside; in other places they desecrated prayer houses. Among the greatest crimes committed on Jews by Germans immediately after the capture of the Rzeszów region there were: the murder of over one hundred Jews in Dynów on September 14<sup>29</sup>, of about seventy in Mielec on September 11, of 102 in Przemyśl on September 17–19, of about two hundred in Nienadowa in late September<sup>30</sup>. These figures show that the numbers of Jews who perished in the different German actions were very high – markedly higher, in the first two months of the occupation, than the number of Polish victims. However, in the next two years few operations targeted specifically at Jews were mounted in the Rzeszów region, while those targeted at Poles, in particular at Polish intelligentsia, continued. At that time the Germans regarded the intelligentsia as the main enemy. This is borne out by the victim count. According to this author's findings, throughout 1939–1941 about 1,100 Poles and about 900 Jews were murdered in the Rzeszów region.<sup>31</sup>

Here are some examples of the crimes committed by Germans on Poles in the first period of German rule: in Stefkowa, Germans shot five villagers who had been watching the Wehrmacht troops entering the village; in Olchowce on September 11, German soldiers shot six people and, to terrorize the inhabitants, forbade the removal of the bodies from the place of execution for three days. In the village of Wróblík Królewski on

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<sup>29</sup> There are considerable disparities, in the literature of the subject and in witness accounts, as to the number of Jewish people murdered in September 1939 in Dynów, ranging from 60 to 400. See, for instance, W. Wierzbieniec, *Z dziejów społeczności...*, p. 56.

<sup>30</sup> E. Rączy, I. Witowicz, *Zagłada Żydów na Rzeszowszczyźnie. Album pamięci*, Rzeszów–Warszawa 2004, p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> AIPN Rz, OKBHZ, 189–212; A register of the sites and facts of Nazi crimes in the counties of: Brzozów, Dębica, Jarosław, Kolbuszowa, Krosno, Lesko, Leżajsk, Łańcut, Niżań, Przeworsk, Ropczyce, Sanok, Tarnobrzeg, *Rejestr miejsc i faktów zbrodni hitlerowskich w województwie rzeszowskim*, Warszawa 1984, *passim*. Cf. Dz. Datner, *op. cit.* p. 9.

September 9, Wehrmacht soldiers who were searching the village shot four men in front of their families, without any reason whatsoever. On September 10, Germans “pacified”<sup>32</sup> the village of Besko, killing 22 people, including a woman and two children. The cruelty with which this so-called pacification was carried out was recounted by Mikołaj Tatarski, whose father had been shot by Germans then: “he was massacred so much that the family could not remove the clothes he had worn when arrested, what with tissue and entrails trailing behind the body.”<sup>33</sup>

Murders and repressions were used against Poles throughout the period of occupation. Poles were kept in prisons and tortured during interrogations. For example, in Jasło in the cellars of the Gestapo building, there was a place where prisoners were interrogated in the course of investigation. Deaths from torture and exhaustion were known to occur there. Besides beating, which was commonly administered during interrogation, the interrogators applied their own methods of extorting testimony, such as locking the interrogated person in an airtight cabinet where he or she suffocated, or pushing his or her head into a bucket full of urine and excrements. Every month about two hundred prisoners were shot or transported to prisons in Tarnów and Cracow, to be executed there or sent to the camps.<sup>34</sup>

As a matter of principle, a Pole found guilty of an offence against the occupying authorities – be it the possession of arms, membership in an underground organisation, subver-

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<sup>32</sup> Editor’s note: on “pacification” see note 43 in M. Urynowicz’s paper.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in: S. Zabierowski, *Zbrodnie Wehrmachtu w Rzeszowskim* [Wehrmacht’s Crimes in the Rzeszów Region] p. 5, typescript.

<sup>34</sup> In 1940–1942 alone 2,337 Poles were transported from the Rzeszów region to the Tarnów prison. See *Księga pamięci. Transporty Polaków do KL Auschwitz z Krakowa i innych miejscowości Polski południowej 1940–1944* [Memory Book: Transports of Poles from Cracow and Other Localities in South Poland in 1940–1944 to KL Auschwitz] (Warszawa–Oświęcim: Towarzystwo Opieki nad Oświęcimiem, Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, 2002), vol. 1, p. 55.

sion, or aid to so-called “political criminals”<sup>35</sup> – was sentenced to death, with the sentence carried out summarily. Lesser offenders or suspects (where there was no proof of guilt) were sent to concentration camps. There were no established rules; in each case the decision reflected the arbitrary will, or a whim, of the German police officials in charge of the case.

In 1942–1944 the campaign against Poles reached its peak. By 1942 the terror practiced by the German occupying forces had spread gradually to all groups of the Polish society. An official announcement of an even more repressive system came with the designation of the GG, on June 21, 1943, as an area of guerrilla activities. Governor-General’s regulation of October 2, 1943 “on fighting subversion against German reconstruction of the GG” extended the catalogue of political crimes punishable by death; these crimes were examined by summary courts, with the trial limited in practice to giving a guilty sentence. Following the promulgation of this regulation, public executions were instituted, most of them as a form of reprisal, and collective responsibility was exercised. In 1943–1944 alone, 2,422 Polish inhabitants of the Rzeszów region were shot on these grounds.<sup>36</sup>

Operations targeting Poles were accompanied by the confiscation of Poles’ property and the “pacification” of villages (raids). During a “pacification” all inhabitants would be herded to the centre of the village, interrogated, and beaten up; selected individuals would be shot and many people would be arrested and deported to the Reich or to prison camps. This was the standard “pacification” formula – but in practice there

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<sup>35</sup> This was a very broad term, comprising the escapees from camps, Soviet prisoners of war, Jews, and all Poles wanted by the Germans for various reasons.

<sup>36</sup> Excluding the victims murdered in the camps and prisons. Findings by the author based on: AIPN Rz, OKBHZ, 189–212; A register of the sites and facts of Hitlerite crimes in the counties of: Brzozów, Dębica, Jarosław, Kolbuszowa, Krosno, Lesko, Leżajsk, Łańcut, Niżań, Przeworsk, Ropczyce, Sanok, Tarnobrzeg, *Rejestr miejsc i faktów zbrodni hitlerowskich w województwie rzeszowskim* [Database of Places and Records of Hitlerite Crimes in the Rzeszów Province] (Warszawa, 1984), *passim*.



were deviations from the standard, according to the Germans' personal ingenuity. In the winter of 1942/1943 in the villages of Przewrotne and Medynia Głogowska, north of Rzeszów, and in the villages of Łopuszka Wielka, Kaszyce, Rokietnica and Czelatyce, a total of 250 people were murdered on the spot and several hundred arrested. The first two villages were "pacified" for reasons which included helping Jews and cooperating with the Polish Workers' Party – People's Guard (PPR-GL). The "pacifications" of the remaining villages were a reprisal for the killing of a female German informer and for no one providing information on the whereabouts of weapons stolen by resistance fighters from a German warehouse in Nienadowa on the San River.

From 1943 the informer network had been expanding. By the occupation authorities' design, this network was to comprise all Germans and the largest possible number of Poles "so that no occurrence escaped the attention and control of the police"<sup>37</sup>. Moreover, personal checks of pedestrians and train passengers, round-ups, and searches of residential premises, cinema theatres and restaurants were instituted. [...]

After the cessation of hostilities in 1939, the German authorities started using Jewish and Polish labour also for work serving the economy of the Third Reich. This matter was regulated by a 1939 law imposing mandatory employment on the Poles and compulsory work on the Jews. These requirements for both groups were enforced with the utmost ruthlessness, regardless of the fact that from the first days of the occupation the Germans had forced Jews to perform any work they were ordered to do: clearing town rubble, cleaning German residential premises, handling cargo, cleaning and maintaining military equipment. In many cases these tasks merely provided a pretext for physically and morally tormenting the people detained and forced to perform them.

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<sup>37</sup> S. Dąbrowa-Kostka, *Hitlerowskie afisze śmierci* [Hitlerite Posters of Death] (Kraków: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1983), p. 201.

After 1940, conscription for labour became the responsibility of *Arbeitsamt* (Labour Office). In the early period of the occupation the methods of dealing with Jewish workers, while designed on a smaller scale, were more systematic and brutal than those applied to the Poles. At that time the Germans were setting up in the Rzeszów region forced labour camps to which mainly Jews were sent. The inmates – slave labourers – were used for fortification works along the border with the USSR<sup>38</sup>. In 1940–1943 Jewish residents of the Rzeszów region were incarcerated in 22 forced labour camps established by the Germans in this area. The largest camps were in Huta Komorowska, Pustków, Szebnie and Zasław – the latter for Jewish prisoners only, in the others there were also Polish prisoners. In all camps inmates were forced to work beyond their strength, they were starved, beaten and shot for the smallest offence.

The German-imposed duty to be employed forced both Jews and Poles to look for military and civilian workplaces, which were scattered all over the region. For the former, jobs in such establishments were an illusory safeguard against incarceration in camps or deportation eastward; for Poles, they were chiefly a protection against forcible conscription for work in Germany. It should be noted that from 1942, with the Third Reich's demand for labour on the rise, the *Arbeitsamts* were relying for their activities on close cooperation with the police. The conscripting of Poles had turned into brutal repression. The police were hunting down those who attempted to evade deportation for labour in Germany, and harassing their families – they even murdered fugitives and transport-dodgers. If a person conscripted for work in Germany could not be caught, members of his or her family were arrested instead, to fill the quota.

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<sup>38</sup> These works were carried on in camps established in Lipsk, Narol, Płazów, Cieszanów, Dzików Stary, and Dzików Nowy. J. Marszałek, *Obozy pracy w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie w latach 1939–1945* [Labour Camps in the General Government in 1939–1945] (Lublin: Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, 1998), p. 117.

From the first days of the occupation the German authorities set out to plunder whatever could be of use to the German state. From the outset, two methods of plunder were in evidence. The first consisted of official confiscation of Polish and Jewish property by the occupation authorities and officially designated institutions. The second amounted to appropriation of property by civilian officials, Wehrmacht officers and troops, and the police. Whatever had any value was stolen: from food to bedding, clothing, jewelry, money, church bells – even copper pots, door handles and all kinds of metal objects. Buildings and premises belonging to institutions, organisations and individuals were requisitioned. At the same time, the German authorities set out to “Aryanise” the economy by issuing a number of regulations pertaining to Jewish businesses, trade and money transactions<sup>39</sup>. All these measures served to push the Jewish population outside the economic life of the region and caused its rapid pauperisation. At the same time, Jews were being ousted from the social and cultural life of the region and isolated from their environment. The regulation on the marking of Jews was published on November 23, 1939. From that date on, every Jew over ten years of age had to wear a white armband with the Star of David, on pain of imprisonment, fine, or deportation to a camp. Later, the removal of the armband carried the death penalty. This marking of Jews, Tomasz Szarota noted, made them immediately identifiable and facilitated anti-Jewish operations, while setting the Jews apart from the rest of the society, giving them an outlaw status and, last but not least, depriving them of human attributes. Thus the non-Jewish

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<sup>39</sup> Such as the regulation of Governor-General Hans Frank of November 23, 1939 on mandatory marking of shops and workplaces (German, Polish and Jewish) with appropriate inscriptions and symbols; the regulation of November 1939 on blocking the bank accounts belonging to Jews, with a maximum withdrawal limit of 250 zlotys a week; or regulation of January 21, 1941 on mandatory reporting and registration of all assets.

population could be influenced and made to feel estranged from – or even hostile to – the Jews<sup>40</sup>.

The regulations which restricted and later prevented free movement of the Jewish population also served to isolate them. Foremost were the regulations of November 11, 1939 and of November 12, 1939. Once they had been put in effect, the Jews became “tied” to their assigned areas of residence, to become an easier target of the anti-Jewish actions mounted by the occupying authorities.

Significantly, the first years of the occupation and of German harassment were perceived by the Jews as less terrifying than originally assumed. Despite the steadily worsening living conditions, the situation of the Jewish population in the Rzeszów region was better than in the other parts of the occupied country. On returning home from Truskawiec in 1941, Helena Stiefel said outright: “In Krosno I found a situation which, when compared with the circumstances of Jews in other towns, I do not hesitate to call idyllic”<sup>41</sup>.

With repressions targeted mainly at the Poles in the first years of the occupation, a common belief at that time was that the Germans’ plans did not go beyond robbing the Jews. This belief had prompted many Jews to return home from the Red Army-occupied territories. The earliest such returns occurred when hostilities were still underway or immediately on their cessation in 1939; the latest – after Germany’s attack on the USSR.

The ultimate isolation of the Jews in the Rzeszów region came in the wake of the establishment of ghettos. This process began in 1941.<sup>42</sup> In a majority of towns, closed Jewish resi-

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<sup>40</sup> T. Szarota, “Reakcja okupowanej Europy na oznakowanie Żydów gwiazdą Dawida” [Marking the Jews with the Star of David: How Occupied Europe Reacted], *Żydowski Kwartalnik Historyczny* 2001, No 1. p. 26.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in: E. Rączy, *Ludność żydowska w Krośnie 1939–1946* [The Jewish Population of Krosno in 1939–1946] Biblioteka Krośnieńska, seria Historia (Krosno: Muzeum Rzemiosła, 1999), p. 20. The situation was similar in other localities in the region.

<sup>42</sup> The Rzeszów region’s largest two ghettos were established in Rzeszów and Przemyśl. In Rzeszów a Jewish residential area was established in 1941

dential areas were established only in 1942. These ghettos were short-lived, some of them existed only several weeks. They were the penultimate stage before the annihilation of the Jewish inhabitants of the Rzeszów region. According to the agenda adopted by the German authorities, all ghettos were to be liquidated by the end of December 1942, the fate of the surviving Jews to be sealed in the death camps.

In line with this agenda, in the summer of 1942 the Nazis embarked on the liquidation of the Jewish population. Jews were deported from the Rzeszów region mainly to the Bełżec death camp.<sup>43</sup> During each deportation several people were shot on the spot, notably those with a physical disability, sick, elderly and children, as unfit for transport, and those who were too slow at obeying commands or who put up resistance. In parallel with the deportations, Jews were being murdered in mass executions, most of which were carried out in the nearby forests or in Jewish cemeteries. [...]

Some other characteristics of the occupying authorities' policy need to be noted. To ensure that the plan for the extermination of the Jews was carried out without major obstructions, propaganda was used alongside the anti-Jewish laws and the terror. It was also used to discourage Poles from maintaining contacts with Jews. Polish-language papers ran anti-Jewish articles portraying the Jews as swindlers, traitors and parasites – in other words, the very cause of the misfortunes that had befallen Polish society. It was suggested to the Poles that the liquidation of the Jewish population was very much to their own advantage, as the Germans' way of counteracting unfair competition. Such formerly Jewish property as had not been sent to the Reich was given, or sold at bargain prices, to Poles or Ukrainians.

“In Baligród there is no Jew left,” reads an entry in a 1942 parish register. “The Germans took the more valuable of their

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and sealed in January 1942. In July 1942 the Germans established a ghetto in Przemyśl.

<sup>43</sup> According to findings by Tadeusz Kowalski, 68,000 Jewish residents of the Rzeszów region were deported to this camp and murdered there.

[the Jews'] possessions and furniture, and the remaining odds and ends were bought by peasants from the nearby villages. These things were collected in the market for people to take away. Some of the Jews' houses were sold cheaply to Ukrainians and many were pulled down and destroyed [...]."<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, the occupation authorities were printing and pasting posters alerting pedestrians to contagious diseases in Jewish residential areas. The posters warned against the Jews as the carriers of squalor, lice and typhus. According to German propaganda, it was the Jews who were the cause of epidemics. Indeed, epidemics did occur frequently during the occupation<sup>45</sup> – though, obviously, for quite different reasons.

Under the same logic, the Poles were portrayed to the Jews as implacable antisemites. These tactics increased to some extent both ethnic groups' fear of strangers, just as they were leading to an even greater isolation of the Jews.

Nonetheless, there were Poles who despite the omnipresent terror and the anti-Jewish propaganda, tried to help the endangered people. To eliminate such activities, the occupation authorities issued regulations concerning Jews who left their assigned areas of residence and Poles who helped them. The third regulation of Dr. Hans Frank, on restrictions applicable to residence in the General Government, came into force on October 15, 1941. Any Jew who left their assigned residential area was to be punished by death, as was any Pole who knowingly provided shelter to a Jew.

In March 1942, the implementation of the "final solution"<sup>46</sup> of the Jewish question was put in train in the Rzeszów

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<sup>44</sup> Quoted in: F. Oberc, "Okupacja Sowiecka, Sanok–Zagórz–Lesko 1939–1944" [Soviet Occupation: Sanok–Zagórz–Lesko 1939–1944], *Zeszyty Archiwum Ziemi Sanockiej*, Sanok 2007, No 7, p. 64.

<sup>45</sup> For instance, in the Rzeszów county there were two epidemics: in the winter of 1941 and in the spring of 1942, and cases of typhus occurred also in 1943. In the winter of 1941 an epidemic of typhus was reported in Krosno.

<sup>46</sup> *Endlösung der Judenfrage* – one of German terms for the annihilation of the Jews. A crucial part of implementing the extermination policy in the

region. To prevent Jews from going into hiding, and Poles from aiding them, yet another regulation was issued on October 28, 1942, signed by Otto Krüger (Senior SS and Police Commander in the GG). Under this regulation the Jews who contravened German regulations prohibiting them from being present outside ghettos were liable to death penalty, as were all those who knowingly sheltered or fed such Jews. Even failure to lay information about the presence of a Jew outside a ghetto carried a severe penalty. The highest German authorities' regulations on the handling of Jews and those aiding them were followed by regulations issued by local authorities, clearly spelling out the penalty for aiding them.<sup>47</sup> Although the first of the above regulations provided for trial by a special court (Germ. *Sondergericht*)<sup>48</sup>, in practice the German police force seldom abided by this provision and the offenders were murdered on the spot.

The Poles residing in the eastern part of the Cracow District came under the jurisdiction of the German Special Court in Rzeszów.<sup>49</sup> [...] The text of one of the death sentence reads:

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Rzeszów region commenced with the deportation of Jews from Mielec on March 9, 1942 [it was carried out in the framework of *Aktion Reinhardt*, the operation whose purpose was to murder all of the General Government's Jews – editor's remark].

<sup>47</sup> AIPN in Warsaw (hereafter AIPN), the Central Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes Against the Polish Nation (hereafter GKŚZpNP), German Posters, 10t/1; Regulation of Kreishauptmann Schlüter of December 1, 1942 on the Deportation of the Jews from the Dębica Administrative Area; *ibid.*, 44 t/1; Regulation of Kreishauptmann Dr Class of October 5, 1942 on the Deportation of the Jews from the Sanok Administrative Area. A proclamation by the Head Administrative officer for the Przemyśl county, Dr Heinisch, of 27 July 1942 on the deportation of Jews from Przemyśl reads: "Any Pole or Ukrainian who attempts to obstruct in any manner the deportation of Jews shall be shot [...]. Any Pole or Ukrainian who attempts to hide or to abet the hiding a Jew shall be shot [...]."

<sup>48</sup> *Dziennik Rozporządzeń dla Generalnego Gubernatorstwa*, No. 99, 25 October 1941, Cracow 1941.

<sup>49</sup> Such fragments of the files of the case as have been preserved are kept in the State Archive in Rzeszów (hereafter APRz). The archives cover the areas of the then counties of Jarosław, Krosno, Rzeszów and Sanok. For more see T. Bieda, "Akta Sądu Specjalnego w zbiorach Archiwum Państwowego w

“Feld was subject to deportation from Sanok under sections 1 and 2 of the police regulation of November 10, 1942 on the establishment of Jewish residential areas in the Radom, Cracow and Galicia Districts. Under this regulation no Jewish residential area was to be established in Sanok and, accordingly, Feld could no longer remain in the town. [...] The defendant admitted that she had hidden and kept the Jew, thereby knowingly committing a punishable crime [...]. There is no evidence to corroborate the defendant’s assertion that she had been engaged to Feld before the war, [that] they intended to get married and that her enduring affection prompted her to shelter him. Such a conduct cannot be justified in this case. Under law it is punishable by death and this penalty must be meted out also to the defendant.”<sup>50</sup>

A death sentence for robbery given to Stanisław Pliś on October 30, 1943 was rather unusual, twenty-four Poles named in the same Police and SS announcement of November 1 having been sentenced to death for illegal activities. It was only by the testimony of Stefania Pliś, the murdered man’s wife, that the real cause could be established. She explained that her husband had had trade dealings with Jews in the Przemyśl ghetto. He had sold objects received from them, using the proceeds to buy food which he then smuggled into the ghetto.<sup>51</sup> This was the real reason for sentencing him to death. It should be remembered that under the law in effect at that time all belongings and goods of the Jews were property of the German authorities.

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Rzeszowie” [in] T. Kowalski (ed.), *Studia nad okupacją hitlerowską południowo-wschodniej części Polski*, Rzeszów 1985, vol. 4 p. 102.

<sup>50</sup> IPN Rz, OKŚZpNP, II Ds. 60/68 – the files of the case against Dr. Friedrich Aldenhoff, judge of the German Court in Rzeszów; the discussion of the sentence in a criminal case against Stanisława Kornecka. [...] Many other cases can be found in the State Archives in Przemyśl (hereafter APP): The files on the City of Jarosław, 824. German Proclamations of September 1939 – 14 August 1944; Polish Red Cross Exhumation Report (from the collection of Leszek Włodek).

<sup>51</sup> IPN Rz, OKŚZpNP, I S. 101/70. The files on the shooting of ten Poles in Przemyśl on 29 November 1943. Record of the examination of witness Stefania Pliś [unsigned].



In most cases, however, there are no documents and witness accounts on which to establish the real reason for the death sentence. In consequence, it is difficult to say in how many cases the charge of “aiding political criminals” really meant hiding Jews, or helping them in some other way.

In most cases executions for aiding Jews were carried out without a court trial – indeed, often without as much as a pretence of legitimacy.

“I was personally acquainted with Florian Szczurek of Janowiec,” recounted a witness. “I don’t remember the date when he was shot [...] and the two Jews who had been hiding at Florian Szczurek’s. As soon as they had found the Jews, they dragged them from their hiding place and shot them in a nearby woods [...] and then they came to Florian Szczurek’s house, took him and shot him in the same woods next to the Jews.”<sup>52</sup>

Many more such cases can be quoted. During the Eichman trial in Jerusalem a Jew from Przemyśl spoke of the shooting of a family of seven for concealing a Jewish child. In Brzóza Królewska Sebastian and Katarzyna Kazak, a married couple, had been hiding three Jews. In March the Poles and their wards were shot.<sup>53</sup> In May 1944 in the village of Jankowice, Szymon Fołta was murdered together with the four Jews he had been hiding<sup>54</sup>.

Among the Krosno prison inmates there were a woman from Korczyn, one Urbanek, and her Jewish ward. According to a witness account

“[...] the corpse of the Jewish woman was carried out from the prison on a straw-filled mattress. Shortly after that Urbanek

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<sup>52</sup> IPN Rz, OKŚZpNP, II Ds. 23/67. The files of the case against members of the German gendarmerie in Mielec. Record of the examination of witness Stanisław Grzech, k. 105.

<sup>53</sup> An account by Józefa Siuzdak, born Kazak (from the author’s collections). See also IPN OKŚZpNP, I Ds. 2/70, The files on the murder of Jews in Brzóza Królewska. Record of the examination of witness Agnieszka Kazak [unsigned]. [...]

<sup>54</sup> The Register Office of Chłopice, *Liber mortuorum pro pago Jankowice anno 1938–1949*, k. 30.

from Korczyn was brought into the courtyard. [...] Becker ordered her to sit down by the [...] corpse, he lifted the edge of a scarf she was wearing on her head, put his revolver to her head and fired, and then he pushed her dead body so that it fell across that of the Jewish woman.”<sup>55</sup> [...]

Poles were murdered even when they were only suspected of aiding Jews.<sup>56</sup> Sometimes an uncorroborated suspicion that a Pole had contacts with Jewish people, or his or her accidental presence in a place where Jews were hiding, was considered a sufficient reason for arrest. Some of those arrested were subsequently shot. Basically, any humane impulse towards Jewish people carried the risk of punitive actions by Germans, who sought to terrorise Poles in this way. Sometimes just greeting a working Jew, or shaking hands with him or her, could land a person in a camp.<sup>57</sup>

One of the witnesses of the execution of Jews in Sanok narrated after the war:

“As the firing went on [...] a woman started to run. She managed to get past the cemetery wall, as far as a nearby house across Kiczura Street. The Gestapo man who had caught up with her did not shoot [...] he wrenched a pickaxe from a prisoner’s hand and struck the woman on the head with the sharp edge, smashing her head [...]. I felt sick then, and I threw up. Seeing this, the Gestapo man said to me in Polish: ‘You are so sorry for them you feel sick, eh? Watch your step, or you may go where they’ve gone.’”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> IPN OKŚZpNP, II S, 93/71. The files of the investigation against Oskar Bäcker, vol. 1. Record of the examination of witness Wawrzyniec Baran, k. 98.

<sup>56</sup> Among those murdered on this charge were the Samojednis, Jan and Maria, of Głogów Małopolski, shot on February 19, 1943, and Jan Bobowski of Lipiny, shot on September 24, 1943. The latter’s house and farm buildings were burned by the Germans.

<sup>57</sup> IPN Rz, OKŚZpNP, I Ds. 3/67. The files of the case of Helmut Lofenz. Record of the examination of witness Władysław Cenaar, k. 44.

<sup>58</sup> IPN Rz, OKŚZpNP, I Ds. 41/70. The files of the investigation into the shooting of people in Sanok in 1939–1945. Record of the examination of witness Bronisław Korczyński, k. 22.

Such threats, far from being idle, could be carried out at any time.

It should be emphasised that in no other occupied country did the Germans administer such extreme oppression and terror for aiding Jews as in the GG. For example, in the Netherlands, Anne Frank and her family had been hiding in 1942 and 1943, until betrayed. Captured by the Germans, the Frank family were not shot immediately, but sent to Westerbork<sup>59</sup> and from there, to KL Auschwitz-Birkenau. Anne's father survived the camp, as did the Dutch who had been helping them; they suffered severely, but they were not killed out of hand. In contrast, on March 24, 1944 in the village of Markowa Wola, Germans captured Jews who had been hiding with the Ulms, a Polish family, and the Ulms and their six children were shot. Gendarme Józef Kokot who had murdered the Ulms yelled as he killed the children: "Look how Polish swine who hide Jews die!"<sup>60</sup>

In the Reszów region, as in the entire GG, appropriating Jewish property also carried death penalty. In 1939 in Tarnobrzeg, a Pole named Krociel was shot in a public execution. A witness to this execution said: "[...] he was suspected of having taken a hat from a Jewish shop at the time of deportation of the Tarnobrzeg Jews across the San River. I was passing by on my way to work and I saw Tarnobrzeg gendarmes lead Krościel out<sup>61</sup>, blindfolded, and tie him to a tree. Five gendarmes – a firing squad – positioned themselves opposite him. Then there was a volley of shots and Krościel was dead."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> A transit camp for Dutch Jews to be deported "eastwards" – which meant being sent to a death camp.

<sup>60</sup> M. Szyptma, "Kto ratuje jedno życie..." [Whoever Saves One Life...], *Dziennik Polski*, 2 March 2004, p. 35. For more on this subject see also: M. Szyptma, J. Szarek, *Ofiara Sprawiedliwych. Rodzina Ulmów – oddali życie za ratowanie Żydów* [Sacrifice of the Righteous: The Ulm Family – They Who Gave Their Lives to Save Jews] (Cracow, 2004), *passim*.

<sup>61</sup> The executed man's name was Krociel. AIPN Rz, WSR Rzeszów, IPN-Rz-107/1776, Record of the examination of witness Bronisława Gil, k. 472.

<sup>62</sup> AIPN Rz, WSR Rzeszów, IPN-Rz-107/1776, Record of the examination of witness Waław Mączka, k.422. This fact was corroborated by Antoni Lubera and Bronisława Gil, k. 471.

Similar deeds were committed also in other localities in the region: in June 1943 in Dulcza Wielka one Ziobroń<sup>63</sup>, a Pole, was shot for possessing Jewish things. In the summer of 1942 a member of the Gestapo force stationed in Krosno murdered Władysław Pilawski on the suspicion of appropriating some previously Jewish property during the deportation of Jews from Krosno. In most cases, Poles caught holding Jewish items for safekeeping were sent to concentration camps. This was the crime for which the Łukaczys, a married couple from Lutowska, and Seweryn, a woman from Pruchnik who had concealed Jewish religious books<sup>64</sup>, perished at Auschwitz.

It should also be noted that occasionally exemptions were made and no death penalty was given for aiding Jews. Many of these exemptions were motivated by the desire to obtain a property gain from the offender against German regulations, or by megalomania of the German authorities. [...]

The differing situations of the Poles and the Jews in the Rzeszów region during the Second World War resulted predominately from the German authorities' policy towards the two ethnic groups. From the outset of the occupation the Jewish people had been subject to discriminatory regulations and from the second half of 1941 – to biological annihilation. To survive, Jews had to look to Poles for help.

[...] Emanuel Ringelblum appears to have over-generalised in regard to the money compensation aspect when he argued that money had been the paramount consideration in hiding Jews: “The indigenous families, for instance, depend for their existence on the money the Jews pay daily to their Aryan host.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> AIPN Rz, OKBHZ, Questionnaires, the Mielec county, 191/388.

<sup>64</sup> IPN Rz, OKŚZpNP, I Ds. 26/69, vol.1. The files of the investigation against the gendarmerie in Jarosław. Stefan Kruszyński [unsigned]. Record of the examination of witness Stefan Kruszyński [unsigned].

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in: M. Arczyński and W. Balcerak (*Kryptonim “Żegota”: z dziejów pomocy Żydom w Polsce 1939–1945* [Code name: “Żegota”: On Help to Jews in Poland, 1939–1945] (Warszawa: “Czytelnik,” 1983), p. 63. The author's thesis is borne out by findings by Nechama Tec (*When Light Pierced*

Admittedly, in the Rzeszów region, much like elsewhere, getting paid for help was by no means an exception. Fela Rozenblat-Walke recounted after the war that one day they had been approached by a villager offering to hide the entire family for a payment. Having failed until then to find a hiding place, they welcomed his offer as a godsend. Ultimately, they were provided with a hideout in the peasant's stable. Another man received 300 zlotys and a gold watch for hiding one person.<sup>66</sup> One family in hiding were paying 500 zlotys a month for a hideout that was only their alternative refuge.

Zofia Haftler and her mother, who were hiding with Poles, were paying 1,000 a month for shelter and food.<sup>67</sup> Wiktor Rattner found shelter with a Pole for a one-off payment of 500 zlotys, and Hadasa Hohdorf paid a Polish woman 10,000 zlotys for taking in her seventeen-months-old child.<sup>68</sup> Jan Tereszkiwicz of Chmielnik concealed Roza Scheinbach Majerowicz and her two underage daughters for three years in outbuildings on his farm. Initially the mother had paid 20 zlotys a day for their shelter and food. Tereszkiwicz said that, all in all, she had paid him about a thousand zlotys. After her money had run out, the Pole kept and fed them at his own expense.<sup>69</sup>

The highest price known to have been paid by Jews hiding with locals in the Rzeszów region was a one-off payment of fifty thousand zlotys – an estimated cost of building a bun-

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*the Darkness. Christian Rescues of Jews in Nazi Occupied Poland*, New York 1986) who established, on the basis of 308 survivor accounts citing 565 Poles who had helped them, that 84 percent of these people had been providing help absolutely gratuitously and only 16 percent had taken money for the aid given. A broader analysis of these findings is presented in A. Klossowska, "Polacy wobec zagłady Żydów" [Poles Facing the Extermination of Jews], *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, 1988, No. 4, pp. 121–122. [...]

<sup>66</sup> ŻIH, Relacje [Witness Accounts], 2981, Fela Rozenblat-Walke.

<sup>67</sup> ŻIH, Relacje, 2377, Stanisław Jastrząb.

<sup>68</sup> ŻIH, Relacje, 2734, Wiktor Rattner; 3245, Hadasa Hohdorf.

<sup>69</sup> AIPN W, GKSZpNP, IPN BU 392/152 (P.150). Record of the examination of witness Jan Tereszkiwicz.

ker to accommodate fifteen people.<sup>70</sup> Food was to be paid for separately.

Sometimes terrified Jews would promise Poles to contribute to the costs of their upkeep, but never delivered on the promise, for in reality they had only little money – or none.<sup>71</sup>

Kazimiera Kreicarek's narrative sheds some light on the financial situation of Poles and of their Jewish wards, who had – at least at the outset – some money and could contribute to the costs of their upkeep:

“I want to add that at the beginning the Jews gave me money, or gold rings which I sold to buy food, but towards the end I fed them for half a year out of my own savings, what with them having no money or any valuables left. Then I was selling my own rings and other things.”<sup>72</sup>

An attitude like this involved many sacrifices. Poor families had to sacrifice even more. It should be emphasised that in the Rzeszów region many poor families were hiding Jews, or giving them food. Maria Kosiorowska, with whom three Jews had been hiding, narrated after the war:

“I was on my own on a small farm, with a young child. The house we had been building with our own hands had not yet been finished when the war came. [...] In April 1942 [...] three Jews came to me [...] I showed them the house – a one-room affair, the interior unfinished, with the bread oven built partly outside and a recess by the oven, on the right-hand side, to store the baking utensils in. Over the hole, which served as the entrance, my husband's working clothes were hanging from a nail.”<sup>73</sup>

The Leśniak family of Frysztak were hiding a group of Jews. After the war Janina Leśniak narrated:

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<sup>70</sup> ŻIH, Relacje, 3380, Marian Bień.

<sup>71</sup> ŻIH, Relacje, 6358, Anna Horak.

<sup>72</sup> AIPN Rz, OKŚZpNP, KPP 3/1985. Record of the examination of witness Kazimiera Kreicarek [unsigned].

<sup>73</sup> AŻIH, Yad Vashem, 2113, Maria Kosiorowska.

“My father had a two-hectare holding and this land had to feed our family of seven and the five Jews. Sometimes other Jews come to us to eat, too. Occasionally my father borrowed money and food from his relations, telling them his children were starving, so that he could feed us all. Some days we ate only once a day, so that the food would go round.”<sup>74</sup>

In the village of Maćkówka, the Obłozs, a married couple, were harbouring the Fromers, a family of seven. With their own children, there were sixteen people to feed – way beyond their means. One of the Obłoz daughters recounted:

“Before the harvest things were getting harder and harder at home. We had no food [...], our living conditions were terrible, there being only two rooms [...] Father kept pleading with them [the Fromers] to move to some safer place, saying that even if we were not all shot, we would all starve to death.”<sup>75</sup>

After the war the fact that Poles had demanded payment for hiding Jews, in particular for the food supplied, was judged differently by different people. Some spoke of this with gratitude because these Poles had saved Jews from starvation – even if for a payment. Others felt resentful, oblivious to the fact that living costs in the GG, already very high at the turn of 1939, had been rising ever since. [...]

For a great majority of Poles under the German occupation feeding their own families was a priority. Under the coupon system introduced by the occupying authorities, getting food depended on opportunities to find a job – and, therefore, getting a pay and food coupons – and on the black market. In the Cracow District only about 20–30 percent of the population were receiving coupons, and the rations were below the

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<sup>74</sup> AŻIH, Yad Vashem, 1229, Janina Leśniak.

<sup>75</sup> An account given by Maria Pruchnicka-Kaczmarczyk (from this author's archive). Other Poles were in an equally difficult situation. See also AŻIH, Accounts by: Aniela Leja (1269), Leokadia Kadziolka-Kielar (2526). Corroborated by Jewish witnesses: Jozeph Goldman (1329), Heinrich Schmidt (1906).

subsistence level.<sup>76</sup> Under the circumstances, Poles had to rely on “the black market” – or many of them would have died of starvation. Those who had chosen to hide others were even more dependent on the black market.

In 1942 a Polish manual worker earned an average of 160 zlotys a month and a white-collar worker 289 zlotys.<sup>77</sup> In that year, after the harvest when prices had fallen, in Rzeszów the average salary could buy: 5.8 kilogramme of rye bread, 3.6 kilogramme of barley cereal, 0.7 kilogramme of butter, 1.5 kilogramme of sugar, and 5.8 kilogramme of beef.<sup>78</sup>

Farm accounts are another revealing illustration of the heavy sacrifices the Poles who were hiding or feeding Jews had to sustain. A comparison of free-market prices with those paid by the Germans for produce delivered under the compulsory quotas shows a vast difference between the two. In the case of potatoes, that staple food of the Rzeszów region villagers, the difference was, respectively: eleven zlotys per tonne in 1939–1940, 109 zlotys per tonne in 1942–1943, and 323 zlotys per tonne in 1944–1945.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> A minimum dietary requirement for an adult doing work [other than manual], as established before war by the League of Nations, was 2,400 calories. Under the rationing system in the Cracow District the calorie allowance was: 740 calories in 1941, 576 calories in 1942 and only 414 calories in 1943. For example, in Przemyśl the ration coupons were an equivalent of 600 calories a day; in Sanok in October 1941 a monthly ration coupon for an adult would buy 500 grams of flour, 2 kilograms of bread, 100 grams of sugar, 50 grams of ersatz coffee. In April 1943 the quantities were, respectively: 400 grams of flour, 4 kilograms of bread, 200 grams of sugar, 400 grams of meat, 250 grams of marmalade and one egg. AAN RGO, Organisation-Inspections Division II, 425, Reports from Polish Welfare Committees, k. 19.

<sup>77</sup> Cz. Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce* [Third Reich's Policy in Occupied Poland] (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1970), vol. 2 p. 65.

<sup>78</sup> YVA, M 20, 137.

<sup>79</sup> T. Kłosiński, *Polityka przemysłowa okupanta w Generalnej Gubernii* [The Occupier's Industrial Policy in the General Government] (Poznań 1947), pp. 10, 91.



With the price of a suit of clothes ranging from 600 to 1,200 zlotys, many Polish children had one pair of shoes among them, or one suit of street clothes, the parents being unable to afford to buy these articles for each child.

Central Welfare Council [RGO] reports provide more evidence of the hardships suffered in the rural areas in the Rzeszów region. Early in 1941 the RGO reported:

“Even in normal times the pre-harvest periods were often a severe trial time and they necessitated significant welfare aid. Now that the countryside carries the burden of the compulsory delivery quotas, people’s capacity for sharing their supplies with the needy is dwindling daily [...]”<sup>80</sup>

The object of these reports were to brief the RGO supreme authorities on the situation of the displaced Poles and their evidence is irrefutable.

In 1942 the situation became even more difficult and famine hit many parts of the region. People baked potato-starch pancakes, boiled pigweed, mixed rye flour with oat flour and bran to bake bread with. The growing corn in became the object of desire for the starving and it had to be guarded, or it would have disappeared unripe from the field. Many farmers slept out in their fields to chase away the hungry from their crops.<sup>81</sup> The situation of the displaced persons and exiles was even more tragic, because they had no means of support of their own.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> AAN RGO, Welfare Division IV, 1026 A. Report for January 1941, k. 17.

<sup>81</sup> An account by Edward Wojnar, recorded by Edyta Ceremon (from this author’s archive).

<sup>82</sup> It appears from County Welfare Committees’ reports that only in four cities in the Rzeszów region (Mielec, Jasło, Przemyśl, Sanok) there were 7083 refugees, of whom only 1768 had own means of support, 3735 received RGO aid, and 1580 had no means of support and received no welfare aid whatsoever. AAN RGO, Welfare Division IV, 1038, 1942 Reports from County Welfare Committees, k. 14, 16, 41, 87–88, 216.

**The material situation of Poles in selected counties in the Rzeszów region in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 1942**

County	Number of RGO aid recipients	Number of persons not receiving RGO aid	Total number of persons in need of welfare aid
Dębica	18,190	17,000	35,190
Jarosław	11,160	6,401	17,561
Krosno	6,122	4,500	10,622
Przemyśl	15,788	5,000	20,788
Rzeszów	10,967	5,000	15,967
Sanok	1,825	4,500	6,325
<b>Total</b>	<b>64,052</b>	<b>42 401</b>	<b>106,453</b>

Figures in the above table demonstrate that over 60 per cent of the population were receiving RGO aid. Yet it should be remembered that this aid, far from meeting the beneficiaries' total needs, fell short even of supplementary nourishment needs – hence many complaints about widespread starvation, even from RGO aid recipients.<sup>83</sup> In the following years, the situation hardly improved. At the turn of 1943 in the Jarosław county 11,160 people were receiving welfare aid<sup>84</sup>. However, the Polish Welfare Committee [PKO] was unable to help all the needy. In November 1943 the Jarosław branch of the PKO warned:

“Now that winter is approaching the living conditions are deteriorating daily [...] the food rations being insufficient for people's most pressing needs [...] a majority of the population in our county is suffering severe shortages in this respect [...] market prices having risen in the month under survey it has been impossible for people to buy [...] food on the free market.”<sup>85</sup>

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 1038, Report from the RGO County Council in Jasło of December 31, 1941, k. 87.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, Organisation-Inspection Division II, 427, The Polish Welfare Committee in Jarosław, 1943–1944, k. 2a. Report for December 1943.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, Report for November 1943, k. 131.

The situation in urban centres was even worse. There, like in the country, the basic diet of a firm majority of Poles consisted of beetroot soup with potatoes, or bread and milk – but often even these were lacking. “With no means of subsistence whatever,” recounted Franciszek Paszek after the war,

“I was reduced, as were my friends, to begging for leftover food from Germans. Lunch and dinner over, the German who scraped remaining food off the plates often allowed me to put some of this slop in my can. The stuff I brought in the can made a meal for the entire family of six.”<sup>86</sup>

Town dwellers hired themselves for any work in the countryside, so as not to starve. With luck, they could get welfare aid – but, as already said, the capabilities of welfare organisations were very limited.

In the light of the data quoted here it can be argued that money received from Jews in hiding did not always pay even for their food, particularly as only few of these Jews could afford to make regular monthly payments. In most cases a one-off payment was made.

Doubtless, an offer of money or valuables increased the chances of survival. Yet, as Stefan Bratkowski noted, no material gain offset the risk undertaken. On detection of aid given to Jews, the “the guilty” and their whole family – even outsiders – could be murdered.<sup>87</sup> Writing about aid to Jewish people, Emanuel Ringelblum (cited above) posed a question: “Are there in the world sums of money large enough to make up for the ever-present fear of discovery by neighbours, by the house janitor, by the administrator, and so on?”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> IPN Rz, OKŚZpNP, I S. 15/74, The investigation of the crime in Żołyńia in 1941. Record of the examination of witness Franciszek Paszek [unsigned].

<sup>87</sup> S. Bratkowski, “Pod wspólnym niebem,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 27 January 1001 [*Plus-Minus Supplement* No 4].

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in: Arczyński and Balcerak, p. 63.

Besides supplying food, the Poles who concealed Jews had undertaken many other burdens. Their wards had to be ensured a modicum of hygiene and, if seriously ill, medical help. This involved admitting other persons into the secret – and added to the risk.

“[I]t turned out that the Rozenzweig woman had got typhus. [...] Then Józef Dobrowolski went to a doctor he knew, doctor Rachwał in Mielec. The doctor came in a cart in the evening and diagnosed typhus in Roznezweig. While she was ill, [my] brother who had gone there attended to her, as did Józef Dobrowolski who went to the sick woman every day and kept watching his wife for symptoms of infection with typhus. After she [Rozenzweig] had recovered, after their six-month stay with Walczak, they returned to [their previous host] Skiba in Połaniec.”<sup>89</sup>

If the disease was not infectious, villagers in the Rzeszów region applied home remedies, few of them being able to afford a doctor’s visit – and even less able to buy proper medicines.

“When Mr Majchrowicz had frostbitten feet,” a Pole narrated, “he used to creep into our stable after dark; he warmed his feet in the animals’ warmth and we treated him with whatever we could. I used to get kerosene at Kolbuszowa, which took some doing, and he rubbed it on his legs, because it brought him relief.”<sup>90</sup>

Another problem arose when a Jew hiding with Poles died. The body had to be buried in such a manner that no outsider would know. People contrived to do this in various ways. In most cases the hosts buried the body, whether by themselves or helped by someone trusted, in the [local] Jewish cemetery, in a woods, or – simply – in their own garden. “Since no coffin could be bought,” a Pole narrated after the

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<sup>89</sup> AŻIH, Relacje [Witness Accounts], 813, Hönig Psachje. [...]

<sup>90</sup> AŻIH, Yad Vashem, 1791, Zofia Skowrońska.

war, “my brothers took the horse’s manger and they put the body into it. At night they dug a grave in the garden and we buried her there.”<sup>91</sup>

Not to be overlooked either are problems caused to the Polish hosts by some of their wards suffering from the psychological burden of having lost the family through deportation, fear for the still-alive family members, and the ever-present strain of their daily existence. For nearly all those in hiding, fear psychosis was the constant companion. Exacerbating this climate was the awareness that any moment they might have to leave their hiding place, or that they might be denounced. In some cases this led the hiding Jews to attempted suicide, or to want to give themselves up to the occupying authorities – a particularly dangerous step which would have endangered the Poles who aided them.

The Poles who were hiding Jews had to have, besides exceptional courage and selflessness, unusual ingenuity in preparing a safe hideout for their wards. Plans for concealment were devised according to circumstances and according to the Poles’ means. All possible nooks and crannies were used for this purpose; in towns, most of the hidey-holes were in cellars, attics or flats. In the latter, at dangerous moments the wards were concealed in wardrobes, beds – even in chimneys. [...]

And finally, there was uncertainty of tomorrow. Providing aid to Jews put a grave psychological burden on the Poles involved. One witness account brings a revealing description of the stress they were living with:

“My husband was tougher, he coped better with this strain. [...] Myself, I was straining my ears all the time: are they coming for us now? A louder knock on the door or the sound of nailed boots on the stairway made my heart jump into my mouth. Once Gestapo men stopped near our house, they were looking for somebody, searching houses, sniffing... What I went through

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<sup>91</sup> AŻIH, Yad Vashem, 2377. [...]

at that time defies description. They passed our house, but after this my hair turned completely grey in just several hours.”<sup>92</sup>

(*Abridged by Sebastian Rejak*)

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<sup>92</sup> J. Szwic, “Sprawiedliwi wśród Narodów Świata” [The Righteous Among the Nations], *Życie Przemyskie* 1992, No. 31.

## **Organised and Individual Help Provided by Poles to Jews Exterminated by the German Occupiers during World War II**

Few themes in the history of Polish-Jewish relations were neglected as grossly as the help given to Jews doomed to extermination by the German occupiers. This oversight was the combined result of Poland's postwar history and of a general neglect of historical research, in particular of the history of Polish Jews. There were a number of reasons for this. Firstly, matters relating to the fate of the Jewish population had been left to the Jewish Historical Commission as its special domain; secondly, Polish researchers had been less equipped to address Jewish issues than historians rooted in the Jewish community; thirdly, the focus had been on the occupier's anti-Polish rather than anti-Jewish policies. The potential for academic research on the assistance given to Jews was contracting with the passage of time as the numbers of Jewish historians dwindled and no properly qualified researchers from the non-Jewish community came into the field. Because of all these factors, the aid theme was crowded out by other aspects of mutual relations, such as the activities of Jewish blackmailers, into a no-man's land between both sides' areas of interest.

It should also be remembered that many Poles paid with their lives for their involvement [in extending help to Jews]: they were shot together with their wards, died in German concentration camps or German prisons, or – in some isolated cases – were murdered by bands of outlaws who, wise to

their activities, had expected to find Jewish property on their premises. Accordingly, it must be kept in mind at all times that those researching aid to Jews are capable of describing only a part of the phenomenon, the memory of many of these events having expired together with their participants still during the war. Today, after seventy years, we are reduced to describing only such evidence of help as was recorded in writing – and these records document only a small proportion of the phenomenon under survey.

### **Activities of Political Parties and Social and Military Organisations Prior to the Establishment of the Council for Aid to Jews**

It was not by coincidence that the Council for Aid to Jews [CAJ] was established and commenced its work in Warsaw, which became at the same time the hub of aid-to-Jews efforts of all similar organisations throughout Poland. This was due to a special role Warsaw had played in the prewar period and in the years of occupation.

Despite antisemitic sentiments, detectable both among the ordinary inhabitants of Warsaw and within the leadership of political life in the occupied country, efforts to organise help for Jews persecuted by the invaders commenced in the earliest days of the occupation. Initially, with the situation not yet dramatic, this help was based mainly on personal contacts of friends and acquaintances, or relations. This was “two-way traffic”; Poles looked for ways to help Jews (nearly always their own acquaintances or relations) and Jews sought contacts on the “Aryan side.” In many cases the two sides were simply making mutually advantageous business arrangements. Alongside these efforts – intensive, albeit difficult and dangerous – underground liaison between Polish and Jewish resistance organisations was maintained with the aim to develop an underground



network in the ghetto as part of the Polish underground resistance movement.

What leaps to the eye is that the pre-CAJ aid had been so effective in its activities and so diverse that “Żegota” actually did not need to initiate any new approaches; it focused instead on expanding the territorial outreach of aid and on smoothing the progress of efforts already pursued by political parties, groupings and underground social organisations.

Political parties dealt with matters of financial aid; they provided necessary documents, brought people out of the ghetto, arranged accommodation, discouraged blackmail and eliminated extortionists. They also motivated the general public to provide aid, conducted combat training, supplied chemicals necessary to produce armaments and helped procure or purchase weapons and furnished required plans and maps (e.g. of the sewer canals in the Warsaw ghetto). Their activities also extended to conducting direct combat operations by the ghetto walls.

Needless to say, the aid provided by various Polish organisations to Jews was not limited to Warsaw alone. Very interesting information about help given by the Peasant Party [Stronnictwo Ludowe, SL] in the Białystok region came from Jakub Antoniuk “Światowid,” who had commanded Peasant Battalions in the Białystok area since April 1943. According to his narrative, the idea of helping Jews in the region, which had been occupied by the Soviet Union till June 1941, was conceived immediately after the entry of German forces, following pogroms organised by the Germans and massacres of Jews in Radziłów, Wąsosz, Wizna and other localities. Antoniuk stated that concrete plans had been discussed as early as August 15 [1941] at his home in the village of Dobrzyniewo Duże near Białystok by Białystok region’s prominent peasant movement workers led by a former Sejm deputy Władysław Praga.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> J. Antoniuk, “Pomoc działaczy ludowych i organizacji BCh dla ludności żydowskiej w okolicach Białegostoku w latach 1941–1943” [The Help of Peasant Activists and the Peasant Guerrilla Organization BCh to

main thrust was to supply food to the region's largest ghetto in Białystok. This aid was provided only by those who had volunteered to do so because, as Antoniuk admits, that were also advocates of helping "only our own" – that is, the Poles. About the same time Polish extreme anti-Communist underground groups murdered several families for aiding Jews. The Peasant Party found itself incapable of providing the ghetto with weaponry, both because they were short of arms themselves (only a dozen or so cubes of explosive materials was delivered) and because their peasant co-workers were afraid to transport weapons. Unlike in cases of food smuggling, this, indeed, was too risky an undertaking as nothing would have saved a man caught transporting weapons from a death sentence. After the uprising in the Białystok ghetto, Antoniuk issued an order emphasising the imperative of helping the Jews escape from the firestorm.<sup>2</sup>

### "Żegota" – the Council for Aid to Jews

Three Polish organisations liaising with the Government Delegation for Poland [hereafter GD] on aid extended to Jews were instrumental in the establishment of the CAJ. First and foremost, there was the Jewish Desk of the Information Department of the Union of Armed Struggle (later to be renamed the Home Army [Armia Krajowa – AK]) High Command's Bureau of Information and Propaganda [BIP]. The Desk, spun

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the Jewish Population in the Vicinity of Białystok: 1941–1943], *Biuletyn ŻIH* 1974, No. 89.

<sup>2</sup> The order read: "The inmates of the Białystok ghetto are dying but they keep on fighting – and those who fight have a much better chance of saving their lives. Doubtless, many ghetto inmates will succeed in breaking out from this place of starvation and death. It is our duty as humans to help these brave, valiant Jews. Let the Jews who escape from the burning ghetto find in us, Poles, their friends and protectors. Do not let your consciences reproach you at some time in the future for your having withheld help, for one reason or another, to cruelly persecuted, dying people [...]" *Ibid.*, 132.

off in February 1942 from the National Minorities Desk, was headed by Henryk Woliński. The BIP was among the first to have recognised the necessity to establish a special institution subsidised by the Polish authorities. This required cooperation with the Government Delegation for Poland. In August 1942 three meetings were held on this subject (the names of people who represented the GD on these occasions are unknown) but, regrettably, they failed to produce the desired results. This tried the patience of the AK Chief Commander General Stefan Rowecki “Grot,” who complained that the talks were much too protracted. At this time the Germans were conducting their “great operation” of deporting and murdering about 300,000 Warsaw Jews [Germ. *Großaktion Warschau*].<sup>3</sup>

Another movement to have contributed to the establishment of the CAJ was the Catholic Front for the Rebirth of Poland [Front Odrodzenia Polski, FOP]<sup>4</sup> headed by the well-known writer Zofia Kossak.<sup>5</sup> It was owing to her contacts in prewar military circles and with the clergy that false documents could be procured and women and children could be placed in convents. Early in August 1942 the FOP published five thousand copies of Zofia Kossak’s *Protest*, in which she proclaimed: “Whoever is silent in the face of murder becomes an accomplice in it. Whoever does not condemn – condones.”<sup>6</sup>

Within the GD, a fairly strong representation of the National Party [Stronnictwo Narodowe] did not support the aid

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<sup>3</sup> T. Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom w Warszawie 1942–1945* [The Underground Council for Aid to Jews: Warsaw 1942–1945], (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1982), p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> The Front for the Rebirth of Poland was a group of Catholic activists spun off from the Command of the Defenders of Poland. See AŻIH, the Bernard Mark Collection, 70, Fragments of reminiscences of Henryk Borucki “Czarny,” *Notatki i wspomnienia z lat 1939–1945*, k. 73.

<sup>5</sup> Zofia Kossak-Szczucka (1890–1968), writer, underground resistance worker, since 1941 a founding member of the Front for the Rebirth of Poland, in 1942 the President of the Interim Council for Aid to Jews.

<sup>6</sup> Editor’s note: see the whole document on pp. 35–37 of the current volume.

for Jews project, some of its members being outright against it. On the other hand, the initiative was well received by the head of the Department of Internal Affairs, Leopold Rutkowski “Trojanowski” as well as by the Social Welfare Department Director Jan Stanisław Jankowski. Both officials were influenced by the Democratic Party’s [Stronnictwo Demokratyczne] Czesława and Teofil Wojeński and by Stefan Szwedowski, Chairman of the Union of Polish Syndicalists [Związek Syndykalistów Polskich], who were actively helping Jews.<sup>7</sup> Eventually, owing to Rutkowski’s decision to grant a subsidy, a Welfare Commission for Jews (also known as the Social Committee for Aid to Jews), code-named for camouflage, the “Konrad Żegota” Committee, was established on September 27, 1942.

Funds provided by the Polish Government in London and raised among Polish and Jewish communities at home and abroad were to be the financial basis of CAJ’s work. The CAJ was in effect a “consultative committee” of parties. It was meant to consolidate the efforts of political and social organisations and those of individuals. There were plans to set up throughout the country local councils attached to circuit delegates’ offices. The Council played a dual role of the headquarters for the local councils and of the local council for Warsaw and its environs, no separate structure having been established for this area. However, it was only in Cracow and Lvov that autonomous councils eventually emerged.<sup>8</sup>

One of the paramount tasks was to provide people in hiding with proper documents, which were indispensable for functioning on the “Aryan side.” To this end, the CAJ worked with underground organisations equipped to render these services, notably with the Union of Armed Struggle/Home Army’s legalisation unit. It is worth noting that this and similar units had already had a long record of providing such services.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf AŻIH, Relacje, 301/5703, An Account by Witold Bieńkowski.

<sup>8</sup> Prekerowa, pp. 61.

Marek Arczyński estimated that by the time of the 1944 Warsaw uprising about 40,000 different documents had been supplied to Jews in hiding.

Once a hidden person had been provided with documents, accommodation had also to be arranged for them. This was a much more challenging task. Until a permanent place to stay was found, the Council used “temporary premises.” As Teresa Prekerowa notes, everybody took part in “house-hunting” for the CAJ wards, from presidium members to office staff, couriers, group caretakers, and members of political parties cooperating with the Committee. Private contacts and family were tapped the most often. While people with “the good looks”<sup>9</sup> had a chance to find a place to live on their own, those with Semitic features were in most cases utterly dependent on CAJ members. Try as they might, “Żegota” workers usually found it difficult to persuade landlords, threatened by the occupying authorities with the death penalty, to accept the risk.<sup>10</sup> On many occasions, when the hunt for private accommodation had failed and the ward had to be urgently placed somewhere, “business” premises used by CAJ member organisations were resorted to. This was a particularly dangerous practice because it engendered the risk of exposure not just of individuals but of the entire organisation which owned the premises. Sometimes private individuals made their flats available not only to the Council, but also to political, including Jewish, parties. For instance, Eugenia Wąsowska-Leszczynska gave permission, in December 1942, for her flat to be used not only for the Democratic Party’s and the CAJ’s activities, but also for those

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<sup>9</sup> Editor’s note: in wartime occupied Poland the term “good looks” referred to an „Aryan” appearance of a Jew, specifically in a situation when he or she was looking for a place to hide. „Good looks” translated to one’s chance to pass for an „Aryan” and survive the war.

<sup>10</sup> Prekerowa, p. 171. The problems of Jews hiding on the Aryan side and the related forms of survival were described recently by J. Nalewajko-Kulikow, *Strategie przetrwania. Żydzi po aryjskiej stronie Warszawy* [Survival Strategies: Jews on the Aryan Side od Warsaw], (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo “Neriton,” Instytut Historii PAN, 2004).

of the Bund Central Committee and the Jewish Coordination Committee. After the fall of the ghetto rising Jewish insurgents stayed at her place.

It is worth noting that, besides finding accommodation for its wards, the Council also helped build “hideouts,” i.e. arrange the interior [of a house or apartment] in such a way that there would be a place to conceal a hidden person when necessary. Some CAJ members, such as Emilia Hiżowa and Leon Bigdowski, specialised in these security arrangements.

The Council for Aid to Jews attempted to provide its wards with comprehensive care. To this end, contacts with a group of physicians was established and the Medical Desk was set up in October 1943. A majority of the cooperating physicians were members of the Consultative Committee of Democratic and Socialist Doctors established in 1940.

One of the CAJ’s priorities was to expand its work into the entire territory of occupied Poland, wherever help to persecuted Jews was necessary. Doubtless, this was one of the Council’s least successful projects. As mentioned earlier, efforts to establish autonomous councils succeeded only in Cracow and Lvov. Nevertheless, the Warsaw-based CAJ sought to reach out to provincial locations whenever there was a realistic chance to provide help. It was with this aim in mind that the Field Desk was established in July 1943, headed by Stefan Sendlak, the leader of the Committee for the Provision of Help to Jews in the Zamość/Lublin Region. This desk was quite vigorous. It succeeded in enlisting cooperation of many active emissaries, to mention only Tadeusz Sarnecki and his wife, who travelled to the regions of Piotrków, Kielce, Lublin, Białystok, Częstochowa, Radom, Pionki, Skarżysko-Kamienna and Łódź.

The Council repeatedly called on the GD to actively fight extortion against Jews; it even asked for fictitious announcements of death sentences carried about Jewish blackmailers as a means of discouraging others. It is uncertain to this day how many death sentences (if any) were actually served, or carried out. Information on this subject is widely disparate. For instance,

the GD's representative on the CAJ, Witold Bieńkowski, declared in 1968 that he had personally signed 117 death sentences against blackmailers countrywide, of which 89 had been carried out. This information seems utterly incredible for a number of reasons. On the other hand, two members of the CAJ presidium, Marek Arczyński and Tadeusz Rek, insisted that not only had a single death sentence not been carried out but no fictitious announcement of such an execution had been given either. This statement is borne out by Jewish witness accounts. According to Teresa Prekerowa, the Polish underground gave between 60 and 70 death sentences in Warsaw, of which about 30 percent in trials for the blackmail of Jews. She could be right, for while it is known that a number of people were executed under underground courts' sentences, these pronouncements were given on several counts of which acting to the detriment of Jews by no means ranked first. It is quite likely that unless a Jewish blackmailer had otherwise fallen foul of the Polish underground, the underground had no interest in rendering him or her harmless<sup>11</sup>, for they had plenty other challenges to deal with.

The GD's activities were crucial to the very existence of the CAJ, which, had it not been for its founding activists' efforts, would probably have been incapable of expanding as broadly as it did. It should be noted that financial aid was not the only kind of support it received. The GD's official sponsorship gave the CAJ access to underground contacts and communication channels – for instance in its legalisation operations of procuring counterfeit identity documents for its wards and workers. By the outbreak of the Warsaw rising of 1944, the Council had obtained about 50,000 such documents, of which probably no less than 80 percent had found their way into the hands of Jews in hiding.

For all those who wanted to help Jews, and in particular for the Jews themselves, the GD's support carried an immense political and moral weight in its own right. It was instrumental

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<sup>11</sup> It should not be forgotten that in the occupation conditions the proving of charges against the defendant was not an easy matter. Cf. AZIH, *Varia okupacyjne*, 230/150, k. 31–32.

in establishing broad contacts and in using the covert aid of various organisations and agencies, which in many cases were unaware whom they were really helping. It should be made very clear how various organised groups and average Poles were concerned about the fate of Jews doomed to extermination. One of the largest of these, a cell of the Polish Socialist Party “Freedom-Equality-Independence” [Polska Partia Socjalistyczna “Wolność-Równość- Niepodległość,” PPS-WRN] numbering about forty members, took care of hundreds of people in hiding. The SL cell had about three hundred wards while the Democratic Party-Polish Democratic Alliance [Stronictwo Demokratyczne-Stronictwo Polskiej Demokracji, SD-SPD] and the FOP cells took care of several hundred people each.

There were also helper groups outside the CAJ, formed spontaneously by people belonging to the same community. These groups received financial aid upon submitting “unofficial” lists of wards and were bound by the same reporting and accounting rules as the political parties’ cells. The most noteworthy among them were: the “Felicja” unit, which in May 1944 had close to five hundred wards; the “AK Democratic Strain” unit with close to three hundred wards in 1944; and the unit operated by Zofia Dębicka and Jan Żabiński.

Yet the broadest welfare operations were conducted by Jewish organisations which had better contact with people hiding on the “Aryan side” and substantial financial resources (in this respect the situation varied at different times). They supported the CAJ with funds, though at times they also received support from the Council. The Jewish National Committee [Żydowski Komitet Narodowy, ŻKN] alone had established over a hundred welfare groups which would not have been able to function as efficiently as they did had it not been for the help received from numerous Poles.

For various reasons, the entire institutionalised “Żegota” operation can be said to have been – when considered at the level of direct contact with the people in hiding – a predominantly (70 percent) Jewish organisations’ project and only to a



lesser extent (30 percent) one in which Polish institutions were involved. Yet the former could not have achieved much without the CAJ, which represented them in dealings with the Jewish Desk of the Government Delegation's Internal Affairs Department. The Council, for its part, might not have undertaken the aid campaign had it not been for the Polish Government in London. It was the position of government members that tipped the scales in favour of the decision to provide financial and organisational aid to Jews in occupied Poland.

Based on research currently available we are incapable of describing the "Żegota" operation in its entirety. However, it should be remembered that, alongside the activities linked organisationally with the CAJ, there were individual acts of many Poles, which are difficult to evaluate and which were either never recorded, or the evidence of which is yet to be brought to light.<sup>12</sup> Paid help to Jews should be included in this category – not schemes to get rich quickly through the exploitation of Jews (e.g. by renting accommodation at exorbitant prices), but situations when a person in hiding paid going rates for the food, care, or accommodation provided to them. All Poles who made the decision to help were risking their own and their families' lives and they must not be excluded from the group of those supporting the Jews, even if their help was not gratuitous. No-one hiding a target would have survived without numerous – single or random – acts of aid which were often performed by perfect strangers. However, many of those who had experienced such help, did not survive the war and many Poles and Jews never took care to document those events regarding them as so natural as to be unworthy of recording.

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<sup>12</sup> Before the Warsaw rising of 1944, organised aid was provided in Warsaw to about 12,000 people, and the number of those in hiding was about 20,000. (I. Cukierman, *Nadmiar pamięci (Siedem owoch lat). Wspomnienia 1939–1946* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2000), p. 336; English edition: *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993); Gunnar Paulsson, *Hiding in Warsaw. The Jews on the "Aryan Side" in the Polish Capital, 1940–1945*, D. Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1998, p. VIII).

## Individual Aid

Individual aid is by far the least researched theme of the subject under consideration. Of all kinds of underground activity it was the least likely to be recorded<sup>13</sup>, the occupation conditions making it imperative for all concerned to leave as little trace as possible of their activities. Most individual acts of long-term or temporary help had remained only in the memories of the parties to these events, to be irretrievably lost with their deaths. What can be captured from the surviving documentation is but a small fragment of the entire picture.

Many things indicate that individual acts of help, which saved Jewish people from death at the German occupiers' hands, occurred much more frequently than organised aid. I believe this to have been a consequence of the reality of occupation in the Polish territory rather than an accident, for organised aid could have evolved only with the awareness of the Holocaust, several years after the outbreak of the Second World War.

Underlying most cases of individual aid was a heartfelt impulse, the desire to help an acquaintance (or simply a fellow human being) in a situation of danger. In such cases there was no room for political calculations and no need to wait for a go-ahead from one's superiors and authorities. One could decide immediately whether one would take the risk. This is corroborated by the fact that the majority of Poles to whom the Israeli Yad Vashem Institute awarded the "Righteous Among the Nations" distinction are people who had no affiliations with the underground.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> It is a paradox of the occupation that those servile towards the occupying enemy had a better chance of being remembered because the Polish underground made and kept lists of them. In contrast, no one (save for the said collaborators) took interest in people who were helping Jews. Information about people collaborating with the occupation authorities is contained in Home Army materials, e.g. AAN, AK, 203/XI-9; 203/XI-21, 203/XI-26, 203/X-82, 203/X-83, 203/X-84.

<sup>14</sup> S. Krakowski, "The Attitude of the Polish Underground to the Jewish Question during the Second World War," in *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and its Aftermath* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers

Neither should it be forgotten that those who decided to provide aid individually were in many respects in a markedly worse situation than the helpers acting for an underground organisation. They confronted the whole repression apparatus of the invaders. They could not count on outside support and in the event of failure had to rely on their own wits alone. The atmosphere of horror and fear, which very often went together with providing shelter, was described by the Holeman sisters who, after their escape from the Łódź ghetto, had stayed for a time with a Pole named Przechodzień.

“We are already at Przechodzień’s. A minute goes by, then ten minutes, an hour – yet nobody else comes. It seems to us that an eternity has elapsed. We do not know what has happened. We are getting more and more upset. The child cries. We don’t know what to do. The Pole goes out to scout the situation. He returns and tells us to go down to the cellar. We can see he is scared stiff. We feel our guts turn, we move in jerks. Trying to make us feel at ease Przechodzień says: ‘Do your business here’, and he points to a cellar corner. Early in the morning he comes into the cellar and tells us that the city is plastered with announcements, in which the Germans threaten Christians with murdering whole families for one concealed Jew and they promise to reward anyone who turns in a Jew with three kilograms of sugar and a kilogram of salt. We are silent, not knowing what Przechodzień proposes to do with us, but he reassures us and promises to recommend us to a villager he knows.”<sup>15</sup>

As Szymon Datner rightly observed, there were four attitudes adopted by an average Pole while encountering a hunted Jew: a) to act in accordance with the “law” forcibly imposed by the invaders – that is, to turn in the fugitive and so deliver

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University Press, 2003), p. 102. Cf. N. Tec, *When the Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 70f.

<sup>15</sup> *Księga Żydów ostrołęckich* [The Book of Jews of Ostrołęka] (Ostrołęka: Ostrołęckie Towarzystwo Naukowe im. Adama Chętnika, Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Ostrołęki; Tel Aviv: Irgun yots’e Ostrolenkah be-Yisra’el, 2002), p. 387.

them to their death; b) neither betray nor help in any way; c) to give an *ad hoc* help; d) to take care of the fugitive and harbour them for a longer time.<sup>16</sup> At the present stage of research it is difficult to determine which attitude was the most common. Indeed, this question could be impossible to resolve. I stipulate that the situations described in (b) and, possibly, in (c) were the most frequent and those in (a) and (d) were much rarer. It is a matter of argument whether scenario (b) qualified as collaboration with the occupying enemy, or – conversely – as a form of passive help. However, this study is concerned exclusively with the scenarios described in (c) and (d) – that is, of undisputable help.

To date, studies have been made from time to time of the forms of aid and the motivations of the people who laid on the line not only their own lives, but those of their near and dear, in order to take care of a friend – or of an utter stranger. In research into this subject the fundamental questions to be asked are: where the aid was given, by whom, in what way, for what motivations, and to whom.

One attempt at the answer is this probing study of 2,473 reported cases of help given to Jews in the occupation period, recorded in documents held in the “Yad Vashem – the Righteous” section of the Jewish Historical Institute.<sup>17</sup> At this point, two fundamental caveats should be noted. Firstly, I want to emphasise that this research is concerned with a specific group – of Poles and Jews most of whom had survived the war and thus reported the instance of help. Moreover, a majority of the Poles in the cases under survey had either reasonable grounds for believing, or a certainty, that the person rescued by them had survived. This makes this group special, possibly fundamentally different from other rescuers and rescuees – and certainly different from “average” Polish-Jewish contacts in occupation.

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<sup>16</sup> S. Datner, *Las sprawiedliwych [karta z dziejów ratownictwa Żydów w okupowanej Polsce]* [The Forest of the Righteous: From the Annals of Rescuing Jews in Occupied Poland] (Warszawa: „Książka i Wiedza,” 1968), p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> Hereafter: YVS.

Secondly, the Poles who reported these acts of help should not be understood to hold the “Righteous Among the Nations” title, as misleadingly suggested by the designation of the section of archives in which the respective documents are kept. In fact, the section contains all cases of help directly reported by rescuers or rescuees, but it is only in well-grounded cases promising, for formal reasons, a successful outcome that applications for award are drawn up on the basis of such reports and submitted to the Yad Vashem Institute. Even well-documented cases have not always been recognised; all in all, the title was not awarded in about 30 percent of cases based on reports held. This was because Yad Vashem’s rules of making awards are very rigorous – but there is no reason at all why the rejected cases should not be used in a study of individual aid.

When addressing the question where help was given, I was not concerned with the distribution pattern of aid by geographic regions of Poland. Rather, I was interested in other inter-relations, e.g. between the urbanisation of a given area and the number of cases reported there. It leaps to the eye that a majority of the reports concern cases outside the largest cities. In the eleven cities I selected (I attempted to choose relatively large urban centres known to have had large Jewish populations: Warsaw, Cracow, Białystok, Lublin, Kielce, Częstochowa, Radom, Otwock, Przemyśl, Lvov and Vilna) only 785 cases of individual aid had been reported, i.e. about 32 percent of the sample. Of these, as many as 507 cases had been recorded in Warsaw.

Where, then, was aid provided the most frequently? Two hypotheses are possible: in smaller towns and in villages. There is not much evidence in support of the first. Few cases of aid were reported to have taken place in the small urban localities I analysed. Unsurprisingly, this leaves the countryside. Why unsurprisingly? Firstly, because in smaller urban centres the prewar Polish-Jewish business competition, which is known to have bred strong antagonism between the two communities, was an important factor. This is evidenced by the fact that in these localities prewar occupational solidarity was the rarest (in

one percent of the cases only) declared motivation for aid. Secondly, in these localities concealing Jews involved more problems, small towns lacking the anonymity characteristic of large cities and the space afforded by villages. All in all, a small town was, for objective reasons, the least advantageous place where to hide – and since a majority of Polish towns qualified as small, with populations of 10,000 or less – it is not at all surprising that help was provided relatively more often in large cities or in villages. As mentioned earlier, Warsaw was the largest aid centre.

In my sample, the most frequent form of aid was to hide a persecuted person – that is how 1,636 people, or 67 percent of all helpers, described their actions. In 339 cases (17 percent) the supplying of documents was reported; 139 cases (about 6 percent) were about helping people in hiding; 84 cases (3 percent) about an *ad hoc* help to escape. However, it was unspecified “other aid” that ranked as the second largest group (464 cases, or about 19 percent).

What was the situation like in the eleven cities selected in my study? In 490 cases hiding was the reported manner of help; this represents 30 percent of all reported cases of extending help. Supplying documents was reported in 229 cases (57.3 percent of all reported cases of this type); help to hiders – in 37 cases, or 27 percent of all reported cases; *ad hoc* assistance in the escape – 45 cases, or 54 percent! “Other aid” was reported in 209 cases (45 percent).

**Table No. 1. Manner of Help**

Manner of help	Total cases reported	Selected cities	
		Number of cases	Percent share of all cases of this kind
Hiding	1,636	490	29.9
Other aid	464	209	45.0
Supplying documents	399	229	57.3
Aid to hiders	139	37	26.6
<i>Ad hoc</i> assistance in escape	84	45	53.5

On the basis of these data several tentative hypotheses can be put forward – obviously, to be corroborated by future research. Firstly – and rather predictably – documents were supplied more often in cities than in small towns or in the countryside. On the other hand, in provincial localities help was given much more often to people hiding by own arrangements. Presumably, these cases concerned supplying food to guerrilla groups, or to civilians seeking refuge in forests. There are also reasons to surmise that those in need of shelter found a hiding place much more often in the country than in towns. This, too, is explainable by the specifics of the countryside, with larger distances between neighbours and more places in which to hide. Does this mean that more Jews survived in the countryside than in bigger cities? This question must remain unanswered for the time being. Nevertheless, I want to emphasise that the relatively better opportunities for hiding in the countryside do not necessarily translate into larger numbers of survivors. In other words, the fact that shelter was given more often in the provincial areas was not in its own right a sufficient guarantee of survival. Beyond doubt, for one, a majority of shelter-seekers did not survive the occupation, for another, “helping in order to rescue” did not automatically mean “successful rescuing.”<sup>18</sup> Besides, unlike in the cities, where anonymity offered a much better chance of operating inconspicuously, in provincial towns and in villages, where people knew each other very well, a new face was immediately noticed. Accordingly, it was much more seldom that villagers had contact with Jews in hiding and remained unaware of who they were dealing with.

It should also be remembered that, first, a majority of the Polish population lived in villages – hence more village inhabitants among those reporting aid; and, second, that before the war a majority of Polish Jews had been urban dwellers. Once

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<sup>18</sup> Shmuel Krakowski puts the number of Jewish escapees from ghettos and camps at over 300,000. Krakowski, p. 100.

a ghetto had been established in the town, shelter had to be sought outside the place of residence, i.e. in the countryside – possibly with the exception of Warsaw which, because of its size, offered opportunities for going successfully into hiding on the “Aryan side.” Warsaw accounted for about four percent of the entire population of Poland and for about 10 percent (and even more during the war) of the Jewish population. These factors – the size of Warsaw and the size of its Jewish population – determined its unique position among the places where Jewish people sought asylum. 507 reported acts of help, i.e. 20.5 percent of the total, occurred in Warsaw, against barely two such acts in Łódź, which had the second largest Jewish population in Poland. Łódź, of course, was in the territories incorporated into the Reich and the Łódź [Germ. Litzmannstadt] ghetto, differed considerably from the other ghettos, but a comparison with other cities in the General Government also reveals a marked disparity: Cracow, ranking second after Warsaw with its 91 reported cases of help, accounts barely for 3.6 percent of the total.

Let’s proceed now to the motives for coming to rescue. Humanitarian considerations were by far the most frequent, cited in 1,229 reports (i.e. in nearly 50 percent of the cases). The second most important factor was prewar acquaintance (676 reports, or 27 percent), followed by “other reasons” (291 reports, or 12 percent); religious reasons (81 cases, i.e. 4 percent); the most seldom quoted was occupational solidarity (22 reports, or 1 percent). It will be interesting to see what the situation was like in my selected cities. The motivations, given in descending order, were: humanitarian considerations – 410 reports (33 percent of all cases of this type); former acquaintance – 244 (36 percent); other – 132 (45 percent); religious considerations – 22 (27 percent); occupational solidarity – 19 (73 percent). Clearly, the proportions are somewhat different here:



**Table No. 2. Motivations for Help**

Motivation	Total reports	Selected cities	
		Number of cases	Percent share of all cases of a given type
Humanitarian considerations	1,229	410	33.3
Former acquaintance	676	244	36
Other	291	132	45.2
Religious considerations	81	22	27.1
Occupational solidarity	26	19	73

In absolute figures, in the selected cities the reported motivations appear in exactly the same order as in the entire sample. These are, in descending order: humanitarian considerations, former acquaintance, other reasons, religious reasons and occupational solidarity. It is only when we proceed to examine the percentage shares of the above motivations that significant differences emerge. For instance, as much as 73 percent of cases of occupational solidarity occurred in the selected cities. Ranked second are motivations described as “other” (45.2 percent), followed by former acquaintance (36 percent), humanitarian reasons (33.3 percent) and religious reasons (27.1 percent). What does this tell us? Should this data be found to hold good for other researched statistical populations, this would mean that all the above motivations underlay aid more often in the countryside and in small towns than in the cities selected for this research – all, that is, except for occupational solidarity. The ranking of the latter, which appears highly probable, additionally supports the credibility of these calculations. In smaller towns and in the countryside practising the same trade or profession meant, in most cases, competing – and this is true for Poles and Jews alike. Only in larger urban centres was there a chance of work becoming a factor building close relations between Poles and Jews, for instance among blue collar workers. There the barrier of national and religious difference was the easiest to overcome. From the data analysed here, it can be inferred that, in absolute figures, the most frequent motivation was hiding for humanitarian reasons.

It would be particularly interesting to know the numbers of people the reported acts of help were targeted at. In many cases in my study the numbers of rescuees were well in excess of those of the rescuers – several times more in some cases.<sup>19</sup> This can be explained by aid having been provided not to one, but to several, or tens of persons. For this reason Szymon Datner introduced the notions of collective rescue and mass rescue. By his criterion, help given simultaneously to between two and ten people should be classified as collective rescue, and where the number of wards was more than ten, the case qualified as mass rescue.<sup>20</sup> Numerous examples of both categories are found in materials collected by the former Main Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland [Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce, hereafter GKBZHWp] and in the Jewish Historical Institute’s YVS section. To quote some of these accounts: Ludwik Zdun says that he and his co-workers, Polish Workers’ Party members, succeeded in bringing about 120 people out from the Warsaw ghetto.<sup>21</sup> On June 14, 1984, Czesława Małoszczyk testified before Władysław Grędziński, a Province Court judge, that her father, who had been employed at the municipal Water Supply and Sewage Disposal Company, had established contacts with Jews in the Warsaw ghetto and had led out eight Jewish children to the “Aryan side” through

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<sup>19</sup> Country-wide, the reverse could have been true, i.e. the number of rescuers could have been many times higher than that of rescuees since, generally, efforts of many rescuers were needed to save one person. The disparities in these calculations – which depend on two approaches to calculation: 1) emphasising that one Jew needed many non-Jews to survive; and 2) emphasising that one person helped many Jews – were recently highlighted by Gunnar Paulsson. His calculations confirm the numerical preponderance of the rescuers. *Idem*, “Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w okupowanej Warszawie” (1940–1945) [Polish-Jewish Relations in Occupied Warsaw (1940–1945)], in *Akcja Reinhardt: Zagłada Żydów w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie* [Operation Reinhardt: The Destruction of Jews in the General Government], ed. By D. Libionka (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2004), pp. 300f.

<sup>20</sup> Datner, p. 42.

<sup>21</sup> AIPN, files on aid provided by Poles to Jews in 1939–1945, 23/68, P. 133.

sewage canals. Later, immediately before the ghetto rising, he had helped about 300 Jews escape.<sup>22</sup> Teodor Niewiadomski, an employee of the Warsaw Waste Disposal Enterprise, allegedly transported about 200 people out of the ghetto.<sup>23</sup> Father Mieczysław Michalski baptised no less than a dozen Jewish women who sought to save their lives this way. He and his colleague Father Michał Dudkowski in Lublin issued about 2,000 blank birth certificates to Poles taking care of Jews.<sup>24</sup>

One of the most tragic and heart-rending cases of mass rescue is the history the Łodej family. The Łodejs were connected with a guerrilla detachment which had in its care about forty Jews, women and children among them, hiding in the forest in Klamochy (near the town of Iłża) in the Kutery Forest Authority area. A majority of those in hiding perished in a manhunt mounted by the German gendarmerie. One of those captured, acting under coercion from the Germans, betrayed the location of other hiding places and mentioned the Łodej family. It was established in a report of an investigation carried out in 1972 that: “Acting on this information the Hitlerites [...] surrounded the village of Lubienie and rounded up the inhabitants, interrogating them about the whereabouts of Władysław Łodej who had gone into hiding. The Hitlerites took Władysław Łodej’s wife Wiktoria, 36 years of age, with four children: Edward aged 12, Janina aged 9, Władysław aged 6, and Stanisław aged 3, and held them prisoner at the gen-

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 23/68, P. 115.

<sup>23</sup> AŻIH, YVS, 1521.

<sup>24</sup> AIPN, files on aid provided by Poles to Jews in 1939–1945, 23/68, P.845. I believe the testimony of Father Michalski is irrefutable. However, with the knowledge of the occupation-time realities it is unbelievable that the two thousand baptism certificates were used to rescue Jewish people. Certainly, a proportion of them was probably put to this use, but I believe the certificates were meant mainly for the Polish resistance movement; indeed, it should not be forgotten that great numbers of Poles, fugitives from the German terror, were using false identity cards. To obtain these, various documents, including a forged certificate of christening, were needed – yet these were cases of change of identity rather than religious conversion.

darmerie station in Iłża. Two weeks after the arrest Wiktoria Łodej and the children were shot in the forest near the seat of the Marcule Forest Administration Authority. Still before the execution two gendarmes and one civilian drove to the Łodejs' house where they shot Władysław Łodej's parents, Wojciech and Marianna, aged 90 and 78 respectively.<sup>25</sup>

Tadeusz Pastuszko notified the GKBZHWP in a letter of March 29, 1984 that between 1943 and 1945 he had been hiding sixteen Jews. He had lived then at Chmielów near Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski and worked in the Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski steel mill. He had been approached by a Jewish steel mill worker who asked him to take in several people. In 1984 Pastuszko still had contacts with four of these people. He had written on this subject to the Jewish Historical Institute but, as he claimed, his story had evinced no due interest.<sup>26</sup>

As already mentioned, the awareness of the annihilation of the Jews was not the prerequisite of individual help, for in these cases the aim was to help a single individual, or several persons, rather than to help the entire community. This is why individual help was given from the beginning till the very end of the German occupation. Very interesting information can be gleaned from a comparison of the number of examples of aid launched and those terminated.<sup>27</sup> These figures show irrefutably that until 1942, when the German invaders murdered the principal part of the Jewish population, the numbers of launched aid undertakings had been soaring, while the number of terminated aid operations had been rising very slowly, to no more than eight percent of those commenced in 1942. The situation changed radically in 1943, but even then there were twice as many operations launched than terminated. Only 1944 and

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<sup>25</sup> AIPN, files on aid provided by Poles to Jews in 1939–1945, 23/68, P.1068. [...]

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 23/68, P. 268.

<sup>27</sup> By the termination of aid I mean the discontinuance of help, for various reasons: reluctance to undertake longer-term risk, loss of contact, the persecuted person's departure from the place where help was provided, and the like.

1945 brought a soaring increase in the number of terminated aid undertakings, both because the Soviet army was moving into the Polish territory and because by then an overwhelming majority of the Jewish population had been murdered by the occupying enemy. The absolute figures are as follows: 1939 – 43 recorded launched aid operations of which two terminated in the same year; 1940 – 133 recorded launched aid operations, eight terminated; 1941 – 299 aid operations launched, 22 terminated; 1942 – 946 aid operations launched, 73 terminated. All in all, in my sample 1,421 aid undertakings had been launched and 105 had been wound up by the end of 1942. In 1943 the numbers of reported launches and terminations were, respectively, 460 and 228; in 1944 there were 65 launches and 851 terminations; in 1945 – 12 launches and 692 terminations. [...]

Apart from 1940, when more than 60 percent of operations began and which were to continue till 1944–1945, in the next two years the percentage shares of operations completed only in 1944 and 1945 were rising.<sup>28</sup> About 71 percent of the operations commenced in 1941 and almost 80 percent of those launched in 1942 ended in 1944–1945. This shows that as the annihilation of the Jewish population by the invaders was spiralling up, more and more (in percentage terms) launched aid operations were targeted at surviving until the ultimate defeat of Germany. In other words, long-term help was becoming increasingly important. One could speculate at this juncture to what extent this was due to the desperate determination of people intent on survival and to what extent on the selflessness and compassion of Poles. Yet, if the motivations for aid declared in the cases in my study are credible, there is no doubt that at least in these cases selflessness and humanitarian considerations played the decisive role.

This case study of reported aid is comparable with the research conducted by Nechama Tec, who addressed similar

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<sup>28</sup> I use only the calculations for years up to 1942 because the 1943 data could artificially increase the percentage share of operations continued till 1944–1945, merely due to the too-short time span.

questions. Tec examined, among other factors, the social-economic status of the rescuers. It appears that in the group of people whose sole motivation for aid was financial – “the paid helpers” – a vast majority (over 80 percent) were people with low education, poor, and/or making their living in farming. On the other hand, among the helpers with non-financial motivations people with the above-described social-economic status accounted for less than fifty percent.<sup>29</sup> A comparison of the accounts of rescued Jews proved very interesting too.<sup>30</sup>

**Table No. 3. Information Concerning the Treatment of Hiding Jews**

<b>Treatment</b>	<b>Paid helpers</b>	<b>Rescuers</b>
Very good treatment	33 percent	96 percent
Unsatisfactory treatment	9 percent	2 percent
Very bad conditions	13 percent	1 percent
Price extortion, hunger, cases of robbery	42 percent	0 percent

Nechama Tec also established that, all in all, barely 18 percent of the paid helpers had been perceived by their wards as fundamentally good, and over 60 percent had been classified as greedy and money-grabbing.<sup>31</sup> As many as 14 percent of the paid helpers threatened their wards with denunciation and 12 percent of them actually laid information against them even though the Jews had given them all their money; in 19 percent of cases the Jews feared denunciation which, however, had not occurred. In contrast, only about one percent of the rescuers was it said that their wards had feared denunciation which, as it transpired, did not occur.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Tec, p. 219, case 6.

<sup>30</sup> I.e. by a group of 76 paid helpers and 415 rescuers.

<sup>31</sup> Tec, p. 220, case 12.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220, footnote 13. Presumably, these fears were due more to the ward's subjective feelings than to a real threat from the rescuer, though, obviously, the latter cannot be ruled out.

I have no doubt that the Polish “Righteous” are but a small group of those deserving the distinction. This is implied by a majority of historical sources, Polish and Jewish alike. We can find there the names or surnames of Poles who saved Jews’ lives during the occupation and yet are not on the list of the “Righteous.” Just as often these sources contain information about nameless people, or people referred to only by their given names and, for this reason, almost certainly unidentifiable.<sup>33</sup> However, the title being awarded on the strength of a testimony by a Jewish witness to whom help was given, rather than on the basis of documentary sources, accounts by now-deceased Jewish witnesses are not conclusive, and even less conclusive are those by non-Jews. The Commission awarding the title does not function as a historical commission, but as a court. Sometimes paradoxical situations occur to highlight the disproportionately low number of the Polish “Righteous” relative to that of the actual helpers. For instance, absent from the list are people referred to in the writings of Emmanuel Ringelblum, the foremost Jewish historian of the Second World War period and the originator of the Warsaw Ghetto Archives.<sup>34</sup> Absent

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<sup>33</sup> A fragment of one of the memory books reads: “At this point we must also pay due tribute to those noble and brave Poles who, risking their own and their families’ lives, helped, supported and rescued the lives of Jews sentenced to death. They helped by providing food, lodging, and in particular by harbouring persecuted people for extended periods in their houses and on their farms. More than one paid for this with his or her life, with exposing themselves to punishment not only from the Germans, but also from their brothers, antisemitic Poles. We believe these noble Poles were motivated not only by pity and kind-heartedness, but, first and foremost, by higher ideals. [...] *Księga Żydów ostrołęckich...*, 391f.

<sup>34</sup> They include: Barbara Wiśniewska, Jerzy Kasprzykowski, Witold Benedyktowicz, Professor Tadeusz Kotarbiński, Gerhard Gadejski, Julian Kudasiewicz, (E. Ringelblum, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej : uwagi i spostrzeżenia*; oprac. oraz wstępem poprzedził A. Eisenbach [Polish-Jewish relations during the Second World War, edited and with footnotes by J. Kermish, S. Krakowski; trans. from the Polish by D. Allon, D. Dabrowska, and D. Keren] (Warszawa: „Czytelnik,” 1988), pp. 165, 167, 168, 170, 172, 175).

are even the Marczak family, who concealed Ringleblum and over thirty other people in a specially built bunker in Warsaw. Yet this is a commonly known fact, described by Ringelblum and corroborated by other people who were aware of it, or who even stayed temporarily in the bunker.

Nechama Tec also noticed and emphasised the absence among those recognised of a firm majority of the Poles who deserved the title. “There is no disputing that those, who have been recognized by Yad Vashem, represent but a fraction of those who deserve to be. Of the 189 rescuers in my study, all of whom fit the definition of “Righteous,” less than a quarter have this official title. Of the survivors, very few contacted Yad Vashem about the distinction. Of those who did, only a small percentage confirmed that their protectors did receive the title.”<sup>35</sup>

Many more such examples are found in wartime reminiscence literature. For instance, Lucjan Dobroszycki mentions over 60 members of a doctors’ committee who worked with the Council for Aid to the Jews.<sup>36</sup> Only thirteen of them are on the list of the distinguished. A name index of 255 Warsaw women who had been engaged in rescuing Jews, published by Szymon Datner in 1969, contains no more than<sup>37</sup> 54 Poles awarded the “Righteous” title.<sup>38</sup>

Yet Gunnar Paulsson and Teresa Prekerowa went the furthest in their calculations. They put the number of Poles engaged in helping Jews at 280,000–300,000. If we assume that the latter was the actual number, then about 6,000 Poles awarded

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<sup>35</sup> Tec, p. 84.

<sup>36</sup> T. Bartoszewski, Z. Lewinówna, *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej: Polacy z pomocą Żydom 1939–1945* (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie ŻIH, Świat Książki – Bertelsmann Media, 2007), pp. 241f; English edition: *Righteous Among Nations: How Poles Helped the Jews 1939–1945* (London: EarlsCourt Publ., 1969).

<sup>37</sup> I included all doubtful cases in the awardee group. Accordingly, the actual number of those awarded the distinction could be even lower.

<sup>38</sup> S. Datner, “Polki warszawskie z pomocą Żydom” [Warsaw’s Polish Women Helping Jews], *Biuletyn ŻIH* 1969, No 70, pp. 113–116.



the “Righteous” distinction will account for barely two percent of those deserving the honour.<sup>39</sup>

Very interesting information about people eligible for the “Righteous Among the Nations” title is also found in documentation (incontrovertibly official) of Jewish organisations active in Poland after the Second World War. Materials relating to Jewish children are a case in point, indicating as they do many specific and hitherto unknown incidents of help. They confirm that during the war an unspecified number of Jewish children found shelter and care with Polish families and Polish social and religious institutions. Relatively best described are the activities of female religious congregations.<sup>40</sup> This theme is also addressed in works on the CAJ. Cases of individual help being the least known I want to discuss here the activities of Poles who provided this aid.

The perusal of lists of survived children, drawn up in immediate postwar years by the Central Jewish Committee in Poland, will suffice to show how many of these rescuers have remained unknown. One of these lists, entitled “A Name List of Children Who Survived the War in Convents or with Poles,” covers 161 children, but only in 46 cases are the helpers known. In the remaining cases entries in the “Place of the child’s rescue” column read: “with Poles, particulars unknown.”<sup>41</sup> If the ratio of known-to-unknown places where children were harboured is confirmed in the future by broader research, this will mean that we know about only 30 percent of the Poles who took care of Jewish children during the occupation. Even among those

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<sup>39</sup> Paulsson, pp. 301f. According to Paulsson, it cannot be ruled out that the total number of the “Righteous” should be between 400,000 and 1,000,000, rather than 20,000.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. E. Kurek, *Dzieci żydowskie w klasztorach: udział żeńskich zgromadzeń zakonnych w akcji ratowania dzieci żydowskich w Polsce w latach 1939–1945* [Jewish Children in Convents: Female Religious Orders and the Rescue of Jewish Children in Poland in 1939–1945] (Lublin: „Gaudium,” 2004).

<sup>41</sup> AŻIH, CKŻP, Education Department, 651, personal files, “Wykaz imienny dzieci, które przeżyły okupację w klasztorach lub u Polaków.”

known by their full names few have been honoured for their activities. The cited list contains the names of twenty nine Poles, of whom no more than sixteen were awarded the “Righteous Among the Nations” title. Even this number is uncertain, for in some cases there could be a coincidence of names. To verify this, appropriate research would need to be conducted at the Yad Vashem archives.<sup>42</sup> In only two cases is there a certainty that the rescuers were awarded the title.

My deductions are not based on this single list alone. There are other examples, several of which are particularly worth quoting. Gizela Alterwajn, born in 1941, had been carried out of the Warsaw ghetto in a rucksack and concealed at various people’s homes, to be finally placed in the Children’s Home in Otwock. In 1947 she was removed from the Home by her uncle and travelled to Łódź. Aleksander Blum, born in 1936 in Warsaw, was concealed by the Borkowski family in Warsaw, in the Żoliborz residential quarter. Tadeusz Bober was hiding with Mrs. Poniewierska in Radość. The Lichtarz siblings, Hersz and Justyna, were hiding in the same house, but with different families; Justyna’s guardian was a clerk, his wife was a teacher. Salomon Cetnarski stayed with primary school teachers. Felicja Cukier had stayed for a year in Legionowo in the care of an unidentified “drunkard” (so stated in the document) before she was taken in by a forest warden’s family with whom she remained till the end of the war. Hanna Federman was rescued after the death of her parents by the headmaster of a school in Legionowo and placed after the war in the Children’s Home in Otwock. Upon crossing to the “Aryan side” Eugenia Furmańska together with her mother and sister were rescued by women who were members of an underground organisation. Jerzy Glass had been placed with Mrs. Bielecka, a Warsaw teacher, with whom he went to Pruszków after the 1944 Warsaw uprising; there his guardian sold the rest of her valuables

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<sup>42</sup> The collection of the YVS of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw is very incomplete compared with that of the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem.

to keep herself and her ward. Before the liberation they still had to endure a German “raid”<sup>43</sup> of the village in which they had found shelter.

Jadwiga Gruszka and her brother had been removed from the Warsaw ghetto by their nanny, Rozalia Król, who thereafter worked to support the children. Being in very strained financial circumstances, she gave the girl into the keeping of peasants she knew; after the village had been deported another farmer took care of Jadwiga and after the liberation the nanny bought her out with her last savings and placed her in a children’s home.<sup>44</sup> A majority of these the Polish caregivers, identified by their full names, are not on the “Righteous Among the Nations” list. They are heroes who have remained nameless. Many more such examples could be quoted, by no means limited to Warsaw. Indeed, there are also similar lists of children from Cracow, Lublin, Przemyśl, Katowice, and Białystok.<sup>45</sup>

Ample material evidencing the stay of Jewish children with Poles during the occupation and after the war has survived in the CKŻP’s<sup>46</sup> correspondence. This documentation can be divided into two main thematic parts: information sent in by

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<sup>43</sup> Editor’s note: such a raid or military action was called “Pazifikation” – an operation in German-occupied Poland which was to serve as a punitive measure directed against Polish villages whose inhabitants were hiding Jews, Soviet POWs, supported local guerilla units or did not deliver livestock and grain in quotas imposed by the occupying authorities. A „pacification” consisted in killing the villagers, burning their homes and confiscating their property by German military units.

<sup>44</sup> AŻIH, CKŻP, Education Department, 655, personal files, “Wykaz imienny dzieci, które po wyzwoleniu zgłosiły się same lub zostały skierowane przez opiekunów Polaków do Domu Dziecka” (information about the child’s experiences during the occupation).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 653f.

<sup>46</sup> Editor’s note: CKŻP: Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce – The Central Committee of Polish Jews (Yid. *Tzentraler Komitet fun di Yidn in Poyln*) – the main political Jewish organization in postwar Poland (approved by the state), established on November 12, 1944 in Lublin. It represented the leading Jewish political parties; the Communists, the Bundists, Ihud, Poalei Zion Left and Right, as well as Hashomer Hatzair. In 1950 transformed into the Socio-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland.

third parties, and the caregivers' letters claiming the costs of the child's upkeep or a compensation for the efforts expended.

In the immediate postwar years the payment of cash indemnity for damage or losses sustained as a result of hiding a Jewish child was seen as a natural thing by Poles and Jews alike. Many such applications were filed with the CKŻP by Jewish organisations themselves, much like in cases of help given to adults. These applications are yet another group of materials from which to discover, besides the names of Polish helpers, the fate – often tragic – of their families murdered by the Germans for their righteousness. For instance, a letter from the CKŻP's Child Welfare Department to the Provincial Jewish Committee in Katowice reads: "The Central Child Welfare Department kindly requests that the greatest possible relief be accorded to a Polish family named Jarosińska, of Gliwice, 14 Krzywa Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. Citizen Jarosińska's family were killed for aiding Jews. Their death took place at Stryj and is a commonly known fact. The murdered Jarosiński couple left three children, who are maintained by their aunt."<sup>47</sup> On October 3, 1945 the same Department instructed the Jewish Committee in Kielce to take care of the widow of a Polish officer, one Gąsiorowska, whose husband "rendered immense services to Jews during the German occupation."<sup>48</sup> These could be the only traces of these families' actions, for the names of Jarosiński and Gąsiorowski are absent from the list of the "Righteous Among the Nations" even though (unless the cited documents lie) their merits are irrefutable.

Yet another interesting category are cases when the fact that a Polish family had been hiding a Jewish child became known through the agency of a third party or of a foreign institution attempting to trace a child. For instance, in August 1947 a U.S. immigration institution, the United Service for New Americans, wrote to the CKŻP informing them that their representation in New York had been approached by a Polish Jew,

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<sup>47</sup> AŻIH, CKŻP, Education Department, k. 11.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, k. 7.

Barney Shapanka, who knew from a Polish woman of his acquaintance, one Mazurek, of a Jewish boy, given name Franek, rescued and being raised in Poland by Mazurek's sister, Maria Pantoła. It appeared from the letter that the woman claimed to be incapable of raising the boy for financial reasons, and that Shapanka was willing to adopt him. The boy is known to have been cared for during the war by Maria Pantoła's mother, who died leaving him in her daughter's charge. Neither of these women is on the list of the "Righteous Among the Nations."

The preceding sections have dealt with people who have not been recognised as the "Righteous Among the Nations." I have already mentioned that the award procedure is very rigorous, as evidenced by non-recognition, for procedural reasons, of one-third of the cases in the Jewish Historical Institute's "Yad Vashem Righteous" section. Materials collected by the former Main Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland, which in the 1980s was conducting a widespread operation of collecting rescuer evidence, fared even worse. The Commission sent to the Yad Vashem Institute 217 applications for the distinction<sup>49</sup>. Accounting for less than 18 percent of the 1,208 investigated cases, these cases were obviously not made without due consideration. In 107 cases the title was awarded and in 119 it was refused. This means that in less than nine percent of all the cases of help to Jewish people, registered and processed by the GKBZHWP, were recognised as fulfilling the Yad Vashem award criteria, while over fifty percent were rejected by the Jerusalem institute.

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<sup>49</sup> According to information given by Prosecutor Władysław Bielecki's in March 1988 to Julian Grzesik of Lublin, about 200 applications sent to Yad Vashem "were pending." 25 more were sent in 1988. (AIPN, Akta dotyczące pomocy udzielanej przez Polaków Żydom w latach 1939–1945, 23/68, P.902, k2). Prosecutor Bielawski estimated the total number of Poles murdered for helping Jews at over 2,400; he mentioned 969 of these victims by name in his books. W. Bielawski, *Zbrodnie na Polakach dokonane przez hitlerowców za pomoc udzielaną Żydom* [Crimes Committed by the Nazis Against Poles for Help Extended to Jews] (Warsaw: Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce – Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 1987).

When researching aid, careful attention should be given to both sides. It takes an in-depth knowledge of the realities of the Second World War and of all conditions with an impact on the Poles and the Jews to understand the Polish-Jewish relations in that period, with their positive and negative aspects. I daresay there has been a tendency to play down and overlook this side of the picture. On the whole, the historiography of the Holocaust largely disregards the situation of the Poles, treating it as irrelevant compared with the situation of the Jews doomed to extermination. Yet I believe that the factors affecting the Poles are critical not only to understanding the situation of the Jews who sought survival on the “Aryan side,” but to overall research on the Holocaust. This is not about a “competition on suffering,” or even about comparing the fate of the Jews and the Poles; the sole purpose is to examine the geographic backdrop of the Holocaust. The differences in the Germans’ occupation policy in the conquered territories in Europe, pointedly illustrated by the Germans’ attitude towards the Scandinavians and the Slavs, are often overlooked, as is the prewar scale of antisemitism, and the sizes of Jewish populations and the degrees of their assimilation in the different countries. It is often forgotten that in different parts of Europe – indeed, in different parts of the same country – anti-Jewish regulations were introduced at different times. Yet all these factors were extremely relevant to the capacity for help, because helping involved different efforts at different times and places.<sup>50</sup> Unlike in the Polish lands, where an “act of help” could cost the helper his or her life and where whole villages were punished with raids for aiding Jews, in the Netherlands, for instance, a farmer who had concealed Jewish children was arrested and sent to a concentration camp only when caught committing this “crime” for the third time.<sup>51</sup>

When researching the Polish wartime experience, one notices immediately the disparity between the real situation of the

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<sup>50</sup> Tec, pp. 6–7.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Poles under the occupation and its traumatic postwar picture. This is an extremely important factor, possibly fundamental to understanding many Polish-Jewish issues of the period under survey. It appears that, contrary to frequent generalisations about an identical experience common to the whole Polish nation, the reality “depended predominantly on the place of residence, the German policy in effect in a given area, the nature of contacts with Germans, the fate of one’s own family, the duration of living under the invaders’ rule and the extent of knowledge of the invaders’ crimes.”<sup>52</sup> Yet already during the war, and thereafter, the picture of the war and occupation in the Poles’ social consciousness developed under the impact of the most dramatic experiences, to become a synthesis of Hitlerite crimes against the Polish nation. This is an understandable and, in a way, natural phenomenon influenced by at least two factors. First, nearly every Polish family lost someone as a result of the war; almost everyone had been, if not a direct victim of atrocity, then at least a witness of it, or had heard of it from a direct victim. Second, there was the postwar propaganda.

Yet this paper is concerned with what was happening during – not after – the Hitlerite occupation. Why was the dramatisation of a situation which, bad as it was, perceived as even worse? Doubtless, this could be attributed to many factors, but I believe that the foremost of them – often not fully realised even when cited – was the terror the Polish society was being subjected to. This word is commonly associated with fear, a feeling known to everyone – but in fact it stands for a much broader and more profound notion. Terror should be construed as a feeling of powerful and enduring fear-induced stress which in time becomes unbearable. This is how Józef Pieter described it: “The Hitlerite regime was sowing fear. What does this mean? The round-ups, torture, executions, concentration camps and the monstrous methods of extorting information – these were

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<sup>52</sup> T. Szarota, „Niemcy w oczach Polaków podczas II wojny światowej” [Germans in the Eyes of Poles during World War II], in *Dzieje Najnowsze* 1978, vol. 10 No. 2, p. 144.

what many people saw and many experienced personally. Nobody was certain of his or her life or freedom, not even when not directly under threat at the moment. The atmosphere of terror – that is, of enduring, powerful fear-induced stress caused by specific inter-human situations – had descended upon and persisted in the society.”<sup>53</sup>

I believe this phenomenon is of exceptional relevance to the help issued and to many other matters. It appears to me that by understanding it we can obtain a much better insight into the situation of a Pole faced with a dilemma: to help a person in danger, or not to help. The way things were, it was fairly immaterial whether the person from whom help was requested was in danger. What counted was whether he or she, subjected as they were to enduring stress and fear-induced anxiety, could get the better of their weaknesses, overcome an emotion far deeper than fear, withstand the invaders’ terror targeted directly at them and their loved ones. I am inclined to believe that in this respect the Polish society did not differ much from the Jewish. Even if slight differences are found, they will be fairly meaningless in my opinion, for in every case the stress was strong enough to paralyse the actions of an average human.

Alongside the destruction of the Polish intelligentsia (a project planned in advance and pursued since the beginning of the war), the massacres of civilians and the press-ganging of Poles for work in the Reich, from 1941 the invaders stepped up the brutalisation of their treatment of civilians and since 1942 (that is, since the commencement of total physical extermination of Jews in the GG) they went as far as to experiment with driving out certain Polish populations and re-settling Germans in the vacated territories, for example the Zamość region. This was a direct and clear message for the Poles that their physical existence was at risk – or worse. The numbers of German police and military forces were rising steadily. In 1943 the entire GG was designated an “area of guerrilla operations” (Germ.

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<sup>53</sup> J. Pieter, *Strach i odwaga* [Fear and Courage] Warsaw, 1971, p. 101.



*Bandenkampfgebiete*), and, with the Polish territories still hundreds and thousands of kilometres away from the front line, there was no hope that the war situation would change soon.

Besides, it is common knowledge that German functionaries were not the only enforcers of the Hitlerite order. Seen from the Poles' perspective, this group must be enlarged by all kinds of agents and spies who were an integral part of the German terror machinery.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps they were the most dangerous enemies of the Polish society because, with their intimate knowledge of it, they were capable of detecting all illegal activities. They came from practically all strata of the society. No community was safe from the Germans' attempts to recruit collaborators. According to findings by Józef Bratko, who conducted research on this subject with respect to Cracow, there were three basic categories of secret agent. The first and the most numerous consisted of people who, arrested by Germans and fearing deportation to a concentration camp or a death sentence, agreed to collaborate. The second group of agents were recruited under duress, some from among arrested persons to whom freedom had been offered in exchange for certain services. The third and the smallest group was of those who, although not arrested, had offered to collaborate of their own free will. The author emphasises that the latter made the best collaborators.<sup>55</sup>

The lowest category of spies came from the bottommost strata of the society, recruited for rather unexpected purposes. Not only did the German authorities attach the least importance to this group, but throughout the occupation they did nothing to prevent these undercover networks from being exposed, even though for the agent whose cover had been blown

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<sup>54</sup> I am referring exclusively to the Polish undercover agents, for the Jewish ones operated chiefly (but not exclusively) in the ghettos as long as these existed and could pose no major threat to Poles. Poles were acting chiefly to the detriment of Poles, but also of Jews.

<sup>55</sup> J. Bratko, *Gestapowcy* [The Gestapo Men] (Cracow: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1985), pp. 170f. [...]

this often meant death at the hands of the Polish underground. Bratko notes that there could be only one reason for this. Information about the resistance movement was the last thing this kind of agent relied on for. The truth was that the German authorities wanted these “exposed spy networks” to create an impression in the Polish society that undercover agents were everywhere and could be encountered in the least expected circumstances. The idea was to generate an all-encompassing psychosis of betrayal and uncertainty, in the belief that this would discourage Poles, to some extent at least, from involving in the resistance movement. The semi-overt agents took the blame for arrests and executions [...] while the most valuable agents were busy elsewhere. It was to the latter that time and resources (very substantial on occasions) were allocated.<sup>56</sup>

The impact of all this on an average Pole is not difficult to imagine. Every stranger, everyone outside the narrow circle of closest relations – even a neighbour and an acquaintance – was perceived as a possible collaborator, agent provocateur, or a German spy. The same applied to escapees from the ghetto or from a camp, whose very presence represented the highest danger. The Poles largely succumbed to fear, mistrust and panic. At times the merest rumour sufficed to throw crowds into panic.

In the light of Bratko’s findings we can attempt a different interpretation of certain issues which are largely unknown to this day. For instance, if the underground authorities were aware of the invaders’ methods of operation, this would account for the absence of a major push to counter the blackmailing of Jews. In fact, the Jew blackmailers, much like the whole category of street informers who were the most visible to the average resident of the occupied country, posed no real threat to underground organisations. To fight them actively, in particular to carry out death sentences against them, would, besides endangering the direct participants of such opera-

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

tions, amount to playing into the German authorities' hands, because through their unavoidable public resonance such actions would have strengthened both the belief in the ubiquity of German spies and the intimidation of the general public.

The Polish society responded to the wartime situation described above by adopting what Jacek Chrobaczyński called an "adaptive" attitude which involved the lowering of social standards, focusing on securing physical existence, and the readiness to trade everything for staying alive.<sup>57</sup> It was obvious to the common awareness of the Poles that the Germans were not going to stop at the Jews and that unless the war ended the Poles would share the same fate. Many things indicate that the perceived wisdom was right. Accordingly, the influence of social norms on individual conduct was disappearing or at least diminishing and the every-man-to-himself reasoning prevailed; in particular people responsible for others had to re-arrange their values, putting survival, self-protection and rescue of their nearest and dearest first, with struggle, resistance or self-defence low (if at all) on their list of priorities.

Yet another consequence was the moral erosion which hit every community. Contrary to what may appear, it is not at all surprising that almost every locality had a collaborator; thief, Jewish blackmailer, prostitute, and the like. The war was a demoralising influence in its own right, whether one's conduct was positive or negative. Even acts recognised as commendable – such as stealing or making easy profit on smuggling so as to help one's starving family, or killing a German in a fight – had a demoralising impact. All previous values had undergone a relativisation profound enough to warrant a thesis that an entirely new world perspective emerged under its influence.

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<sup>57</sup> J. Chrobaczyński, „Stan anomii. Wpływ okupacji na zjawiska negatywne i naganne w postawach społeczeństwa polskiego w latach 1939–1945 (na przykładzie Krakowa)” [Anomie: The Impact of Occupation on Negative and Reprehensible Attitudes in the Polish Society in 1939–1945 (the case of Cracow)], *Rocznik Naukowo-Dydaktyczny. Prace historyczne XIII. Studia z dziejów Małopolski w XIX i XX wieku*, vol. 13, No. 126, pp. 248f.

New moral criteria, underpinned by personal emotions shaped by the impact of personal experiences, came to be applied in self-evaluation and in the evaluation of others.

## Conclusion

Help given by Poles to Jewish people in the period of the German occupation in 1939–1945 still stands in need of detailed research. Because of neglect in this area, this help – in particular individual aid unconnected with underground organisations – will never be examined as thoroughly as it might have been immediately after the war when a relatively large group of witnesses of these events were still alive. Nevertheless, even though the state of research on this subject still leaves much to be desired, a number of important conclusions can be put forth.

Firstly, clear distinction must be drawn between organised and individual help. It is incorrect to identify the “Żegota” operation with the Council for Aid to Jews, the way the two have often been identified in academic literature on Polish-Jewish relations during the war. The “Żegota” code name was used not only by the CAJ, but also by other organisations and, at times, even by individual helpers. I believe that, bearing in mind that this campaign was not identical with the CAJ’s operations, no less than three separate “Żegota” actions undertaken by representatives of the Polish society in the interests of Polish Jews in the occupied territories should be recognised. The first one was individual help which comprised, besides temporary support, all minor kinds of assistance Poles provided to their acquaintances and, at times, to total strangers – victims of the invaders’ anti-Jewish policy. Doubtless, the scale of these actions was much larger than can be proved today. This is obvious, given that a majority of the Polish “Righteous Among the Nations” had no affiliations whatsoever with underground organisations.

The second “Żegota” action covers help provided by Polish underground organisation prior to the “great operation” and the establishment of the CAJ. This is not to say that this help did not continue thereafter because, after all, some underground organisations involved in aiding Jewish people refrained from joining the Council. One prominent example is Zofia Kossak-Szczucka who is recognised as the originator of the CAJ; having elected – for various reasons, including political – not to engage in the work of the CAJ, she formed another organisation for aid to the Jews, known as SOS (Social Organisation for Self-defence).

The core activities of the CAJ and of the parties and groups affiliated with the Council represent only the third “Żegota” action. Then, we must add to these three all Polish efforts abroad aimed at helping Jews, focused on but not limited to Polish citizens. To sum up, it can be said that there were no less than four “Żegota” actions, three at home and one abroad. Once this is realised, both the links between the two communities of the prewar Poland and their divisions can be better understood. Where help was possible owing to social and personal contacts or organisational connections, chances were high for those in need to receive support. On the other hand, where no such prewar contacts existed help was practically unfeasible. For this reason, it was imperative that Jewish organisations participated in the work of the CAJ, for they alone had the necessary knowledge of the Jewish community. Without them, supporting people with no close acquaintance with Poles, or unassimilated Jews, would have been impossible in the inhuman conditions of the German occupation.

Several interesting conclusions can be drawn on the basis of my sample of about 2,500 cases of aid and of Nechama Tec’s research. In these cases, help was given the most often for humanitarian reasons, more often in the countryside than in cities. As the German offensive progressed, the assistance provided developed and it was only with the end of the war approaching, as the Red Army was liberating Polish territories, that the number of acts of help begin to decline. [...]

People, to whom Jewish refugees came, spared no sacrifice once they decided to provide aid. Obviously, we cannot establish how many Poles helped Jews without payment, disregarding the mortal danger to themselves and their families. Neither will the numbers of those, who helped for material gain or in expectation of obtaining such gain after the war, ever be known. The latter do not appear to have been a large group. Indeed, accepting that only about 300,000 Jews (less than 10 percent of Polish Jews) had resolved to escape from ghettos and camps, how many Poles could they have encountered on their way – or, rather, to how many did they apply for help? A proportion of the escapees were caught immediately after the escape, some were turned over to Germans by hostile people, robbed or murdered by bandits or by guerrilla groups operating in forests. How many of the fugitives had means with which to try to buy food or pay for a place to spend the night? The number of Poles awarded the distinction approaches six thousand and the number of people they rescued is probably much higher. As demonstrated by my analysis of a selected group of Polish and Jewish archival materials, six thousand is a vastly understated number relative to the number of Poles who helped Jews and whose names are recorded in archival materials. On the other hand, it is reasonable to deduce that only a proportion of these Poles was referred to by name or surname in the documents which have survived. One example is a collection of Jews' accounts written down after the war and kept now in the ŻIH archives; many of them mention the names of Poles who have not been honoured with the "Righteous" title. Also, it is a known fact that only a small proportion of the surviving Jews left such accounts. The collection numbers slightly above seven thousand texts, while the lowest estimate of Jews who survived in the Polish territory is 30,000. All in all, the Poles involved in helping Jews should be counted in hundreds of thousand, the most likely figure being about 300,000.

This relatively meagre record of the memory of Poles who helped Jewish people is due not only to neglect by Polish and

Jewish historians but, as many factors point out, to neglect by the Yad Vashem Institute. The procedure for the award of the title is very rigorous and many formal requirements must be satisfied to apply for the title. What's more, the procedure is lengthy, it has been known to take as long as eight years. In most cases the title is awarded only when the Jewish witness is still alive and willing to give testimony –and the latter is not always the case.

We also seem to set less store by “acts of help” – that is, to cases of one-off help to a persecuted person – than to periodic or permanent help. Usually the former are treated as quite trivial. This approach is reflected in narratives of occupation time, in which victims of the Holocaust naturally highlighted cases of negative behaviour towards them. Unlike hostility, the help offered seemed a natural thing. Yet in the conditions of the German occupation, in particular since the death penalty had been instituted for any form of help to those escaping from ghettos, the situation of Holocaust witnesses was radically different. This makes acts of help as relevant as acts of hostility, for they could save a life just as an act of hostility could kill. Any form of support could cost life and, in this sense, it could be equivalent to an act of blackmail or extortion, of which there were also many.

*(Abridged by Sebastian Rejak)*

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## Rescue for Money: Paid Helpers in Poland, 1939–1945<sup>1</sup>

*“When he took the Jews in, he fixed himself with gold teeth, and his wife started wearing gold earrings.”<sup>2</sup>*

The issue of Poles’ rescuing the Jews during the war is one of the most complex and charged topics within the realm of the already complicated history of Polish-Jewish relations. Over the decades, the subject had been ill served by political pressures, which fostered the growth of myths. These, in turn, had less to do with the historical reality of this tragic period than with the political expediency of the moment. It is striking that even today these pressures continue to have an impact on this area of study. In their attempt to prove the massive and universal character of the “rescue” phenomenon, certain authors cross the distinct line that separates historical writing from a biased, partisan account. Despite these obstacles, there are several serious studies devoted to the subject – one of them was even written under the German occupation<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to Jan T. Gross, Stanisław Obirek., David Silberklang, Jean-Charles Szurek, and the participants in the July 2008 Yad Vashem workshop who generously provided me with comments on this text.

<sup>2</sup> „Z chwilą kiedy zabrał żydów do siebie, sprawił sobie złote zęby, a jego żona ma żydowskie kolczyki,” From the deposition of Jan P., a farmer from Ratulow, Nowy Targ county. Kraków State Archives (APW), collection of the Appellate Court (Sąd Apelacyjny) in Kraków, 985, K 244/49, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Among the most important works see: the classical study of E. Ringelblum: *Polish-Jewish Relations During the Second World War* (Yad Vashem, 1992); Teresa Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada Pomocy Żydom w Warszawie*,



There is a consensus among Polish historians that helping the Jews under the occupation was a widespread phenomenon. Thousands of trees planted at Yad Vashem are testimony to the scale of selfless sacrifice made by Polish Christians to their Jewish neighbors. When we look closely, however, from behind the olive groves we can see trees that grew on a different soil than the ideals espoused by the Righteous Among the Nations. For many Poles, helping Jews was, to put it bluntly, a very risky, but also an extremely profitable enterprise. While people taking part in this endeavor were also providing help to the Jews, it was in a less traditional sense of the word.

According to the selection criteria developed by Yad Vashem, the Righteous' actions must have been driven by motives other than financial gain. In certain situations they were entitled to seek reimbursement of the costs of living from their Jewish guests, but little more. This criterion excludes *a priori* all those who regarded Jews in distress as a potential source of income. Nevertheless, it is also thanks to people like them that many Jews were able to survive the Holocaust. One peasant woman expressed it in following words: "Some helped because of greed, others – because they had a heart of gold."<sup>4</sup> In English-language literature those people who "did not have the heart of gold" are usually described as "paid helpers."

From historians' (as well as survivors') point of view, drawing a line between rescuers who requested a "fair" price for shelter, those who asked for more, and those whose expectations and demands were much higher is not an easy task. Ac-

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1942/1945 (Warsaw: PIW, 1982); Władysław Bartoszewski, Zofia Lewinówna, *Ten jest z Ojczyzny Mojej. Polacy z pomocą Żydom* (Warsaw, 2007); Marcin Urynowicz, "Zorganizowana i indywidualna pomoc Polaków dla ludności żydowskiej esterminowanej przez okupanta niemieckiego w okresie drugiej wojny światowej," in: Andrzej Żbikowski, *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką, 1939-1945. Studia i Materiały* (Warsaw: IPN, 2006), pp. 252–253.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase is somewhat lost in translation. In original Polish it reads: „jedni z powodu interesu pomagali, inni, bo mieli serce bogate.” See: Alina Cała, *Wizerunek Żyda w polskiej kulturze ludowej* (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 2005), p. 168.

ording to Marek Edelman, in order to survive, Jews needed money, “good” (gentile) looks, and reliable and trustworthy acquaintances on the “Aryan” side. Without one of these elements, their chances for survival were reduced; lacking two of them usually spelled death. Unfortunately, we know practically nothing about the economically motivated help. The very idea of raising this issue is considered by many, quite unjustly, a tactless attempt to question the motives of people who helped Jews on more noble grounds.<sup>5</sup>

Asking for money from Jews (even when significant amounts were involved) should not, however, automatically brand the helpers as immoral individuals deprived of a sense of decency and deserving our contempt. Sheltering Jews in exchange for money was, for many, an attempt to act normally in an abnormal situation. Icchak Cukierman (Antek), one of the leaders of ŻOB (Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa – Jewish Combat Organization), once stated that the extremely difficult conditions under the German occupation forced people to look for unorthodox sources of income.<sup>6</sup> A trustworthy paid helper was, therefore, a useful ally in the Jewish fight for survival. The Jews themselves treated paid help as a normal feature of everyday life and death in Poland, and the existence of a large group of people willing to risk their own lives for money was absolutely crucial for those seeking safety. According to Cukierman, the critical issue was thus not whether (or not) the helpers gained financially, but whether they were ready to respect and honor their “contractual” commitment to their charges. If the paid helper and his “guests” negotiated the rent (even an outrageously high one) and had an understanding as to the

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<sup>5</sup> One of the Jews in hiding noted in his diary that one would not dare talk about the “financial side of the question” because “the hosts would not understand us and would accuse us of sheer ingratitude.” Marek Szapiro, *Nim słońce wszędzie* [Before the Sunrise] (Warsaw: Jewish Historical Institute [ZIH], 2008), p. 641.

<sup>6</sup> Icchak Cukierman, *Nadmiar Pamięci (siedem owych lat). Wspomnienia, 1939–1946*. [Too Much Memory (These Seven Years) Memoirs, 1939–1946] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2000), pp. 326–327.

living conditions (even if they were to be more than modest), and if the Aryan host did not unilaterally change the terms of the contract, then such an arrangement was considered not only normal, but even praiseworthy. Cukierman has offered a general appraisal of Poles' attitudes towards the extermination of the Jews. He was full of deep admiration for a people, who – for variety of reasons – decided to throw in their lot with the “non-Aryan” population and, consequently, risked their own lives. The second group, according to Cukierman, were people who helped Jews for financial gain. Some of them continued to help even when the financial resources of their charges ran out. There were others who kept Jews as long as the money was good, and later forced them to leave. Finally, there were people who sheltered Jews as long as the profits were good, and later surrendered them to the authorities.<sup>7</sup> These last two groups will be the focus of our special attention.

### Methodology of Help: Discussing the Sources

The dimension of the phenomenon of “paid rescue” can neither be easily evaluated, nor quantified. Given the complexity of the issue, such an attempt would quickly become an exercise in futility. What we can do, however, is offer certain guesses and less-than-precise evaluations. We know, for instance, that sheltering the Jews for money – according even to the most modest estimates – was the choice of many, and records show that paid helpers came from all social strata of Polish society. As we will demonstrate on the following pages, the division between selfless rescue and paid help was a fluid one. On one end of the spectrum we encounter paid help, which sometimes evolved into friendship. on the other side, we see different forms of exploitation and blackmail against the “hidden” Jews. These attitudes were in flux, forcing us constantly to revalu-

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<sup>7</sup> Cukierman, *Nadmiar Pamięci*, p. 299.

ate the paid helpers' motives. one of the survivors noted: "The attitude of our host changed. He fed us better; one could see that he really wanted to save us. Quite simply, we became *his little Jews*."<sup>8</sup> The helpers' attitude could change from day to day, month to month. In cases in which the relationship soured, the price of help grew immediately. Sometimes the Jews, having been robbed of all their belongings, were subsequently denounced to the police.

Both scenarios (the "friendly" and the "hostile") were not as frequent, however, as the most common development, one based on mutual understanding. The Jews, aware of the risks involved, promised to adequately compensate their hosts, and the helpers promised to provide their guests with bearable conditions.

The price of shelter grew with inflation as well as increased terror, but this was implicitly included in the agreement, and acceptable to all sides. The Jews were well aware that money was not the only, but certainly the fundamental, condition for survival. "We had no money, so we could not ask the Poles (who asked for outrageous amounts of money) for shelter," wrote Halina Raps-Aszkenaze about her situation in January 1943. "A Jew without money has to return to the ghetto and is doomed," added Wiesław Dobrowolski.<sup>9</sup>

Studies conducted thus far seem to indicate that greed and financial motivation were at the root of only 10–16% of the reported cases of help.<sup>10</sup> Nechama Tec, who, during the early

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<sup>8</sup> The Polish term "żydek" denotes a patronizing, but benevolent attitude towards the Jews. "Po prostu byliśmy jego Żydkami," YVA, 03/1327, Testimony of Eli Kuszniir, p.12.

<sup>9</sup> Archives of the ŻIH (AZIH), collection 302/300, p. 104.

<sup>10</sup> In a recently published text by Marcin Urynowicz, the author based his analysis on more than 2,400 cases of help registered in the ŻIH documents relating to the Righteous. Unfortunately, such a choice of sources almost automatically eliminates most of the cases involving "paid helpers." In order to study this problem, Urynowicz relies on the earlier work of Nechama Tec. Unfortunately, the most recent work also relies on the same kind of sources, and therefore struggles with the same methodological problem. Urynowicz

1980s, conducted dozens of interviews with survivors and analyzed hundreds of post-war narratives, came to the conclusion that “paid helpers” amounted to little more than a margin of the studied phenomenon. The paid helpers – according to Tec – were as rare as antisemites involved in rescuing Jews. According to Tec, 80% of paid helpers were uneducated people, peasants for the most part. Educated people, suggests Tec, would have helped out of more noble convictions.<sup>11</sup> However, because Tec’s study was based on interviews with survivors, this entails a methodological challenge: people helped by the Righteous gentiles had a much better chance for survival than those who had to pay a day-to-day and month-to-month ransom for their safety. If the financial resources of those belonging to the latter group ran out before the arrival of Red Army, they often found themselves out on the street, or denounced to the authorities. Penniless Jews did not last long in occupied Poland, and very few among them were given a chance to leave an account of “paid help.” This methodological handicap is a serious challenge to existing studies. Tec herself remarks that paid helpers were not eager to advertise their motives; they left no diaries, or other materials that would enable us to describe their actions. It does not mean, however, that historians are left without alternative and complimentary sources of information.

As it has already been noted, studies from the early 1980s suggest that financial motivations were important only in a relatively small percentage of the registered cases of helping

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notes: “The financial motivation was insignificant. Of course, this kind of information – especially in the case of the Polish testimonies – has to be treated with caution, since they are unlikely to confirm the fact of taking the money for help. In many cases, however, Poles’ testimonies are being corroborated by the accounts of their Jewish guests.” See M. Urynowicz’s paper in the current volume, pp. 288–294. See also: Elżbieta Rączy, *Pomoc Polaków dla ludności Żydowskiej na Rzeszowszczyźnie 1939–1945* [Help Given by Poles to the Jewish Population of the Rzeszow Region in 1939–1945] (Rzeszów–Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej– Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2008), pp. 101f.

<sup>11</sup> Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced The Darkness*, table on p. 226.

Jews. Even if we were to agree with this evaluation, the phenomenon of paid help would still be important enough to deserve a separate study. It seems, however, that in light of new archival evidence (previously unavailable to or left untouched by researchers), previous conclusions have to be revised. This, in turn, forces historians to rethink the whole issue of help and rescue. First, we need to mention the so-called “August files,” the judicial proceedings based on the August 31, 1944 decree “against people accused of collaboration with the enemy.”<sup>12</sup> Among the thousands of “August files” there are more than 1,300 case-files concerning people accused of taking part in persecuting Jews during the war. Among the accused one finds many paid helpers who, having taken away the Jews’ savings, murdered them, or delivered them into the hands of the police. Those sheltered by particularly greedy and cruel helpers left behind no memoirs or diaries on which we may base our understanding of their plight. The “August files” offer, therefore, important insights into this previously unknown situation. The dossiers mentioned above represent the records of completed judicial proceedings. In addition to these materials, historians now have access to extensive archival holdings related to some 24,000 case-files of the so-called “prosecutors’ investigations.” These files regroup records of primary investigations that were never completed because the attorney’s office decided either that there were no chances for a verdict, or that the evidence was insufficient, or because the suspects were dead. According to a recent inventory of archival materials, around 8% of “prosecutors’ files” concern anti-Jewish activities of Polish citizens during the 1939–1945 period. A substantial number of the

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<sup>12</sup> The Decree of August 31, 1944, called for the prosecution of various crimes committed against the Polish nation during the war. The majority of trials were held during the 1946–1950 period, but some investigations continued as late as 1956. Most recently, the importance of the “August files” for Holocaust research has been demonstrated by Alina Skibinska and Jakub Petelewicz in their article: “The Participation of Poles in Crimes Against Jews in the Świętokrzyskie Region,” in *Yad Vashem Studies*, 2007 (35:1), pp. 1–44.

preserved records is a veritable mine of information concerning paid helpers and their Jewish charges.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, and on top of the aforementioned archival evidence, one has to stress the importance of the records of wartime Polish and German courts. The records of German courts (*Deutsches Gericht* and *Sondergericht*), which – until very recently – have not been used by historians, are of particular importance. These collections contain hundreds of proceedings against Jews who went into hiding outside the ghettos.<sup>14</sup> They are illuminating, in terms of offering insights into the fate of the people who did not survive. They also allow us to advance initial guesses as to the circumstances in which Jews were seized by the German authorities. In many Polish accounts, we encounter a recurring statement that “the Germans arrived and took the Jews away.” With the help of court records, one can now venture a guess as to how the Germans knew where to look for these Jews in the first place. This question, given the deadly efficiency of the German anti-Jewish measures, is one of fundamental importance.

The relatively low rate of success is another feature associated with paid help. Unlike the narratives of survivors, upon which the majority of existing studies are based, the court files provide evidence regarding the futility of the rescuing efforts. This, however, is no reason why such a form of helping should be excluded altogether from historical scrutiny and analysis.

Taken together, the “August files,” the “prosecutors’ dossiers,” the German war-time court records, Jewish testimonies from the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw (collection 301

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<sup>13</sup> See: Alina Skibińska, *Zróżdła do badań nad zagładą Żydów na okupowanych ziemiach polskich* (Cyklady: Warszawa, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> The records of the German courts in Warsaw were used in my book: *“Ja tego Żyda znam!” Szantażowanie Żydów w Warszawie, 1939–1943* (Warsaw: IfiS, 2004). I would also like to draw attention to an important article by Dorota Sierpacka, “Mordercy Żydów przed nazistowskim Sądem Specjalnym” [The Murderers of the Jews Facing the Nazi Special Court], in *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*, 2004, 2(6), pp. 233–245, based on the records of the Łódź *Sondergericht*.

and 302) and the testimonies preserved at Yad Vashem (collections 03 and 0/33) all dramatically expand our research horizon. The question of paid help, previously described as a marginal activity, thus acquires a different format, and looms as a significant historical phenomenon with far-reaching social implications.

Having made these initial remarks, the time has come to have a closer look at the phenomenon of paid help.

### Sheltering the Jews and the Everyday Reality Under the Occupation

*“Good Christians; couldn’t they take pity on those poor, desperate souls who ventured to their doorsteps when the ghettos were being liquidated, and allow them to slip away, into safety? No, the good people don’t want to do that. They simply don’t want the Jews around any more.”<sup>15</sup>*

The inhabitants of the Generalgouvernement (the occupied Polish territories) lived entangled in a dense net of laws, bylaws and regulations meant to govern practically all walks of life. The draconian punishments meted out by the Germans for any transgressions resulted in various degrees of compliance. In the case of the ban on radios (introduced early, already in the fall of 1939), for example, the majority of Poles complied with the regulations, and surrendered their receivers. In other cases, the regulations of the occupant were boycotted. In the economic sphere, the resistance to German measures allowed for the creation of thriving smuggling operations, illegal foreign currency exchange and equally illicit sales of foodstuffs to

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<sup>15</sup> YVA 03/3141, The diary of Emil Urman, p. 5: „Czyż nie mogłyby chrześcijańskie dusze zmiłować się na tyle, by w czasie akcji pozwolić takiemu desperatowi, który zabłądził do ich domostwa, przemknąć się gdzieś chyłkiem...? – ludziska właśnie nie chcą. Po prostu nie życzą sobie w ogóle Żydów.”



the cities. The expansion of the black market successfully defied German plans to starve the Polish population into submission, while the universal rejection of the political strategy of the occupier resulted in the creation of the Polish Underground State, whose influence reached all strata of Polish society.

All these activities – both economic and political – carried with them a potential death sentence. Nevertheless, there was no shortage of candidates either to volunteer for the resistance, or to take part in smuggling activities. But helping Jews was – and on this score the historical sources are unequivocal – a separate, particularly dangerous chapter of the German occupation. People helping Jews had to consider not only the higher risks related to this activity, but also the lack of social approval that went with it. These two issues were closely linked: the more disapproval in society for rescuing Jews, the more probable was denunciation and arrest. Not surprisingly, the high prices asked from the Jews reflected the gravity of the situation.

The epidemic of denunciations was particularly threatening, and the records of German courts provide ample testimony as to the size of this phenomenon.<sup>16</sup> On the one hand, Poles helping Jews had to contend with a high probability of detection (much higher than those who helped members of the Resistance); on the other, they were aware of the lack of social support for their actions. Professor Paweł Horbaczewski, who tried to find a hiding place for one of his Jewish (but blessed with good “Aryan” looks) friends, wrote: “I called all my Polish

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<sup>16</sup> The files of the Ciechanów [Zichenau] gestapo (Archives of the Warsaw IPN) or those of the Warsaw Special Court [Sondergericht – Municipal Archives of Warsaw] offer a particularly rich research background, as far as the denunciations are concerned. See: Barbara Engelking-Boni, *Szanowny Panie Gestapo: Donosy do władz niemieckich w Warszawie i okolicach w latach 1940–1941* (Warsaw: IfiS PAN, 2003). Denunciations can also be found in the „August files,” where documents from the Germans archives are frequently appended. See: AMSW, 654 /III sygn. 230, denunciation concerning sheltering of the Jews, December 7 and 28, 1943, against Antoni Halecki, reported to the 14th precinct of the Polish “Blue” police by the Mogielski family. See: Archives of the Warsaw IPN, SWWW, file 536.

friends to put the girl up for one night. Everyone refused point blank. If she had been a Pole from the Home Army [AK-Polish Resistance – JG], they would have helped. We started to make rounds of those Poles with no phone, everywhere with the same result: ‘We will not take the Jewess.’<sup>17</sup> The girl was finally placed with the Poles as a “blown AK courier from Lwów” – an Aryan, of course.

While we will pay more attention to popular attitudes towards the “Jewish question,” the Polish nationalists’ goals in this respect were clear. The NSZ (National Armed Forces – an underground organization of the Polish nationalists) declared, unequivocally and categorically, that: “Those who hide Jews will be branded as traitors to the Polish cause. Because every true Pole knows that in a resurrected Poland there will be no room either for a German, or for a Jew.”<sup>18</sup>

Since the Jews hiding on the “Aryan side” exposed gentiles to an increased risk, this could have mobilized the inhabitants to act in self-defense. Ad hoc tenants’ committees formed in order to coordinate common action. one of the victims of the “vigilantes” noted: “Stefańska, the janitor, the local shopkeeper and three other tenants all entered our hideout. In the yard, despite the lateness of the hour, I saw a large number of people from the house next to ours. They behaved as if they were assisting at a spectacle. The shopkeeper assumed the role of an official.”<sup>19</sup> The Jews were later delivered into the hands of the police. It is rather difficult to image a similar scene taking place had an Aryan tenant been discovered to have been working for the Resistance. In rural areas, “hidden” Jews were sometimes killed by the locals, and their hosts forced to bury the dead next to their house – as a constant reminder of their transgression against the community, whose well-being they

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<sup>17</sup> YVA, 03/ 2521, Testimony of Paweł Horbaczewski, p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> Propaganda Centralna (PC), newspaper of the NSZ, 14/27, 1942. The bi-weekly PC had a run of about 80,000 copies.

<sup>19</sup> Wiesław Dobrowolski, *AŻIH*, 302/300, p. 133.

had so callously exposed to danger.<sup>20</sup> It is, therefore difficult to condemn people who, under these circumstances, refused to help the Jewish refugees.

Anti-Jewish feelings did not diminish or disappear over time. Quite to the contrary, everyday scenes of mass murder and the constant barrage of the German propaganda tended to reinforce and strengthen the existing prejudice. The anti-Jewish attitudes were also not limited to the poor or uneducated. Aurelia Wyleżyńska noted on June 25, 1943 in her diary: "I hear from a distinguished, European lady: 'I am so relieved that they are no longer with us!' One can see that Hitler has won over many from amongst us!" Even in August 1944, after the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising, when the threat of denunciation to the Germans had disappeared – the old attitudes continued: "If you want to leave [the hiding place] I will not allow you back in," declared one of the paid helpers in Warsaw to "his Jews." "I don't want to be the laughing stock of the neighborhood when they learn that I helped the Jews."<sup>21</sup> Another "paid host" told his charges: "The town is under AK control and when they find a Jew, they kill him. They will also kill me, if they learn that I kept you."<sup>22</sup> Jan Biernat, a merchant from Bochnia, declared with much candor (in 1949!) that he hated the Jews, and that before the war he had been a member of the "Christian Front," which strived to "waste the Jews." Biernat was particularly incensed that – unknowingly to him – a tenant in his own house had sheltered a Jewish child during

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<sup>20</sup> See the annexed document No. 1 at the end of this text. For a similar case, see also: IPN Warsaw, District Court (Sąd Wojewódzki) in Kielce. In the Kielce case, the village elder initially requested that the bodies of dead Jews be buried inside the house, and only later relented and allowed the killed Jews to be buried outside, directly under the widows of the Polish helpers. 182 I-183 II (SAK 182 I-183 II). [I am grateful to Alina Skibinska for having made me aware of this last case.]

<sup>21</sup> Marian Berland, *Dni długie jak wieki* (Warsaw: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1992), p. 454.

<sup>22</sup> YVA, 03/3130, Testimony of Awraham Goldblum, p. 24.

the war: “Had I known that they were keeping a Jewish child, it would have been shot,” he told the prosecutor.<sup>23</sup>

Not all denunciations were caused by the dislike of the Jews. Simple envy often played a large part, too. According to many, those sheltering Jews were making a fortune in process.<sup>24</sup> Such “unjustified” enrichment bothered neighbors and friends, who considered themselves unfairly excluded from the redistribution of wealth that was happening around them. Jewish wealth thus became common property, and individual attempts at hiding Jews were considered egoistic assaults against the community. Since everyone could suffer because of the potential German reprisals, there was no reason why only the chosen few should gain. As a result of such reasoning, organized groups of citizenry searched houses of people suspected of harboring Jewish sympathies, or whose behavior was deemed suspicious (living above their expected means). Julian Trebnio, a farmer from the Sokołów area, learned his lesson the hard way when, in the spring of 1943, a group of masked men searched his house “looking for gold, cash and Jews.” According to them, the farmer must have been harboring Jews because “he purchased vodka all too often in a bar in Sokołów.”<sup>25</sup> The searches were often accompanied by beatings and blackmail.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> APK, SAKr 974, K209/49, The interrogation protocol of September 20, 1949.

<sup>24</sup> *All Jews have tons of gold (Wszystkie żydy mająm pełno złota)*, said a peasant to two Jews caught in a village. Marian Berland, *Dni długie jak wieki* (Warsaw: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza 1992), p. 205.

<sup>25</sup> AMSW, collection of the Warsaw *Sondergericht*, file 1054. Zeugen Vernehmungsprotokoll vom 2.4. 1943. Interestingly, two of the attackers, the Rajewicz brothers from Sokołów, were professionally involved in hunting down Jews. Both held special passes issued by the Sokołów gendarmerie, which enabled them to search houses “in order to find the Jews who went into hiding following the liquidation of the Sokołów ghetto.” [The Sokołów ghetto was liquidated in September 1942 and its inhabitants sent to Treblinka – JG].

<sup>26</sup> “The searches were conducted by the citizenry from Połaniec. They moved in groups of five or six, and searched the houses together with the village elder looking for Jews,” AZIH, 310/813.

In addition to the hostile attitudes of the populace, people hiding Jews had to be aware of a broad array of regulations which further complicated their task, and which increased chances for detection. In rural areas, the authorities often inspected households and farms looking for undeclared foodstuffs or grains subject to contingent regulations. In the cities, apartments and houses were searched in pursuit of “underused”<sup>27</sup> spaces, or in order to apprehend “unproductive and idle” inhabitants. The searches allowed the authorities to take stock of people living in each dwelling, and “idle” residents were threatened with resettlement, or simply shipped off to work in Germany. In addition, from the summer of 1943, rumors spread about the forced deportations of retirees living alone.<sup>28</sup> On the top of this, strict regulations regarding blackouts and the covering-up of windows resulted in many searches targeting real or alleged delinquents. Not surprisingly, all these measures and attitudes contributed greatly to the amount of money that Jews were expected to pay for shelter.

### Making Money Off the Jews

*“The Jewess had crossed the meadow, and lost her watch. Some time later, a certain Jurek found this watch...”*<sup>29</sup>

Many people from different walks of life, and from various strata of Polish society, decided to take part in the process of expropriation of Jewish wealth. The whole process involved

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<sup>27</sup> According to the German regulations, each room, apartment and house had to be fully utilized. In many cases, people were forced to accept additional inhabitants, in order to meet the prescribed density quotas.

<sup>28</sup> Marek Szapiro, *Nim słońce wzejdzie... Dziennik pisany w ukryciu, 1943–1944* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo ŻIH, 2007), p. 226. The planned deportations of retirees are frequently mentioned by Franciszek Wyszynski. See Franciszek Wyszynski, *Dzienniki 1941–1944* (Warsaw: Mówią Wieki-Bellona, 2007).

<sup>29</sup> APK, collection of SAKr, 984, k239/49, the testimony of Jakub B., p. 299.

a certain degree of ingenuity, as well as a good knowledge of the new anti-Jewish regulations, introduced by the Germans as early as November 1939. Some lawyers and judges took part in the “aryanization” of Jewish real estate: in Warsaw, in the spring-summer of 1940; in Kraków, local lawyers and magistrates became involved already in the late fall of 1939. Businessmen and industrialists, using the proviso of absent lenders, started to cancel their pre-war letters of debt held by Jews. Others looked with growing hope at the emerging housing opportunities in the liquidated ghettos. A thriving commercial exchange (illegal, for the most part) between the ghettos and the “Aryan side” helped thousands of Poles to improve their lot and, even after the destruction of the ghettos, the smuggle of wares, merchandise and other movables continued unabated.<sup>30</sup> It comes, therefore, as no surprise that the appeal of the “Jewish fortune” attracted intense interest. It was often argued that since the Jews were anyhow condemned to die, they might as well legate their property to Poles. The Poles, the argument went, were, after all, more entitled to this wealth than the Germans. Emmanuel Ringelblum put it succinctly, describing the Jews under occupation as the “dead on a furlough.” “One day, in January 1943, a Polish woman came up to my wife and, seeing her good boots, asked her to give them up, since shortly she would not be needing them anymore,” wrote Eli Kuszniir about his wartime experiences.<sup>31</sup> A while later, on the eve of an *Aktion*, “the Poles not only failed to show their compassion, but openly rejoiced that they could take the things left behind.” This reaction upset the Jews so much that they started to burn their belongings. “This resulted in a terrible row, because the Poles believed we were burning things they already considered their own.”<sup>32</sup> Another Jew noted down the broadly circulated opinions “that the Jews were to be blamed for Poland’s misfor-

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<sup>30</sup> Marian Berland, *Dni długie jak wieki* (Warsaw: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1992), p. 327.

<sup>31</sup> YVA, 03/1327, Testimony of Eli Kuszniir, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

tunes; that the Jews were spies, that they took over the commerce; that they were fighting for the political control. The Poles were particularly upset that the Jews did not leave their Polish “brothers” their fortunes, diamonds, furs, money and other valuables, which they had in such abundance. Because of that, they have been justly punished.”<sup>33</sup> Shortly after the war, a farmer from the Kraków area admitted that “he wanted to trade pants with Icek Mendel [a young Jewish lad hiding in the area – JG] because he might run into police who would shoot him, and then a good pair of trousers would go to waste.”<sup>34</sup> Similar business-like attitude to Jewish goods was also evident in Warsaw. During the ghetto uprising in April-May 1943, some expressed concern over the extent of the damage and destruction. “Because of these Jews, they burn down so many houses,” the previously cited Berland reported the opinions of bystanders, “otherwise the people would at least have had the apartments.”<sup>35</sup> Franciszek Wyszyński wrote in a similar vein. When the uprising had been quashed, he commented sadly on the ruins of the “closed quarter:” “The Jewish quarter as a hotbed of communism shall be destroyed. We know that nothing will be left there. It is a sign of horrible barbarism – the fact that a few hundred Jews remain hidden in the ruins does not justify this kind of destruction.”

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<sup>33</sup> YVA, collection 03/295, Testimony of Gusta Wilner, “W sąsiedztwie Niemców i antysemitów” (in the company of Germans and antisemites).

<sup>34</sup> APW, SAKr, 967, K156/49

<sup>35</sup> Marian Berland, *Dni długie jak wieki*, p. 223.

## The Price and Extent of Help

*“You know, one asks for a lot of money for a room, but however much one would ask, it would still be not enough.”*<sup>36</sup>

The rental market in the Generalgouvernement was limited and tightly regulated. The tenants were placed under the watchful eye of Polish and German authorities. Even more insidious was the informal surveillance conducted by other tenants (in the cities) or neighbors (in the rural areas). From the creation of the ghettos, and especially the proclamation of the Third Regulation Concerning the Right of Residence,<sup>37</sup> the arrival of every new tenant immediately raised suspicions.

Superintendents were required to demonstrate due diligence in examining all documents, and the “residents’ books”<sup>38</sup> were frequently inspected by the police. Before a superintendent could register a new tenant, he had to check the stamped confirmation that the tenant had legally left his last place of residence, and examine his personal ID (*Kennkarte*) and record of employment. From 1942, new tenants also had to provide certificates of baptism. Growing penalties made the bureaucrats more vigilant, and this spelled new problems for Jews seeking shelter. In occupied Poland, the black market for false documents was dominated by the needs of the Polish Underground State, but “illegal” Jews were certainly one of its most important groups of clients. The most secure documents were those belonging to people temporarily out of the country. These IDs were later adjusted to the needs of their new owners. Simple,

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<sup>36</sup> In original Polish: “*Wiecie państwo, wprowadzcie bierze się zapokój dużo pieniędzy, ale ile się bierze to za mało*,” YVA, T. Obremski, p. 377.

<sup>37</sup> The III Regulation, proclaimed on October 15, 1941, introduced the penalty of death for every Jew found outside the ghetto, without a valid authorization.

<sup>38</sup> Each house had to have its own book of residents, containing information about the tenants.



falsified IDs were more risky, but much depended on the price the buyer was willing to pay.

Sometimes, a new “Certificate of Baptism” went together with a special “Confirmation of Aryanness.” This peculiar document (notaries in Warsaw charged 50 zlotys to draw it up) was drafted in the presence of the person whose Aryan origins were being confirmed, as well as at least two witnesses. The witnesses attested to the fact that the individual in question “right after his birth was admitted to the Christian community and thus the witnesses state that they are not aware of any circumstances which would indicate that this person would, at any point, belong to the Jewish religion.”<sup>39</sup> High-quality documents facilitated the search for shelter. In case of a police search, the “documented” Jews could provide the Polish hosts with an all-important alibi. This became particularly crucial in the wake of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, when the gendarmerie began to conduct so-called “blockades” of buildings. During a blockade, the police cordoned off a house, or a number of houses, and searched all the apartments looking for people without the required registration. The forged IDs offered some measure of protection, but often the gendarmerie worked hand-in-hand with the agents, who could recognize a Jew “by his nose” – as Ringelblum put it.

The safekeeping of one’s goods became one of the foremost preoccupations and worries of Jews who wanted to enter the black market of “paid rescue.” The trick was to store the valuables in a safe place, and not to carry them around. During a search performed by a dishonest helper, or a raid by rogue “agents” (discussed later), one could at least hope to live through another round of negotiations for a ransom. Jews who were robbed clean stood little chance of survival. The best course of action therefore, consisted of leaving money and valuables with several trusted Aryan friends, thus reducing losses

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<sup>39</sup> AMSW, repertorium of notary A. Malinowski, 22, December 30, 1940.

if faced with treason or arrest. Ringelblum described bitterly this sad and tragic part of the wartime scene. According to the Jewish historian, the war demoralized the people to such an extent that the Poles, in vast majority of cases, refused to return the goods or money to their rightful owners, assuming that there would soon be no Jews left to claim their belongings.<sup>40</sup> Celel Perechodnik, in his moving account, recalled: “The Germans are right. Time and human meanness are their best allies in fighting the Jews. The Jews fall into their hands without any effort on their part. Some are denounced, and others are caught because they were robbed by Jew-hunters, or by their own friends, who stole the goods left under their care. Human meanness and time work tirelessly in favor of the Germans. They guarantee that there will be no Jews left in Poland at the end of the war.”<sup>41</sup>

In the case of wealthy Jews in Warsaw or Krakow, the amounts involved were often substantial, but treason also struck the poor, who had left their spare clothes, few household items or farm animals in the care of their Aryan friends.<sup>42</sup> The plight of these people was even more dramatic, since they could have no hope for any help from other Jews, most of whom were facing an equally tragic predicament. Leaving their goods in “uncertain” hands could not only mean their forfeiture, but – more importantly – could also result in the denunciation and death of those in hiding. One of the “entrusted” gentiles, a farmer from a village in the Krakow district, tracked down his former Jewish friends, who had left their belongings under his care and

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<sup>40</sup> E. Ringelblum, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie*, p. 65.

<sup>41</sup> Celel Perechodnik, *Czy ja jestem mordercą?*, p. 272.

<sup>42</sup> A Jewish woman sentenced to death, wrote (from prison) a note to her daughter: “I have no idea what we have left at the Felicjanki [a Catholic female order – JG]. I gather everything is lost. I am sending you a key to a box at Bronia’s place. At Zieba’s place you will find (with Mary’s help) six barrels. Gabrychowa has 200 five-liter (rusty) containers. The Chowańskis have our silverware, a set for twelve people. The Boczek have silver items, and Rzepa has a small American drawer. The janitor has a cupboard with shelves.” From the testimony of Gustawa Ehrlich, AZIH, 301/1804.

who had gone into hiding in the neighborhood. Having found his prey, he reported them to the police. Some time later, he declared to the farmer who hid the Jews: “There you go, swine, now eat your eight acres [land the Jews allegedly promised him as a payment for shelter]. Now the Jews have been taken away, Thomas G. is left with nothing.”<sup>43</sup> Gold, foreign currency and valuables were the preferred means of storing one’s wealth during the war. Franciszek Wyszyński, a Warsaw-based diarist, remarked on the scale of Jewish currency transactions. In the summer of 1942, during the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto when thousands of Jews began to flee in despair to the other side of the wall, panic erupted on the Warsaw stock exchange: “The stock exchange is completely disoriented due to the events of the ghetto. People say that thousands of beggars are being deported every day, but that rich Jews paid two million [zlotys of ransom – JG] and now want to recover their losses.”<sup>44</sup> A few days later, the “disorientation” of the stock exchange suddenly increased and the value of gold and precious metals plummeted. The reason – noted Wyszyński – lay in the fact that the Jews, herded into the trains heading for Treblinka, frantically traded their holdings for local currency, and thus managed temporarily to raise the value of *młynarki* [młynarkas].<sup>45</sup>

Besides the gold and foreign currencies, *młynarki* were the basic form of payment. Though relatively benign during the first three years of war [see table below], inflation started to grow quickly by mid-1943. Economic conditions became increasingly dire, and the deterioration of the German military situation on the Eastern front made many people aware of the distinct possibility of the imminent collapse of the German rule.<sup>46</sup> For the hunted Jews, keeping savings in zlotys was

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<sup>43</sup> APK, SAKr 964, K110/49.

<sup>44</sup> Franciszek Wyszyński, *Dzienniki, 1941–1944*, entries of July 24 and 31, 1942.

<sup>45</sup> See note 62, p. 132 in the current volume.

<sup>46</sup> The collapse of German defenses, so obvious from today’s perspective, was much less certain from the contemporary vintage point. As late as

a risky proposition, because payments for shelter were often determined in gold, or in dollars.

Various personal items were another form of possible payment. From today's perspective it is difficult to fathom the depth of misery and poverty in occupied Poland. While greed is a universal phenomenon, the abject poverty of wartime made this sentiment even stronger. The narratives of survivors and the testimonies from court files underline the fact that days, weeks and months were usually measured in terms of dwindling stocks of coats, jackets, trousers, shirts and other items kept under the care of trustworthy Aryans. The same phenomenon comes across strongly in the testimonies given in Polish courts after 1945. Jewish survivors recalled the tragic moments when they learned that their trusted "Aryans" had decided to go back on their word and seize the goods. In the winter of 1943, a coat or a jacket could fetch up to 2,000 zlotys. In other words, a jacket could extend someone's purchase on life for another whole month. The whole system of mutual obligations was based upon trust. In a case of treason, Jews had, of course, no legal recourse; they could only hope that their "Aryans" would do the right thing. According to the "August files" and court records, their hopes were often groundless. In rare cases, Jews tried to convene informal "courts of conciliation," in an attempt to influence the dishonest party, and to place moral pressure upon them.<sup>47</sup> The known cases are too few,

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Summer 1944, furious debates raged in the Polish underground about the shape of postwar Polish policy toward the "Eastern" minorities, such as the Ukrainians, Lithuanians or Byelorussians. Many ambitious people were taking courses in management and administration to start careers in territories already occupied by the Red Army, and claimed by the Soviet Union. According to popular conviction, the 1918 scenario could well be played all over again – with Germans and Russians arranging a negotiated peace.

<sup>47</sup> AP Kraków, case of painter Felicja Rose against Mr & Mrs. Seifert, July 14, 1947. Collection of the Appellate Court, Kraków (SAKr), 976/K218/49. "In the summer of 1942, when the liquidation of the Warsaw Jews had begun, a court of conciliation was convened by M. Wyka. The accused were represented by Aleksander Filasiewicz and Franciszek Seifert, and attorney Dr. Antoni Buksztel stood in for the accuser. The court action went nowhere,

however, to allow for any further speculation about the role of this strategy. Some wealthy Jews, while deprived of money and valuables, could find hope in their pre-war real estate holdings. Real estate, although seized by German authorities and administered by trustees (*Treuhänder*), could be „traded away“ for shelter and help. The Jews, with their backs against the wall, were known to transfer legal titles to their houses, industrial

### The Price of Life

The time has come to study the price of life, as requested by the paid helpers. Warsaw is probably the best example of an area where the size of the phenomenon created conditions that today enable us to venture certain hypotheses. Only here, in the occupied capital, can one talk of a “market of rescue.” Hiding Jews often went hand in hand with other forms of illegal activities. Merchants from Kercelak market, who quietly wooed potential customers: “I buy gold, I keep cats [Jews – JG],”<sup>48</sup> considered the Jews no more than another form of risky, illegal and profitable merchandise. In principle, the price of life was as high as one could extract from the desperate victims. In the case of Warsaw, however, where the “rescue market” was a thriving enterprise, one can establish a range of “reasonable” requests. During the second half of 1943, an “Aryan” could rent a room (depending on the area and the offered conditions) for anywhere between 250 and 400 zlotys per month. During the same period, the going price for a Jewish “client” could range

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because Filasiewicz advised Rose to seek redress in German or Polish courts, because “he would not seek accommodation with the Jews (*z żydami na sąd polubowny nie pójdzie...*)” plants and apartments to their paid helpers. Others without the necessary means worked off their rent toiling for their hosts.

<sup>48</sup> *“złoto kupuję, koty przechowuję”*: YVA, collection 03/260, the testimony of Mordka Purman, p. 49. Jews in hiding were often referred to as “cats.” In Polish, the word “miał” (phonetically close to cats’ ‘miau’) means “had.” As Purman explains: “They called the Jews ‘cats’ because all of them said that they ‘had,’ which meant that they had a house, or a factory...”

from 2,000 to 4,000 zlotys per month.<sup>49</sup> A wealthy Warsaw industrialist who, in mid-1943, paid for his daughter and for himself in excess of 500 zlotys per day, was clearly an exception.<sup>50</sup> A Warsaw landlady who asked “her Jews” to pay 5,500 zlotys per month also found herself in the upper range of the “market” prices.<sup>51</sup> According to a survivor (from Ostrowiec), Jews could survive *only* in Warsaw, but they needed to have at least 100,000 zlotys in reserve.<sup>52</sup> At first glance this sum may seem excessive but, given the fact that paid helpers charged per head and not per room, the amount makes more sense. 100,000 zlotys would enable a family of four to survive in a shelter for less than a year,<sup>53</sup> or much less, if the paid helpers engaged in blackmail.

Charging the Jews per person and not per room greatly increased the paid helpers’ income. The increase in earnings was all the more welcome, since the risk associated with hiding several Jews was only slightly greater than in the case of a solitary guest. Following the liquidation of the Otwock ghetto, eight local Jews went into hiding on the Aryan side, in a special hideout. Each of them paid their helper 2,000 zlotys per

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<sup>49</sup> An analysis of records from the Kielce, Siedlce and Kraków archives confirms the results from Warsaw. Further examples: Jan–Feb, 1943: “Nojar’s wife lived in a two-bedroom apartment which belonged to a certain captain’s wife. Room (with no board) cost her 2,000 per month. I was shocked, because the normal rent for a two-room apartment is no more than 40–120 zlotys. Obremski, p. 371; “Room with board costs several thousand zlotys per month; it’s not all that much when hiding the “cursed race,” nevertheless, for us, this is a fortune, AŻIH, 302/133, Testimony of Naemi Wajnkranc-Szac p. 112. An equal amount (2,000–3,000 per person) is also mentioned in the testimony of Paschaje Hoenig: AŻIH, collection 301/813. See also: Berland’s memoir and the testimony of Janina Brandwajn Zemianowa (3,000 per month for a child), YVA, collection 03/2359, p. 41.

<sup>50</sup> YVA, 03/2195, Testimony of Jael Szalit-Briskier, p 5.

<sup>51</sup> AMSW, zespól 654/III sygn. 230, June 4, 1946.

<sup>52</sup> Hinda Malachi, Dziennik, YVA, 03/3379, p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> The estimates above do not concern the last few months before liberation. In Warsaw, in July 1944, due to high inflation, a Jewish family had to pay as much as 3,000 zlotys per week, per person for shelter .

month.<sup>54</sup> The earnings were good enough to enable their host to build, in 1943, a new house. As mentioned above, the Jews rented rooms, and not apartments, or houses. The members of Żegota (the official underground organization devoted to helping the Jews that started its operations in late 1942) had purchased several apartments, but experience showed that the risks of detection were too large, and the cost too high.<sup>55</sup> Following this failed attempt, it became clear that placing Jews in Aryan households was the only viable solution for their survival. The *meliny* (illegal shelters) belonged to people from all social strata. The hosts were often members of the impoverished intelligentsia, and included many women whose husbands were fighting abroad (in France or England), leaving their spouses without sufficient income.

In some cases the “contracts” between paid helpers and Jews concerned room and board. In others, food was not included, and for dishonest helpers this opened up a new area of possible fraud. On the one hand, they could misrepresent the amounts gained from the sales of Jewish valuables; on the other, they could quote unrealistically high prices for their food purchases. In both cases, the Jews (unable to leave their hideouts) were in no position to bargain. “After the January *Aktion* in the ghetto, we stayed at Blazynski’s place,” noted one of the Warsaw Jews. “It was not easy. We had to pay for every step, for every breath. Finally, he made our lives so miserable that we returned to the ghetto.”<sup>56</sup> Another survivor described his predicament in the following words: “I once had a high-school friend, Oldakowski, a son of a noble family from the Łowicz area. They charged us [for shelter – JG] three times more than the others, and they fed us so poorly we were constantly hungry. There were many other people hiding there as well.”<sup>57</sup> The “rescue market” responded to the laws of supply

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<sup>54</sup> YVA, 03/3130; Awraham Goldblum, p. 12.

<sup>55</sup> T. Prekerowa, *Konspiracyjna Rada*, p. 164.

<sup>56</sup> Berland, p. 273.

<sup>57</sup> Anatol Weksztej, Testimony, AŻIH, collection 302, file 204, p. 179.

and demand. After the deportations in the summer of 1942, demand grew rapidly, and so did the prices. In fact, wealthier Jews drove the prices up, forcing out those unable to match the increased “rents.” Paschaje Hoenig noted in his account: “My wife and Mrs. Rosenzweig paid 2,500 zlotys each and, quite unknowingly, we put in harms’ way the family of Markus Spalter, who also stayed there and paid much less. When Żak [the paid helper – JG] received 5,000 zlotys from his two new tenants, he kicked the Spalter family out.”<sup>58</sup>

### Forms of Payment

“I pay 10 rubles in gold and two meters<sup>59</sup> of coal for my room,” noted one of the Jews hiding in Warsaw.<sup>60</sup> In the first years of occupation, paid helpers were quite likely to accept zlotys. Later, together with growing inflation, prices were negotiated in gold or dollars. Most popular, by far, were the small five-ruble gold coins (called “piggies”), particularly useful in everyday transactions. The 10- and 20-dollar golden ‘half-eagles’ and ‘eagles’ were also very popular, as were the 10-ruble coins.

**Table: Dollars and Gold Coins: Prices in Zlotys**

Date	gold ruble	gold dollar	gold (per gram)	paper dollar
XII 1941	85	185	60	40
VI1942	90	180	50	44
XII 1942	140	270	75	
VI1943	200	380	110	75
XII 1943	280	500		95
II 1944	510	840		140

Sources: Franciszek Wyszynski, *Dzienniki z lat 1941–1944*, Warsaw, 2007. L. Landau, *Kronika Wojny i Okupacji*, v. 1–3, Warsaw, 1960. H and H. Malachi, *Dziennik*, YVA, 03/3379.

<sup>58</sup> AZIH, 301/813.

<sup>59</sup> Editor’s note: in slang one meter is a unit of weight and equals 100 kg.

<sup>60</sup> YVA, 03/2933, Testimony of Dora and Eziel Kuczyński, p. 28.



The issue of gold coins in Jewish hands provoked much debate on the Warsaw black market, where various strange accounts and theories were being circulated. Franciszek Wyszynski, himself trading in gold and currencies, noted on January 12, 1942: "People claim that the Jews in the ghetto produce gold dollars and rubles. The coins allegedly have the right weight and proof, and one simply cannot distinguish them from the original pieces. The trick is that a gram of melted gold is valued at 70 zlotys, while the same gram in a coin is worth 42 zlotys more!" This citation can be helpful in understanding the dynamics of gossip surrounding the fabled "Jewish gold."

In rural areas one knew little about prices in Warsaw, and the threats were of a different nature. Anonymity, difficult in an urban setting, was practically impossible to achieve in a village. The price of shelters therefore grew accordingly. A peasant from Brzesko Nowe who, in the fall of 1942, sheltered Mordko Boruch Elbinger and his family, asked for 1,200 zlotys weekly for his trouble. On a monthly basis, this equaled 10 quintals of rye, which at that time could be purchased on the open market at 500 zlotys per quintal. The exorbitant sums demanded by the peasant went hand in hand with the everyday terror the hidden Jews had to endure: "He wanted to grab a knife, to slaughter us all, but his children had hidden the knives, so he beat me up so badly that I was in pain for several weeks. He even molested my wife, and when I wanted to help her, he beat me up once again, told us to give him all our money, and go away." Sometimes Jews offered the peasants the greatest treasure of all – their land. Most often, however, payments were made in kind. Maria K. from the village of Falkowa in the Tarnow area kept a Jewish woman under her roof for five weeks. In December 1942, her neighbors "found out about the Jewess," and surrendered her to the Germans. "She had a lot of undergarments," Maria K. testified after the war, "bed linens, five strings of pearls and a 20-dollar banknote. We took good care of her, all the more so since she

promised us that, should she survive the war, she would reward us handsomely.”<sup>61</sup>

### Breaking the “Contract” (or Dishonest Helpers)

Emmanuel Ringelblum once noted that “the people who helped Jews only for money, and who were not compelled morally to do so, sooner or later got rid of the dangerous ballast and kicked them out of their apartments.”<sup>62</sup> This generalization does not render justice to the many paid helpers who fulfilled their obligations until the very end. It is true, however, that cases of treason, denunciation and murder were much more frequent among those who treated Jewish life as just one more kind of merchandise, especially when the helpers felt threatened, or when the Jews ran out of money. The “breaking of the contract” could happen in a variety of ways, although usually the paid helper would simply hike the rent beyond the means of his “guests.” Jews were in no position to negotiate; their only defense was to threaten their hosts with exposure when arrested by the Germans. Those who held their savings in Polish zlotys were struggling because of inflation. But even people who held on to their savings in gold and dollars could rarely afford the two-, three-, or four-fold increases in “rent” requested by their masters.

There were many ways to take advantage of the Jews; we will provide just a sample. The previously cited Warsaw diarist Aurelia Wyleżyńska noted: “A gentleman rented a room, and paid three months in advance, 300 zlotys per month. He was not certain when he would move in – this would only be his *pied-a-terre*. For the time being, he moved his things in, including a huge basket. He left. In the closed room, there was some movement, someone kept moving around. The owner

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<sup>61</sup> APK, SAKr, 964, K114/49, Testimony of Maria K., October 29, 1948.

<sup>62</sup> Emanuel Ringelblum, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w czasie drugiej wojny światowej*, pp. 175–176.

of the apartment, who had the key, entered the room and saw a Jewess inside. What's the problem? The fellow cheated both parties; the Jewess gave him 200,000 zlotys, 100,000 for him, the rest to pay for the rent. He took it all."<sup>63</sup>

Sudden increases in rent could indicate that the paid helper wanted to get rid of his charges. The refugees, fearfully listening to every change of tone or a new expression on the faces of their hosts, and dissecting every rumor coming from the outside world, knew full well that their survival depended on the whim of the paid helpers. "I am afraid," noted one of the Jews hiding in Otwock, "that the Poles, having financially exploited their tenants, will try to bring the whole thing to a logical end."<sup>64</sup> Another method of forcing Jews to leave involved cutting off the supply of food and "starving them out." Jews could also be doomed because of the rumors of "blockades" in the neighborhood, on account of suspicious neighbors, before an unannounced visit by cousins, or simply in the wake of a major drinking binge of their hosts. In order to expel the unwanted guests, paid helpers could also denounce them to the authorities. Denouncing "one's own Jew" involved a degree of risk, but only in case of "undocumented" people. Fake IDs could allow the helper to pretend that the room had been rented to alleged Aryans "in good faith." Denunciations were made even easier since the Germans offered, from time to time, blanket pardons for people who surrendered their Jews. On August 27, 1942, in the previously mentioned Otwock, the authorities put up posters promising to pardon all Poles who revealed their Jewish refugees. In other cases, the Germans followed a policy of pardon for all paid helpers, as long as their tips led to the arrest of the Jews. Sometimes – most frequently in the rural areas – penniless and robbed Jews were murdered, or surrendered to the hands of the Polish "blue" police. In one testimony, we

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<sup>63</sup> Aurelia Wyleżyńska, *Dziennik z lat 1939–1943*, and "Dziennik z lat 1939–1944," written in Warsaw and in Wielgoles (Mińsk Mazowiecki area). National Library (BN), IV 6456, III 10786; III 10787, entry for June 4, 1943.

<sup>64</sup> Marek Szapiro, *Nim słońce wszędzie*, p. 247.

read about a Warsaw lady who “kept a Jewboy [*przechowywała Żydka* – JG],” who paid her 50,000 zlotys.<sup>65</sup> Later on, this woman delivered her tenant to the police and received a handsome reward for having fulfilled her civic duty.

### Handing Over Jews to the Germans

*“He went to ask his uncle what to do with the Jew. His uncle told him to waste the Jew”.*<sup>66</sup>

Occasionally, paid helpers continued helping their Jewish charges even though their financial resources had run out. In place of paid help we therefore see the beginning of selfless sacrifice, and the former paid helpers become Righteous. Unfortunately, much more often the helpers, facing danger or unable to extract further payments from the Jews, decided to get rid of their bothersome guests. The following case amply illustrates this dramatic situation.<sup>67</sup> At the end of August 1942, shortly after the liquidation of the Otwock ghetto, the Grajewski family offered their hospitality to a Mr. Solnicki and his daughter, both Jewish refugees from the ghetto.<sup>68</sup> Initially, the Solnickis were supposed to stay only one night, but they remained under the Grajewskis’ roof for the whole week, until September 2. Solnicki had little money, but his son – a policeman in the liquidated but still existing ghetto – supplied Grajewski with cash. Facing Grajewski’s increased demands, the Jewish policeman delivered an additional 1,600 zlotys. The money was meant to compensate Grajewski and his wife and to secure a

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<sup>65</sup> YVA, E/438, Testimony of Pola Rotszyld, p. 70.

<sup>66</sup> Once again, the passage is lost in translation. The original Polish reads: *“Poszedł do swego stryja aby spytać się o radę co z żydem uczynić. Po powrocie oświadczył iż stryj mu radził aby żyda zmarnić.”* APK, SAKr 994 K5/50.

<sup>67</sup> The Archives of the City of Warsaw (hereafter, AMSW), *Sondergericht Warschau*, file 1134, proceedings against the Grajewski family.

<sup>68</sup> The Otwock ghetto was liquidated on August 19–20, 1942.

safe hideout for the two desperate refugees. On September 2, 1942 the Grajewskis came to the conclusion that the potential benefits from hiding the Jews were incomparably smaller than the risks involved. The same day they delivered them into the hands of two German soldiers. The soldiers shot Solnicki and his daughter, and ordered Grajewski to bury the bodies on his lot. Later the Grajewski couple and the Germans split the few rings they were able to find concealed in the undergarments of the victims. However, the news of the murder reached the ears of the authorities, and the Grajewskis were placed in custody.<sup>69</sup> The charge was not murder, but rather hiding Jews (*Judenbegünstigung*) during the earlier period. The investigation lasted more than a year. Finally, on October 4, 1943, the German Special Court (*Sondergericht*) heard their case and released both Grajewskis due to the “minor social significance of the crime.”

In the microcosm of this case, one can see the methodological challenges involved in discussing the issue of paid help. At the end of August 1942, in the particularly dramatic circumstances surrounding the liquidation of the Otwock ghetto, the Grajewskis decided to take two Jewish refugees – risking their own lives – under their roof. Some time later, out of greed or (and) fear, they decided to sell the Jews out. This decision cost them one year of brutal investigation and incarceration in the notorious Warsaw prisons of Rakowiecka and Pawiak. Since the arrest was primarily caused by Grajewski’s decision to hide the Solnickis, they may now be considered people who were persecuted for having helped Jews.

People caught “red handed” while helping Jews were harshly punished. The Grajewski couple, whose case we described above, certainly did themselves no favor trying to “solve the Jewish question” on their own. Instead of denouncing the Jews to the police, the peasants tried to deal directly with German soldiers, something the authorities penalized severely. Surrendering Jews to the proper authorities could not

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<sup>69</sup> AMSW, *Sondergericht Warschau*, file 1134, pp. 56–63.

only lower the risk of reprisals, it could even result in modest rewards. In rural areas, informers were entitled to special compensation. Peasants who delivered Jews to the police could keep the clothes of the victims; sometimes they also received a new pair of boots, or a few kilograms of sugar.<sup>70</sup> In some cases, a Jewish family delivered to the gendarmerie could fetch such a significant award as ten quintals of potatoes.<sup>71</sup>

In Węgrów, in the Warsaw District, the life of one Jewish woman was worth 15 zlotys – the price the murderer received for a pair of gloves stolen from his victim.<sup>72</sup> Peasants from Lipnica, renowned in the area for their zeal in hunting Jews down, were called in to Nowy Sącz, where the local Gestapo rewarded them with Jewish clothes taken from a special warehouse.<sup>73</sup> “I told the lieutenant that, indeed, there were three Jewesses in my house,” stated one of the paid helpers in 1946. “The policemen took the Jewesses away. They also took all the valuable items and left me only the gadgets.”<sup>74</sup> In Kopaliny, close to Bochnia, a peasant handed over to the police a Jew whom he had sheltered. After the execution, the Germans rewarded the treacherous “helper” with one liter of vodka and a pack of cigarettes.<sup>75</sup> After the execution of two Jewish women from Kraków who had been caught in the village of Brnik: “Many people congregated, and all clamored [*dobijali się* – JG] for the

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<sup>70</sup> APK, collection SAKr, 991, k1/50, Testimony of Rand Alter regarding Michalina S., July 5, 1946. Julian Głuchowski, a farmer from Skarżyna (Węgrowo area) received one kg. of sugar for each delivered Jew. Archives of the Warsaw IPN, SSWW, file 105.

<sup>71</sup> APK, collection SAKr 988, file IVK 256/49, p. 2, deposition of Michał H., z Trzebunia. One might add that, from the fall of 1942, the German gendarmerie shot the Jews on the spot. In daily reports, these executions were reduced to a dry formula: “*Nach dem gegebenen Richtlinien verfahren*” – treated according to the received orders.

<sup>72</sup> Warsaw IPN Archives, Collection of the Special Military Court [Specjalny Sąd Wojskowy (SSWW)], file 362.

<sup>73</sup> APK, SAKr, 964, K114/49.

<sup>74</sup> APK, zespół SAKr, 991, k1/50, Interrogation of Michalina S.

<sup>75</sup> APK, SAKr 970/K178/49; YVA, Collection E/438, Memoir of Pola Rotszyld, p. 67.

clothes of these Jews.”<sup>76</sup> In this particular case, the Germans ordered that the clothes be given only to the people who took an active part in the whole affair.<sup>77</sup>

Similar was the fate of Jewish women hidden in the villages of Wieniec, Niegowicie and many others mentioned in the “August files” of the Kraków Appellate Court.<sup>78</sup> The sharing of “Jewish bounty” was very much a public event, often taking place in a central village square, with the active or passive participation of large numbers of people.<sup>79</sup> The emerging pattern is depressingly similar: the Jews tended to look for pre-war acquaintances, or at least seek help in areas known from better times.<sup>80</sup> It must be stressed again that the majority of the Jews who were firmly rooted in the urban areas had little previous acquaintance with the peasants, and even less understanding of their mentality. Court records indicate that Jewish escapees

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<sup>76</sup> APK, SAKr, 967, K153/49, deposition of Weronika N., p. 47, October 15, 1948. According to another witness, the two women were well known in the village.

<sup>77</sup> APK, SAKr, 967, K153/49, p. 50. Witness Peter S. described another “action” which took place in the same village: “There was a policeman with us who made sure we didn’t take any of the [Jewish] things. When we arrived at the village elder’s house, the Germans told us to dump everything in one pile, and then the policeman let the people take whatever they wanted. The people threw themselves at the pile, but one of the Germans approached and said that these things were only for those who deserved it. The elder told us to bury the executed Jews and when we returned to the spot [of the execution – JG] we saw many people, including one Jew who was looking at the body of his dead sister. He told us to shoot him too, and to bury him along with his sister. So one of the people let the gendarmes know, and a German rode up on a horse, and shot this Jew. We buried him together with his sister in a ditch.” Witness’ statement of October 16, 1948.

<sup>78</sup> APK, SAKr, 984, K39/49, interrogation of Piotr T.

<sup>79</sup> This aspect has already been noted by Alina Skibińska and J. Pelelewicz, see: “The participation of Poles in Crimes Against Jews in the Świętokrzyskie Region,” in *Yad Vashem Studies* 2007 (35:1), pp. 1–44.

<sup>80</sup> See also the case of the Mlawski family, hiding in the Pultusk area. The IPN Archives, Warsaw, collection of the Gestapo Zichenau, files 3740 and 9807. To learn about the three Jewish women murdered by their “paid helper” in the Siedlce area, see: AMSW, collection *Staatsanwaltschaft bei dem Sondergericht Warschau*, 4869 (4579).

were sheltered by peasants for relatively short periods of time (longer stays are known to historians from the Yad Vashem records concerning the Righteous). At some point, Jews were being robbed and later handed over to the police. In some cases, the peasants became killers and – fearing German reprisals, or anxious to avoid questions about the acquired Jewish goods – executed their guests on their own.

In Ratulów (Nowy Targ area), Jozef S. provided the family of a local Jew, Wiktor Relka, with shelter for more than two weeks. According to his neighbors: “He exploited them as much as he could, and then chased them away.”<sup>81</sup> Later, Josef S. called in the police from Czarny Dunajec. One of the witnesses testified: “I saw the blue police in his yard. There were also many peasants. I did not see the Jews when they were led away, but I was told that this Wiktor, his wife and their children were crying in despair: ‘When will these murders cease!’” The policemen delivered Relka and his family to the Zakopane Gestapo. Their helper, Jozef S., was repeatedly slapped in the face by the policemen, and told not to help Jews in the future. The policemen also warned Jozef S. that they had already received several anonymous letters about his “rescue efforts.” A certain Marian Haba sought shelter in Cholerzyn (a village not far away from today’s Kraków international airport in Balice). He remained in hiding, in the village, until the locals heard a rumor that Haba had gold stashed in the area. A blue policeman summoned a while later by the peasants, said: “When I arrived in the village, I saw not a human being but a shapeless form. His face was completely unrecognizable. People told me they had killed the Jew because he was said to have buried five kilograms of gold.”<sup>82</sup> Another rural paid helper sheltered four Jews until the spring of 1944, when he handed them over to the Germans. “He stood by when the Germans shot them,” reported one of his neighbors, “and after the execution they

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<sup>81</sup> APK, SAKr 985, K 244/49.

<sup>82</sup> APK, SAKr, 994, K5/50, interrogation of Stanisław H., pp. 56–56v.



went into his home. They did him no harm, so it's clear he must have denounced them himself. People say these Jews had a lot of gold and money. This fellow received 12 *morgi* of land from them.<sup>83</sup> He claims to have bought it from them, as well as the house and farming machines.<sup>84</sup>

In the cases discussed above, one can see the rural specificity. The absence of direct German supervision facilitated the planning and execution of the paid helpers' murderous plans. In the cities, in order to achieve the same result, the helpers usually called for "agents," or for Germans. In the villages, the paid helpers not infrequently were the murderers themselves.

### Blackmailing One's "Own" Jews

*I heard their voices: 'This is one fat cat – one can ask her for more.' 'This cat should lie like this, he has to have more.' 'How much have you got for this little kitten?'*<sup>85</sup>

The murders of Jews, or handing them over to the police, constituted the final act of treason on the part of dishonest paid helpers. There were, however, other ways of "breaking the contract" – stealing the Jews' possessions and getting rid of them – without necessarily committing an act of murder.

In many cases (once again, a precise determination of the size of the phenomenon is impossible), the helpers handed over their guests into the hands of cooperating "agents." Agents were recruited from among friends, Polish policemen, or even from among the Germans, but they had one thing in common

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<sup>83</sup> A *morga* is an historical measure of arable land in Poland; one *morga* roughly equals 0.5 hectare.

<sup>84</sup> SAKr 954 IV K. 53/49, Proceedings against Piotr J. and others.

<sup>85</sup> In Polish, this exchange reads: "Dobiegały mnie urywane zdania: 'to tłusta kocica – można wziąć od niej więcej,' 'Ten kot ma jeszcze dość, niech nie kłamie, że to już wszystko,' 'A za tę kotkę dużo dostaliście?'" YVA, 03/2716, Testimony of Miriam Wecer Thau, p.11.

– they were working for their own account. The goal was to extort from the hidden Jews all their valuables, threatening them with the imminent arrival of less “humane” and understanding agents. The searches and threats lasted as long as the Jews met the repeated requests for ransom, or if they managed to flee this kind of protection racket. The main difference between the murdering helpers described previously and those who blackmailed their charges was that those in the care of the latter sometimes, despite the odds, survived the war. It may even be said that – to a certain degree – they survived the war thanks to the shelter provided by their blackmailing hosts. One of these agents, while taking a payment of several tens of thousands of zlotys from the Jews, noted down his victims’ real pre-war addresses, so that the victim “could repay him further after the war, because he was so good to have left his victim alive,”<sup>86</sup> meaning that the agents could squeeze some more money from the Jews. Their victims should be grateful, because the agents could have not only taken their victims’ money, but their lives as well.

The dramatic experiences of the Malachi family provide us with an example of the phenomenon of continued and unrelenting extortion, organized and orchestrated by paid helpers.<sup>87</sup> The first “search” of the Malachi room by the agents occurred a short time after they had moved into their new hideout in Warsaw. The issue was settled with a sum of 20,000 zlotys. The Jewish family was later transferred by their host to another place, having first paid a go-between 3,000 zlotys for his services, and promising to pay 2,500 per person, per month in the future. A few days later, the Malachis were warned that they had to pay 4,000 zlotys for their friends, who had also fallen prey to a well organized gang of “agents.” The new room was no better than the old one, and the Jews had to hand over another 15,000 zlotys, as well as a golden watch. A few hours

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<sup>86</sup> YVA, 03/3379, p 18.

<sup>87</sup> YVA, 03/3379.

later the agents, visibly disappointed with the loot, returned, requesting even more money. After this “invasion,” the paid helper revealed that the agents most probably must have belonged to a competing gang of blackmailers. “They must be Henry’s people – sons of bitches want to waste my hideouts!?” he shared with his Jews, the victims of the extortion. Both the paid helpers and the blackmailers treated this blackmail as an act of historical justice and a redress of past wrongs. “We, the Jews, made our fortunes on their backs, and now their moment has come to claim all of it back,” noted Hinda Malachi in her diary.<sup>88</sup> Many an *endek* (Polish nationalist) politician would eagerly subscribe to such an interpretation of the historical processes. The Malachi family, having paid 10,000 zlotys, moved to their next shelter. The food was better “because the landlady did not cheat us on the cost of supplies,” but soon enough the agents appeared again. The Malachis were shaken down by a gendarme and a policeman, both in uniforms: “This time they really took everything we had. We were left only with clothes on our backs; they took all the rings, a cigarette case, 30 dollars, 300 zlotys and one golden coin.” The misery of the Malachis continued, but notwithstanding the extortion and threats, they survived the war. Their tormentors still provided them with shelter, and sometimes with new sets of false papers. Did they survive the war because of their paid helpers, or despite them? A historian is unlikely to find a convincing answer to this question.

The Malachi case was not an isolated one. The roving gangs of blackmailers operating in tandem with paid helpers are a matter of record. “After two weeks, Lewastamow sold us out. She brought here two German agents, Ukrainians, whom I had to pay. Later I learned that this was her usual way of doing business,” noted Anatol Weksztejn.<sup>89</sup> Tadeusz Obremski, another Jew hiding in Warsaw, noted in his previously quoted

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid. p. 22.

<sup>89</sup> See: relation of Anatol Weksztejna, AZIH, collection 302/204, pp. 178–179.

diary: “Unfortunately, very frequently such a fellow sent the blackmailers to his own apartment, so that the Jews would flee, and leave all their belongings behind.”<sup>90</sup>

One of the most tragic episodes in the dramatic plight of Warsaw Jews seeking shelter was linked to Kazimiera Swierdzewska. This young woman, taking advantage of her prewar contacts with several wealthy Jewish families, promised them help and found them shelters.<sup>91</sup> Periodically, having robbed them of all their valuables, she would deliver them into the hands of the Gestapo. The frequency of this “method of action” is impossible to determine, but its mechanism and implementation is well known, both from the published literature and from archival documents.<sup>92</sup>

Post-war accounts and wartime court records indicate that paid helpers betrayed “their Jews” most often during the first days or weeks of residence. After a longer period of time, the relationship between the two parties could develop beyond the purely financial arrangement, and make treason less probable. There were no firm rules, however. Estera Polanicer found this out the hard way. She had spent six months in the farm of Stanisław Woliński, who “used her a lot,” as one of his neighbors explained after the war. “He had a lot of Jewish things at home, and even sported a fur coat.”<sup>93</sup> Despite this, Woliński handed the woman over to the “blue” police and they, in turn, delivered her to the Germans.

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<sup>90</sup> Obremski, p. 212.

<sup>91</sup> Among her victims were members of the Lichtenbaum and Weinstein families. This case can be partially recreated on the basis of files of the Warsaw Special Court and a testimony preserved in the Jewish Historical Institute. See: AMSW, *Sondergericht* Warschau (SGW), file 735, and AŻIH, zespół 302/200, the account of Roma Elster.

<sup>92</sup> To quote the Malachi diary once again: “The Jews moved out because the blackmailers found them. We were told that it was Ms. Billikowa herself who wanted to scare them out. The ‘agents,’ before leaving, even kissed her hand and took only 3,000 zlotys from the Jews but, more importantly, ordered them to leave immediately.” Malachi, *Dziennik*, p. 82.

<sup>93</sup> APK, SAKr, 965, K122/49. For a more detailed account of this case, see the documents annexed at the end of the text.

## Conclusion

Polish Jews, desperately seeking shelter and help against Nazi persecution, often encountered indifference and hostility on the part of mainstream Polish society. These traumatic experiences bred fear, which paved the way to growing resentment. Instead of selfless assistance, Jews mostly encountered various forms of exploitation. In the many cases discussed above, the quality of help was so low that the Jews perceived the paid helpers as only slightly better than the Germans. Some Jews (including Emmanuel Ringelblum) wondered why the fierce German terror, which also struck the Poles, failed to create a sentiment of common fate and destiny. "Even today," one of the "hidden" Jews wrote in 1943, "the Poles think in pre-1939 terms. No doubt many are glad to see the extermination of the Jews by the Germans. They forget that there are two ends to a stick. If they approve of these methods, they should be aware that the same method might one day be used against them."<sup>94</sup>

The Jews were also appalled and upset at the tone of underground leaflets and newspapers. Instead of hope, they often found in them further evidence of hate towards their dying people.<sup>95</sup> In 1940, Jan Karski, the Polish underground courier, in his well-known message to the Polish government in exile, made no secret of the growing support for anti-Jewish German policies within Polish society. According to Karski, the "Jewish question" was one of the few places the occupant and the occupied seemed to speak with one voice.<sup>96</sup> The feeling of alienation opened the chasm dividing the two societies even further. The constant blackmails, denunciations and threatening behavior associated with their Polish neighbors left the Jews in despair.

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<sup>94</sup> Marek Szapiro, *Nim słońce wszędzie*, pp. 254–255.

<sup>95</sup> YVA, Malachi, p. 67.

<sup>96</sup> See the full text of the Karski report in: David Engel, "An Early Account of Polish Jewry under Nazi and Soviet Occupation Presented to the Polish Government-in-Exile, February 1940," in *Jewish Social Studies*, 47 (1983), pp. 12–13.

Hinda Malachi wrote with bitterness: “I only knew that I hated the Poles so much I could not remain among them.” Thanks to such a social climate, rescuing Jews became one of the most dangerous activities in occupied Poland. Lack of social approval increased the threat of denunciation and death.

Previous studies of paid help tend to underestimate the size of this phenomenon. They are based, for the most part, on survivors’ accounts that, for obvious reasons, say little about the fate of people sheltered by paid helpers. The archival collections discussed and used in our study help shed light on this troubling phenomenon. A thorough analysis of the preserved documentation allows us to reevaluate the scope of the rescue, seen as a profitable occupation. There is no doubt that not only the helpers, but also the Jews themselves, perceived paid help as something natural – as long as the helpers remained true to the informal contracts concluded between host and guest. Sometimes, the relationship between paid helpers and their Jewish charges evolved into friendship and selfless assistance. In other cases, cold calculation prevailed, and the Jews, having expended all their savings, were evicted by their hosts, and left to die penniless in the streets. Still in other cases, the paid helpers denounced their own Jews to well-organized gangs of blackmailers and extortionists. These so-called “agents” terrorized the betrayed Jews, robbed them of all their possessions, forced them to flee, and then shared the loot with the dishonest helpers. In the most tragic cases, having robbed “their” victims, the paid helpers called in the police, or murdered the Jews themselves.

It is difficult to evaluate the “price of life” in occupied Poland but, as the data concerning Warsaw seem to suggest, during the 1942–1944 period a Jew needed at least 2,000–4,000 zlotys per month to pay for a shelter. In addition to payments for rent, the Jews had to pay for the food, often at exorbitant prices. This does not mean that every Jew with that kind of money could find a place to stay, but without money their options were limited to people who saved Jews out of the good-

ness of their hearts. And there were far too few of those. Interestingly, with time, the Jewish survivors' recollection of humiliation, exploitation and mistreatment started to fade. Its place was taken by the growing appreciation of having been saved from certain death. "The fact that we survived erased all the bad things that happened during the war," wrote Awraham Goldblum. "Whatever we say, one cannot deny that they [our hosts] helped us stay alive."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> YVA, 03/3130, Testimony of Awraham Goldblum, p. 28.

## Annex: Documents<sup>98</sup>

### Document No. 1

Krakow Appellate Court [Sad Apelacyjny w Krakowie]  
State Archive in Krakow  
[Archiwum Panstwowe w Krakowie]  
Collection : SAKr/K58-61/49, pp. 245–249

Sentence.

In the name of the Polish Republic, January 13, 1949

The VII Criminal Section of the Krakow District Court, sitting  
in the following SKALD

Justice S.O.L. Solski

Jurors: L. Kozlowski, T. Kurowski

Minutes: Rytarowska

And in the presence of deputy-attorney S.O.W. Wyrobek

Having heard, on January 13, 1949 the case of:

1. KURAJ, Aleksander, born July 11, 1901 in Sielec, county Miechow, son of Jakub and Marianna, living in Rogow, county Kozlow, Miechow district, Pole, Roman-Catholic, farmer, married, with 9 children and having 5.5 hectares of arable land,

is accused that on the day of February 1, 1943 or 1944 in Rogowo, County Kozlow, Miechow District, facilitating the policies of the German state, took part in the murder of Jankiel Liebermann, striking him on the head with a metal wrench, in result of which Liebermann's central nervous system was damaged and he died instantly.

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<sup>98</sup> The translation tries to loyally render the tone of the original, and the original errors have been preserved.



2. Josef Misio, born March 3, 1907 in Przybyslawice, County Miechow, son of Jakub and Marianna, living in Rogow, County Kozlow, Pole, farmer, 4 hectares of arable land,
3. Jan Kucharz, born February 28, 1909 in Rogow, County Miechow, living in the same location, farmer, married, Pole, 4 hectares of land,

are accused that at the time and in the circumstances described above, helping the German state, they took part in the capture of the Jew Jankiel Liebermann (and therefore a person persecuted by the authorities on racial and religious grounds). The deed indicated in point no. 1 in the light of the decree of August 31, 1944, is a crime.

The court resolved:

- I. to declare Aleksander Kuraj guilty of the crime of which he had been accused (...) and to sentence Aleksander Kuraj to six years in prison, and to take away his public and citizen's rights for a period of five years and to forfeit his goods for the benefit of the state.
- II. to declare Jozef Misio and Jan Kucharz guilty that at the time and in the circumstances described above, helping the German state, they took part in the search of the house of Aleksander Kuraj, where Jankiel Liebermann was found and detained ( . ) . To sentence Jozef Misio and Jan Kucharz to three years imprisonment, to take away their public and citizen's rights for a period of two years and to forfeit their goods for the benefit of the state.

Justification:

During the trial, and more particularly on the basis of the depositions of sworn witnesses Antoni Rozworski, Jozef Kowal, Jan Zasada, Stanislaw Kania, Zdzislaw Kucharz, Wladyslaw Kucharz, Wincenty Kucharz, Jan Gadek, Stanislaw Kucharz, Izydor Kucharski, Helena Kuraj, the explanations given by the accused, as well as on the basis of the autopsy of the body

performed on June 21, 1947, the Court accepted as factually proven that:

Before the war, and in the beginning of the Occupation, Jankiel Liebermann, a poor Jew, had a store in the village of Rogow, County Miechow. When the German authorities started to persecute the Jews, Jankiel Liebermann (in order to save his life) went into hiding in the nearby forests. This situation continued through the summer months. but during the 1943/44 winter Jankiel Liebermann turned for help to the accused, Aleksander Kuraj, whom he knew well, and sought shelter in his house. The accused, Aleksander Kuraj, a farmer of modest means, saddled with a large family (a wife and 9 children), taking pity in Liebermann's misfortune, agreed to his request. He could not, however, invite him into his house, fearing denunciation to the German authorities. Both Liebermann and the accused Kuraj were well aware of the risks in case of a denunciation. Under these circumstances, Jankiel Liebermann dug for himself a pit in the barn, where he built a shelter. Kuraj also helped Liebermann in such a way that he sometimes brought him food, although not much, since he had little to spare. During the night, Liebermann often left his shelter and looked for assistance elsewhere in the village. He remained in hiding under these conditions for one month. It must be added that the accused Kuraj took Liebermann in without any financial gain, but only driven by a sense of compassion for the poor and helpless Jew. Kuraj was well aware of the consequences if Liebermann were discovered. Some two weeks before the tragic events, Jan Gadek, the village elder, ordered witnesses Wincenty Kucharz and Jan Gadek [Same name as the village elder – JG] to warn Kuraj that he should chase the Jew away, and that if the Germans learned about him, he would die with his entire family. Kuraj assured them that he sheltered no Jew. Two weeks after this warning, on February 1, 1944, Gadek (who knew that Kuraj was sheltering Liebermann), having taken with him Jan Kucharz and Jozef Misio, as well as a score

of other peasants, conducted a complete and thorough search of all the buildings on Kuraj's farm. At first, Gadek did not tell Misio what kind of action he was being called on to perform. When Misio – initially – refused, Gadek threatened him that he would share the fate of Nowakowska, who had been shot by the Gestapo. Kucharz was then openly told they were going to search Kuraj's place for a hidden Jew. Kucharz initially refused, but when Gadek threatened him with the German police, he agreed – all the more so, since he believed there were no Jews at Kuraj's farm and that even if Kuraj had kept some Jews, he would have sent them away after the initial warning two weeks earlier. He thought, therefore, that the search would be a pure formality without any tragic consequences. Kucharz's thinking was all the more justified, since this was a period of particularly intense policy conducted by the German authorities toward the extermination of the Jews in County Miechow. There were several cases where Jews were apprehended and the German police murdered not only the families that sheltered these Jews, but also those who were indicated by the arrested Jews as people who had offered them some help. In nearby Wierzbiny, a village bordering on Rogow, two families and several individuals (altogether some 13 people) were shot under such circumstances.

Once they arrived at Kuraj's farm, they surrounded the buildings, and Gadek began the search. The accused Kuraj, having seen a large group of men, and fearing that Germans were coming, fled the house with his eldest son. Helena, Kuraj's wife, told another son to run and warn Liebermann, but it was already too late. When Kuraj found out that these were his own people, he returned home. The village elder asked him where was the Jew hidden, and Kuraj replied that there were no Jews there. The search of the house, the attic and the shed produced no results. Having found no one, the village elder went to the barn. The accused Misio, believing that no one could survive during the winter in a barn, followed the elder. The others started to throw hay around, pretending they were looking for

a Jew. Suddenly, the accused Misio tripped and fell into a pit. Someone saw Misio's fall and alerted the elder, who ordered the bales of hay removed. Misio obeyed, having no idea that a human being could be hidden beneath. When they removed the remaining bales of hay, they saw a pit and detected an unpleasant stench. Gadek, being certain that he had found the right spot, called: "Jankiel! Climb out!" His call went unanswered, so he ordered Kuraj to repeat the order. Kuraj did as he was told, and assured Liebermann that there were no Germans, or police, and that only "our people (*sami swoi*)"<sup>99</sup> were present. Having heard this, Liebermann climbed out from his hiding place. At this point, the accused Kucharz, unsettled by the whole situation, fearing the consequences and furious with Kuraj, struck the latter on the face. They took Liebermann to Kuraj's house, and on the way Gadek told the accused: "If you wanted to keep him, then now you can eat him," ordering Kuraj to kill the Jew. Kuraj refused, so the elder threatened him that the Germans would kill him and his family. He also reminded him of recent events in Wierzbica and Nercie, where the Germans had killed entire families for having sheltered Jews. The accused Kuraj knew well what was in store for him and for his family, but did not want to take a murder upon his conscience. The village elder demanded then that Kuraj and the Jew be placed in a carriage and delivered to the Gestapo. When some of those present returned towards the village, Gadek started to berate Kuraj once more and ordered him to kill the Jew, explaining that that this was the best solution, and that otherwise a lot of people would die. At this point Gadek called other farmers, and told them that Kuraj also had horses and that his – Gadek's – son could deliver him straight to the Gestapo. Kuraj, aware that his death was imminent, took an iron wrench from the elder and struck Liebermann suddenly from behind the head, so that Liebermann fell dead. Then, following the orders of

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<sup>99</sup> The Polish expression "*sami swoi*" is lost in translation. Used primarily in the village dialect, it describes the locals, friends, "our folk" and implies familiarity, security and closeness.

the village elder, he buried the dead Liebermann in a pit, next to his house. Afterwards, the village elder assembled all those present and swore them to silence, lest Germans take note of the affair.

**Document No. 2**  
**SAKr 965, K122/49**

*From Jan Ciukaj 's deposition:*

“I do not recall the exact date, but it was sometime during the German occupation. There was a Jewess called Esta Polanicer, who for six months was hidden in Stanislas Wolanski’s farm in Klyz. Later on Wolanski chased her away, and she went to stay with Stanislaw Golas, also from Klyz, but he didn’t want to keep her, so she went back to Wolanski, who took her to Julian Zelazny. The same day Zelazny informed Stanislaw Lata, the village elder, who wrote a letter and asked me to deliver it to the police. Naturally, I did as I was told. Before I had returned from the police station in Otfinow, Esta Polanicer had already been executed, and I had no idea what could have been written in that letter. Wolanski was most probably the reason why Esta Polanicer was murdered. I know that Wolanski, during the time he sheltered Esta Polanicer, used her a lot, that he had many Jewish items, including a fur coat that belonged to Kalm Rot, and three bed covers belonging to Abraham Levi. Myself, I saw Wolanski parading in this fur coat (...) Wolanski told me that the fur belonged to the Rot family.”

*Interrogation of Julian Zelazny:*

“I know that in 1941 or 1942 (I am not sure when) a Jewess, named Esta Polanicer, stayed at the farm of Stanislaw Wolanski from Klyz, Otfinow district. In return for shelter, Wolanski received a fur coat from one of Polanicer’s cousins – I heard this both from Wolanski and from Polanicer. Once, in 1942, my servant Cecylia Magiera went to the barn and found Ester Polanicer hidden inside. I told the servant to tell the Jewess to leave, but the servant returned and said that Esta Polanicer wanted me to come to the barn. I agreed, went to the barn and told her that she could not stay here. She pleaded with me to

take her back to the ghetto, but I would not agree, and went instead to the village elder who, in turn, reported all of that to the police. One hour after my report, two policemen arrived from the Otfinow station; one of them entered my house and asked where the Jewess was. I told him that she was in the barn, and then he went to the barn. The two policemen found Esta Polanicer, they took her some 300 meters away from my farm, close to the shed of Andrzej Wrona, and there they shot her. She was buried at the same spot, and I do not know who tore the clothes off her dead body.”

**Document No. 3**  
**SAKr 975, K212/49**

On August 14, 1949, the militia in Gromnik received a report from a Jan Ulaniecki from Wroblowice concerning the murder of a Jewess during the German occupation. The murder (allegedly motivated by greed) was said to have been committed by a Wladyslaw Nosek from Janowice, community [gromada] of Plesna. According to Ulaniecki, one day when he went back home from the field, he met Franciszek Galecki and Wladyslaw Wojcik, who were engaged in conversation. He asked them what was the topic, and they told him that they were talking about the murder of a Jewess, who had been killed with a wooden stake by Wladyslaw Nosek. The Jewess, who had escaped from the ghetto and was looking for a shelter, had come to Michal Jakobik in Wroblowice. She asked him for help and offered a large amount of money, but he refused and took her to Chwalibozek in Wroblowice, but he also feared the German authorities and led her to Wladyslaw Nosek in Janowice. Nosek took her in and hid her for a longer time. After some time, Ulaniecki met Chwalibozek, who told him that Nosek and his brother Franciszek had killed this Jewess, and split all her valuables. Chwalibozek told Ulaniecki that he himself heard the blows of the stake when Nosek struck the Jewess, and that she begged him to spare her life, and promised to give him all her possessions. But Nosek killed her, buried her not far away from his house, and took all her things (...)

Witness Wladyslaw Lasota from Siemiechow testified that on April 30, he was not certain which year, he was on his way to play at a wedding in Wroblowice and in the forest, close to the stream, he met an unknown woman, who was dressed in a coat and had a wrist watch. Lasota asked her where she was going, but she did not answer. Jokingly, he mentioned that his brother served at the nearby police station, and that she could spend the night there, and that he could take her to the police. Hearing this, the girl started to cry and at this point, seeing



the fear and tears, Lasota understood that she was a Jewess. So he told her to move on, and she went towards Janowice. One year later, Lasota heard someone relating that Nosek's wife, Wladyslawa, complained that her husband beats her as badly as he beat the Jewess, and that he probably also wants to kill her. Lasota added that soon after Aniela Jakobiec, a servant in Nosek's household, started selling very valuable and beautiful things. Jakobiec was dirt poor so she could not have owned any of these things, and neither could have Nosek, who also was poor. Lasota also saw that Jakobiec wore a wristwatch, quite like the watch he had seen on the Jewess in the forest.

Witness Wladyslaw Wojcik from Wroblowice testified that during the German occupation, when the Germans created the ghetto, he was strolling with Karol Mazur and called for Karol Chwalibozek who was then a forest ranger (he, Wojcik, was in charge of the forest). Mazur asked how were the things, and Chwalibozek replied that things were going bad, because Nosek from Janowice had killed a Jewess, who was in hiding. So Mazur asked him how Nosek had killed the Jewess, and Chwalibozek told him that Nosek had killed her with a wooden stake, and that he, Chwalibozek, had counted the strikes. He struck her 12 times and the Jewess asked him to spare her life and she promised him her real estate which she was said to have had on the other side of the Dunajec [river]. Chwalibozek also told them that her grave was marked with a stick (...).

Karol Chwalibozek testified that during the 1942 harvest, a Jewess came to him and asked him for shelter, seeking refuge against the Germans. He hid her for one night and one day, and the following evening he took her to Wladyslaw Nosek in Janowice, because he was afraid of the Germans and could not keep her any longer in his house, which was located close to the road. Nosek was not at home, but his wife gladly agreed to take care of the Jewess and Chwalibozek went back home.

During the interrogation, suspect Wladyslaw Nosek initially refused to admit guilt but, upon further questioning,

collapsed and admitted to the murder of this Jewess. He also admitted that he had buried her not far from his house and taken all her possessions. He denies, however, that anyone else was involved in the murder and maintains that he had sold no items that belonged to the victim.

From the interrogation protocol of Wladyslaw Nosek, born August 10, 1904, farmer, Roman-Catholic, widower with 4 children: "Sometime during the fall of 1943, one day I came back from work and my wife, Rozalia Nosek, told me that earlier that day Karol Chwalibozek came to our house and brought a Jewess with him. He told her that he had kept this Jewess at his house, but did not want to keep her any more and was giving her to us for safekeeping. 'Keep her, or kill her,' he had said to my wife. The Jewess was not in the house at this point, according to my wife; she was in the barn. Initially, I took no interest in the Jewess, and my wife brought her food. Only on the third day, when I did not go to work, out of curiosity, I went to see the Jewess for the first time. She was about 30 years old, dirty and I thought she was a retard, because when I asked her where did she come from, she said nothing. I told her to go away because I didn't want to hide her, but she still said nothing. I noticed that she had two battered suitcases with her, but I didn't look inside. I took no more interest in her for the time being, but I knew that during the next few days the Jewess remained in the bushes next to my house. She was up to no good and stole fruit from the garden. Some days later, I met Chwalibozek who told me that this Jewess had spent some time at his place (he didn't say how much), and that she told him that she had fled from some camp. He told me too that he took away her suitcases and wanted to give them to his family, but that the Jewess had raised such an alarm, he had to give her the suitcases back. Finally, Chwalibozek told me, 'Keep her, or kill her, whatever you want.' One week after she moved in, the Jewess took green apples from my apple tree and this made me angry. Given that my wife also wanted to get rid of her, I decided to kill the Jewess. In order to do it, I prepared a sturdy

piece of wood similar to a beater and, having said nothing to my wife, I went to the bushes where the Jewess was hiding and struck her several times on the head. She started to shout but soon fell silent. I waited some 30 minutes, until she stopped moving and then I dug a hole in the field, behind my garden. I buried her with her clothes on and the body lies still in the same place, although the ground has been ploughed over. I opened her suitcases: one was empty, and in the other I found bed linen, bedcovers, a bra, two pairs of stockings and one pair of shoes.”

Translation provided by Yad Vashem.

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## *Szaber Frenzy*

In the summer of 1945 Poles were totally absorbed by *szaber*.<sup>1</sup> They were either talking about it or actively participating in it. Such a state of collective emotions evoked by the prospect of swift enrichment is usually called a “frenzy.” “I dare say,” reads the column of *Dziennik Powszechny* (published in the Kielce-Radom region) of July 1945, “that ... a huge majority of our society either was looting, is looting, or is about to. Those who are afraid envy those who have already made up their minds.”<sup>2</sup> This post-war excitement is inversely proportional to what we can find out on the topic of *szaber* today.<sup>3</sup> The phenomenon has been mentally repressed, although the purloined objects decorate apartments until this day. This absence from the historical discourse is connected with a perceptible feeling of shame and embarrassment on account of the fact that so many Polish citizens participated in *szaber*. The cognitive dissonance which emerges – between real behaviors and the idealized image of the Pole – is sought to be reduced by explanations in terms of which *szaber* was a form of taking revenge on the Germans for their crimes and plunder. Admittedly, the anti-German sentiment and the desire for taking re-

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<sup>1</sup> This text is a shortened version of a chapter from the dissertation entitled *Wielka trwoga w Polsce 1944–1947. Ludowa reakcja na kryzys*. It was created within the framework of KBN grant no. 1 H01G031 27 „Strach w Polsce Ludowej (1944–1989).”

<sup>2</sup> “Jadę na szaber,” *Dziennik Powszechny*, 18 July 1945.

<sup>3</sup> It was discussed by, among others: M. Urbanek, “Wielki szaber,” *Po-lityka* 17 (1995); M. Cichy, »1945 – koniec i początek«, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 26 May 1995; J. Kowalska-Leder, „Szaber,” in *Obyczaje polskie. Wiek XX w krótkich hasłach*, ed. M. Szpakowska (Warsaw, 2008), 334–341.

venge on the occupiers was one of the forces that drove the looting masses onto the “Recovered Territories,” but it was not necessarily the most important one. What drove Poles to *szaber*, how it was conducted, and finally what mental consequences it has left – these are the most important questions worth answering.

### ***Szaber* Theory and the Peasant Vision of the World**

At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century the word *szaber* (looting) had two basic meanings, let us say – a day one and a night one. In the daytime, in the vocabulary of masons it denoted pieces of stones, debris, while *szabrować* (to loot) meant *szpachlować* (to putty).<sup>4</sup> At night the word assumed a different meaning. According to the linguist Henryk Ułaszyn, as early as around 1840, *szabrować* denoted burglarizing in thieves’ slang.<sup>5</sup> The *Dictionary of Thieves’ Jargon*, edited by Antoni Kurka, Austro-Hungarian adjunct of the Lvov police headquarters, says that *szabajrem* and *szabry* were thieves’ tools used for breaking in, which today we would call picklocks or files.<sup>6</sup> Linguists are not sure of the word’s origin. Some try to prove its German etymology (supposedly, it was derived from the verb *schaben* (to scrape)).<sup>7</sup> Others, e.g. Maria Brzezina, the author of *Polszczyzna Żydów* [The Polish Language of Jews], agree with Ułaszyn that *szaber* came from Hebrew, in which *szdbar* means *to break*.<sup>8</sup> Hebrew or Yiddish words were very often incorporated into criminals’ jargon (e.g. *melina* [den]). But we should not conclude that Jews constituted a majority among crimi-

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<sup>4</sup> *Słownik języka polskiego*, ed. J. Karłowicz, A. Kryński, W. Niedźwiedzki, vol. 6 (Warsaw, 1915).

<sup>5</sup> H. Ułaszyn, *Przyczynki leksykalne. Gwara złodziejska z około roku 1840* (Cracow, 1913).

<sup>6</sup> *Słownik mowy złodziejskiej*, compiled by A. Kurka (Lwów, 1907).

<sup>7</sup> *Słownik języka polskiego*, ed. M. Szymczak (Warsaw, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> H. Ułaszyn, *Język złodziejski* (Łódź, 1951), 50; M. Brzezina, *Polszczyzna Żydów* (Warszawa-Cracow, 1986).

nals in any of the partitions. Dictionaries say nothing about the interwar history of the word. It is also uncertain when it began to be popular in the general Polish language. It is difficult to say whether it happened during the looting of Jewish ghettos in 1942, which seems less probable, or during the Warsaw Uprising, which is more likely.<sup>9</sup> The verb *szabrować* (to loot) appeared for the first time in the press in January 1945 in the context of the looting of the property of the residents of the destroyed Warsaw.<sup>10</sup> Only in April did *szaber* begin to be identified with trips to the Recovered Territories. According to all modern dictionaries of the Polish language *szaber* denotes: “appropriation of unsupervised property abandoned or deserted by its owner, usually in the course of warfare or a natural disaster.”<sup>11</sup> Despite the relatively short history of the word, its referent has a very long history.

Peasants’ attacks on mansions at times of unrest, and servants stealing their deceased master’s property, occurred all over modern Europe. A moment of suspension, chaos, temporary dissolution of government structures – usually as a result of a natural disaster, rebellion or war – has always been their common denominator. Consequently, social control was weakened and fear of punishment disappeared. At that particular moment the looted property was ownerless in the looter’s opinion. It did not, however, exclude the possibility of the existence of a distant owner, e.g. an heir, who could assert his rights to the property after some time. All those events of the nature of looting had one more common denominator: their participants, i.e. servants, less well-off peasants, the urban poor, experienced deep material deprivation. Presumably, most of them shared

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<sup>9</sup> „[F]amous *szaber* (looting) and less famous *lipa* (bunk) were words known in Warsaw, but it was the Uprising and what happened afterwards which made them popular (S. Urbańczyk, “Wpływ wojny na nasz język,” *Dziennik Polski*, 10 January 1946).

<sup>10</sup> One of the first articles: “Skończyć z ‘szabrowaniem’”, *Życie Warszawy*, 25 January 1945.

<sup>11</sup> Among others *Praktyczny słownik współczesnej polszczyzny*, ed. H. Zgólkowa (Poznań, 2003).

the peasant “vision of the world of restricted goods,” a world in which there is always a lack of something, first and foremost, of food. This vision was inseparably intertwined with the fear that there would not be enough, with the fear of hunger. According to the sociologist George M. Foster, the tragic fate consisted in that in the peasants’ opinion there was no direct way to increase the amount of available goods. The only solution was to acquire them at somebody else’s expense.<sup>12</sup> *Szaber* was a form of folk reaction to crisis, sometimes to a permanent state of want and poverty. Other elements characteristic of peasant culture – pragmatism and utilitarianism – can also be noticed in the genesis of *szaber*. “Who knows what life will bring. It’s better to be prepared,” “It might come in handy,” “Nothing can go to waste” – probably these were the looters’ maxims, due to which, it must be stressed, *szaber* was no simple theft. While breaking the rule of universal protection of property, they did not have to reject the rule “thou shalt not steal” altogether. As Dariusz Stola points out, they probably implemented the rule in a form narrowed down to “their people,” which explains why it was easier for the looters to take masters’, Jewish, German or state property, than their neighbor’s. The “unwanted people” regarded a large part of society as “aliens” (and vice versa), which explains the former group’s participation in every act of *szaber*. The less marginalized groups (i.e. those situated closer to the social center) had perhaps greater inner restraints limiting their readiness to commit *szaber*.<sup>13</sup> However, as a result of protracted moral erosion these barriers could be weakened. The Second World War demonstrated that.

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<sup>12</sup> G.M. Foster, “Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good,” in *Peasant Society*, ed. J.M. Potter, M.N. Diza, G.M. Foster (Boston, 1967), 304, after: E. Tarkowska and J. Tarkowski, “Amoralny familizm” czyli o dezintegracji społecznej w Polsce lat osiemdziesiątych,” in J. Tarkowski, *Socjologia świata polityki. Władza i społeczeństwo w systemie autorytarnym* (Warsaw, 1994), 272.

<sup>13</sup> Dariusz Stola’s remarks during the discussion in the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 22 March 2009.

History provides plenty of other examples which might prove informative in the study of *szaber*. The Galician massacre of 1846 must be mentioned in this context. Although it was inspired by the Austrian authorities and it reached, as a result of bloody killings, the level of genocide, it did, however, clearly contain elements of the situations described above. Stefan Żeromski's *Rozdziobią nas kruki, wrony* [Ravens and Crows Will Peck Us to Pieces] provides the best, albeit literary, example of such behaviors. A peasant finds a horse carcass with a harness and a corpse of a Polish nobleman killed by the Cossacks. The latter was carrying weapons for the January Uprising insurgents. The peasant takes everything that might prove useful: the harness, the shoes. The nobleman, dead or alive, is doubly "alien" to him. Firstly, he belongs to a different social class. Secondly, he represents Polishness, which the peasant does not feel. Another example, this time not a literary one, can be found in Bolesław Prus' *Kroniki* [Chronicles]. In 1874 enormous fires broke out in a few towns, among others in Pacanów and Siedlce. The local peasants, who arrived in horse-drawn wagons at the site of the tragedy, either expected exorbitant payment for their help or appropriated and then buried the property rescued from the burning buildings (note the archetypical burial of the loot). The parish priest's appeals in which he threatened them with hell did not help. It was the police that finally managed to recover the looted objects.<sup>14</sup>

Two elements were involved in the genesis of *szaber*. Firstly, the hurly-burly and chaos occasioned by the fire – the moment when there was no social control and when nobody was watching anything. The second one was the distance between the peasants and the "townies" (who quite probably were all Jewish anyway), which ruled out any solidarity.<sup>15</sup> The looting of shops and warehouses during street riots, when some of the rioters use their anonymity and the absence of the police,

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<sup>14</sup> B. Prus, *Kroniki*, vol. 1, part 2 (Warsaw, 1956), 24, 330.

<sup>15</sup> As Eric J. Hobsbawm points out, most peasants did not trust city dwellers if not simply hating them (idem, *Bandits* [New York, 1981], 17).



might be regarded as the urban equivalent of *szaber*. Such situations transpired e.g. at the end of January 1905 during several days of riots in Warsaw. They became an introduction to the revolution.<sup>16</sup> The phenomenon of *szaber* appeared also during the conflagration at the Polish eastern frontier in 1918–1920, when Jews were killed in mass pogroms and abandoned mansions were burglarized on a grand scale. These events have left a deep wound in the memory of the landed gentry.

### September of 1939 and the “Broken Windows” Theory

The next “great chaos” which occasioned “great *szaber*” occurred during the Polish-German War of 1939. It did not happen at once, during the first days after the outbreak of the war. Only after some time, after the dissolution of the state structures had become obvious and the elite’s escape had become a fact, did the unsupervised apartments, houses, private stores and warehouses begin to be burglarized. The same fate awaited army storehouses and barracks, e.g. in Pionki and Radom, where an arms plant and the apartments of the engineers employed there were located. Somebody remembered that: “At first the better-off were robbed, and then the others, usually at night.”<sup>17</sup> After the Soviet Union’s invasion of the Polish eastern frontier, Belarusian peasant bands often launched attacks on mansions and ranger’s stations inhabited by Poles. However, according to Marek Wierzbicki’s research, the action was at least partly organized, with the owners often being murdered. Consequently, these acts were not always examples of *szaber*, which has a chaotic, accidental character and does not involve attacking people, let alone murdering them.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless,

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<sup>16</sup> B. Prus, *Kroniki*, vol. 18 (Warsaw, 1968), 460–463.

<sup>17</sup> A. Misuna, “Pionki w latach II wojny światowej – wspomnienia,” in *Szkice z dziejów Pionek*, ed. M. Wierzbicki (Pionki, 2000), 184.

<sup>18</sup> M. Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Białorusini w zaborze sowieckim. Stosunki polsko-białoruskie na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej pod*

during the few days of the “interregnum” instances of classic *szaber* occurred there too, which is illustrated in Zygmunt Klukowski’s diaries. The author wrote about Polish peasants arriving in horse-drawn wagons at the Zamoyskis’ palace in Klemonsów. “Bolsheviks” were called to prevent *szaber*.<sup>19</sup> Not only “masters” but also Jews fell victims to *szaber*. Incidents of that kind took place in the beginning of October 1939. By virtue of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact provisions, the Red Army had to retreat from most of the Lublin region, which it had seized. Most of the communizing Jews and all those who did not want to find themselves under the German occupation followed its example. Between the Soviets’ departure and the Germans’ arrival there was a moment of an authority vacuum – a perfect occasion for *szaber*. *Szaber* and acts of violence toward the remaining Jewish population took place in about a dozen towns and villages (e.g. Wysokie, Turobin, Biłgoraj, Frampol, Piaski, Izbica, Żółkiewka).<sup>20</sup> *Szaber* was not a domain of the provinces only. Instances of it occurred also in September 1939 in the besieged Warsaw. The lack of policemen, who had either escaped or had been evacuated, was an important element of the reality of the bombarded city. Warsaw was left without law enforcement officers, whom the home guard could not fully substitute. Living on Brzeska Street in the Warsaw district of Praga, Sabina Sebyłowa witnessed the robberies on 18 September. She wrote about the looting of burning storehouses and private houses, and even of corpses. “I saw my neighbor wearing shoes torn off from a killed passer-by. The neighbor talked about it openly himself.” She did not, however, sociologically categorize the perpetrators, and she only remarked that they had become

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*okupacją sowiecką 1939–1941* (Warsaw, 2000); idem, *Polacy i Żydzi w zaborze sowieckim* (Warsaw, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> Z. Klukowski, *Zamojszczyzna 1918–1943* (Warsaw, 2007), 98.

<sup>20</sup> D. Libionka, „Polska ludność chrześcijańska wobec eksterminacji Żydów – dystrykt lubelski,” in *Akcja Reinhardt. Zagłada Żydów w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie*, ed. D. Libionka (Warsaw, 2004), 307.

“scoundrels, blackguards and animals.”<sup>21</sup> We can only suspect who these “blackguards” were, since during the interwar period Brzeska Street was inhabited by many railroaders, factory workers and hackies.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, euphemistically speaking, the district was not one of the most elegant. Sebyłowa’s notes reveal the extraordinary determination of the looters active during the bombardment and the shelling. Robberies also happened in other districts of the city, e.g. in Powiśle, inhabited, particularly at the level of the basements, by the “unwanted people.”<sup>23</sup> “Fellows” from Czerniaków, Stanisław Grzesiuk’s friends, admitted in October 1939 that: “We are living on what we have removed from the burning warehouses and the factories during the siege. We are selling some things and for the money we get we buy what we need.”<sup>24</sup> According to Ludwik Landau, *szaber* was a common phenomenon in the bombarded Warsaw.<sup>25</sup>

As for the social reactions after the passing of the frontline in 1944 and 1945 we should focus on the looting behaviors at the moment of suspension between the capital’s capitulation and the institutional settling of the German authorities, i.e. during the several-day period from 28 September to 1 October 1939. Many contemporary observers noticed the “disorder” prevailing among Varsovians, which manifested itself in robberies. Furniture and clothes left by residents were removed from abandoned apartments. “And how eagerly they took to robbery, and not only the hungry; even the policemen!”<sup>26</sup> Stores were being looted in Praga. The spread of the phenomenon could have been influenced by the great food shortage in the

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<sup>21</sup> S. Sebyłowa, *Notatki z prawobrzeżnej Warszawy* (Warsaw, 1985), 46.

<sup>22</sup> J. Urbanek, *Lęk i strach warszawiaków wobec zagrożeń Września 1939 r.*, 94. M.A. thesis written in 2008 in Warsaw University, Institute of History, under Prof. Włodzimierz Borodziej’s guidance.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, 95.

<sup>24</sup> S. Grzesiuk, *Boso, ale w ostrogach* (Warsaw, 1999), 172.

<sup>25</sup> L. Landau, *Kronika lat wojny i okupacji*, vol. 1 (Warsaw, 1962), 18.

<sup>26</sup> J. Wróblewska, *Listy z Polski* (London, 1960), 105. (I would like to thank Błażej Brzostek for recommending this book).

besieged city. As Landau pointed out, the scale of *szaber* ruled out the exclusive participation of “professional thugs.” The social base must have been greater. “The population was using the possibility to loot: neighbors, passers-by and soldiers, who were quartered in the whole city and were in a state of total disorder.”<sup>27</sup>

This is what the phenomenon of such behaviors is all about: the majority of people participating in *szaber* would never be tempted to appropriate somebody’s property under normal circumstances. Does it mean that these people were just like any other citizens and they simply “became possessed” out of the blue? Sabina Sebyłowa employed the following metaphor: “Moral, civilized rules flake off some individuals like enamel off a struck dish.”<sup>28</sup> This flaking could have been occasioned by the fact that the young in particular did not undergo a full process of socialization, and many looters were recruited from among them. Conceivably, for the older people as well the “enamel” was only a surface, and they too had never internalized the official system of values. Individuals from the lower social classes – excluded, “unwanted,” and surely poor, since they risked theft under fire – predominated among the robbers. However, the fact that people found themselves in circumstances which can hardly be regarded as normal remains of key importance.

Here we should devote some attention to the theory of chaos, also known as the “theory of broken windows.” It says that chaos occasions chaos. In an environment changing for the worse (sometimes broken windows are enough) our pursuit of appropriate behavior withers. After one of the social norms has been broken we are tempted to ignore the other ones as well. And when we see that other people have not been punished for bad conduct and when we feel anonymous, we come to the conclusion that we will get away with our offences too. Ac-

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<sup>27</sup> L. Landau, *Kronika*, vol. 1, 18.

<sup>28</sup> S. Sebyłowa, *Notatki*, 46.

ording to Philip Zimbardo, any circumstances placing people in a position of anonymity limit their feelings of personal and civil responsibility for their own actions.<sup>29</sup> Social psychologists have conducted many experiments which have confirmed this mechanism. War and occupation created a unique kind of research laboratory.

### ***Szaber* in Ghettos and Other Locations**

Proof that *szaber* is a child of chaos lies in another wave of *szaber* which spread across the Polish eastern frontier in July 1941 in connection with Germany's attack on the Soviet Union. Jan Chusteki's memoir *Byłem sołtysem w latach okupacji* [*I Was a Chair of the Village Council During the Occupation*] published in 1961 contains descriptions of three acts of *szaber*. Residents of Wólkowysk and the surrounding area participated in the first one:

The town is already empty. And now comes the turn of the trains standing in long lines at the platform. God! It is like a celebration after the creation of the world. Soldiers dying in flames and from bullets, squealing children dying in cars in a hail of bombs, frying corpses, crawling casualties, and the all-pervasive cry: 'Help! Water! Mom!' – the nearby villages immediately launch a looting spree. And they carry: wheat, shoes, linen, leather, clothes, fabric, wool, crystals, eiderdowns – such wonders! God, there's everything! Belts, saddles, rifles, revolvers, furs, silk. Some have taken tens of thousands of meters of it because it is really thin and they are putting loads of it onto the wagons. Commotion, hubbub, curses by the cars. Some wagons, bursting at the seams, drive home in long lines, with their wheels screeching. Other wagons arrive at the station.

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<sup>29</sup> P. Zimbardo, *Efekt Lucyfera: dlaczego dobrzy ludzie czynią zło?*, transl. A. Cybulko et al., Warsaw, 2008, 48 [originally published as *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (New York, 2008)].

The situation resembled the one during the fires in 1874: a tragedy of death, people are calling for help, and the peasants from nearby villages are busy looting. Chustecki witnessed boots being taken off killed Soviet soldiers.

They have begun to smell, they need to be buried. Franek Niklas has come again and begun stripping their feet of the better pairs of boots. He started pulling – they would not come off, the feet have already stiffened. But he is pulling persistently, with the corpse looking at him with his open eyes. His hands are spread out wide, the head is hitting the stone pavement. And he is dragging him along the street. Well, he already has three pairs. They should last for two winters. But he has to bury the body. The commune head ordered him to do so. He took off the belts of the two corpses, tied the belts at the ends, noosed it at the neck and he slowly dragged the corpses onto the meadow, as if he were dragging a harrow in his garden. He piled them up nicely and covered them with some soil – it's done. Smiling, he went home with the boots. He took off his clogs. He tried one pair on, the best one – as if custom-made. He washed the blood out. He smeared them with fat. Ha-ha, they're shining, like some master's.

It is difficult to comprehend the scene. It becomes a little easier when we consider that walking barefoot was common in the Polish countryside, especially in the southern and eastern provinces in the interwar period. Poverty and the weakening of social bonds led to such behaviors, stances and opinions. That is why growing rich as a result of *szaber* brought the joy of a fate-changing miracle; however, it also evoked fear.

People secretly started calculating who got what and for how long it would last. There was a rumor that the Germans would search the suspected villages... People were less afraid during bombing raids and bombardments than they are worried about this wealth now. Luckily, there's enough straw. They dig holes in mows, cover them with straw and put the loot there.

But there's fear again: because if the barn catches fire, then to hell with it, but what if the hole does? What's in it is worth as much as twenty barns. That would be a pity.<sup>30</sup>

Another example of archetypical behavior. Just like after the fire in Siedlce, the peasants buried the looted objects. They behaved as if programmed to carry out the scenario of what to do in such circumstances. Conceivably, the *szaber* of the Jewish property in Jedwabne and other small towns of the region during the pogrom wave of 1941 was also conducted according to the scenario. This region also plunged into several days of chaos after the passing of the front line. According to historical research, at least two partly similar scenarios were intertwined in the events' genesis: a *szaber* scenario and a pogrom one.<sup>31</sup> Jan Tomasz Gross writes in *Neighbors* that on 10 July the peasants from the area around Jedwabne began walking or driving their wagons into the town from the early morning, despite the fact that it was not a market day.<sup>32</sup> In Tykocin, Suchowola, and Jasionówka the residents of the nearby villages also looted the Jewish property. In Wasilkowo "during the pogrom, the leaders... were shouting, 'Don't break or tear anything, everything is already ours.'"<sup>33</sup> Perhaps there was only one scenario of behavior but in two versions: a mild and a bloody one? The first one, without violence, was employed when somebody's property was ownerless in the looters' opinion. In the second one, when there "was" an owner, he had to be removed – beaten up, killed, driven away – so that the property could come into "our" hands. The second version was obviously far more difficult to carry out (it required at least rudimentary organization, the domination of young, armed men, the breach of far

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<sup>30</sup> J. Chustecki, *Byłem sołtysem w latach okupacji* (Warsaw, 1960), 66, 70, 73.

<sup>31</sup> P. Machcewicz, „Wokół Jedwabnego,” in *Wokół Jedwabnego*, vol. 1: *Studia*, ed. P. Machcewicz, K. Persak (Warsaw, 2002), 39, 41.

<sup>32</sup> J.T. Gross, *Sąsiedzi. Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Sejny, 2008), 51, 52.

<sup>33</sup> P. Machcewicz, „Wokół Jedwabnego,” 40.

more serious moral and psychological barriers connected with inflicting pain and suffering). Consequently, it was much less frequent in history.

The boundary of the behaviors connected with the extermination of the Jews in Szczepieszyn in the fall of 1942 can be more precisely defined. It was predominantly the Germans who murdered the Jews there, with Poles who “had nothing to do” ordered to be their helpers. Some Poles used the occasion and got down to looting. Beginning the action, the Germans “broke the window,” they gave a sign that it was allowed. Zygmunt Klukowski wrote about it in his diary.

22 October, 1942:

Some of the Jewish apartments have been sealed; however, the robberies are in full swing.

24 October:

Many town residents were shamelessly robbing what was left. 26 October:

In the afternoon many residents flung themselves into looting with even more enthusiasm. In the end, as a punishment for the *szaber*, the military policemen shot a boy and Felka Sawicówna, who lived opposite the hospital.<sup>34</sup>

Similar scenes took place in hundreds of other towns and villages, especially in the small towns, where ghettos were liquidated.<sup>35</sup> The houses belonging to deported Jews were almost immediately burglarized, destroyed, or sometimes taken apart by local Poles who wanted to obtain some wood, as they were afraid of another harsh winter.<sup>36</sup> On 18 September, 1942 *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, an organ of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa), wrote that Poles from Otwock, Rembertów and Miedzeszyn, “on the memorable day of the Otwock ghetto liq-

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<sup>34</sup> Z. Klukowski, *Zamojszczyzna 1918–1943*, 304, 305, 307, 310

<sup>35</sup> D. Libionka, “Biedni AK-owcy opisują Zagładę na prowincji,” *Więź* 4 (2009): 118–129.

<sup>36</sup> See e.g. K. Panz, „Zagłada sztetl Grice,” *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 3 (2007): 32–37.



uidation, came at night in horse-drawn wagons and began to loot the remaining Jewish property – just a few hours after the barbaric event. They took away everything that fell into their hands. Doors, windows, shelves, floor planks were all broken off, not to mention the furniture, clothes and linen which were the first to fall prey to the looters... In the name of the noblest rules of God and humans, we plead with you, our compatriots, not to stoop to the role of jackals.” The underground reported similar acts of *szaber* also in bigger towns and in cities, including Warsaw.<sup>37</sup> They probably also took place in

Lublin, but on a smaller scale than in smaller towns and villages, partly because the ghetto borders were better protected by the blue police and the military police.<sup>38</sup>

Although the *szaber* occurred at that time throughout Poland, the total amount of the appropriated wealth was much smaller than the amount appropriated after the war in the Recovered Territories, because the Jews had already been looted by the occupant or had sold the remains of their property for food. A peasant diarist from the Kielce region wrote about it.

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<sup>37</sup> “As soon as the tenements in the Warsaw ghetto emptied, bands of jackals went there, behind the ghastly walls, to frantically steal the property soaked in blood and imbued with putrid odor. Policemen of all colors, who were the first to stretch out their filthy and greedy hands for these miserable remains, condescendingly watch the dregs of society follow their example and loot and steal whatever they can... Groups of adolescents, even of 12–14-year-old children, wander about the streets of Warsaw. They unceremoniously trade the stolen goods. The most disturbing is the fact that the people who see it do not react to the sight of that awfulness. On the contrary, various Mistery and Ladies Muck eagerly buy ‘for nothing’ some miserable rags, plates, paintings, etc. It is a shame that not only lesser mortals, people of low intellect, but also individuals with traces of intelligence or at least with intellectual aspirations also stoop to robbing the Jewish property. These include various stewards of Jewish houses, who are ‘securing’ valuable objects, but also those who have ‘passes’ to the ghetto and do not want to miss a unique opportunity... to tarnish their reputation for the rest of their lives. News about other instances of common lack or atrophy of decency and humanity are coming in from the whole country.” (“Niebezpieczeństwo wewnętrzne,” *Agencja Prasowa*, 7 October 1942).

<sup>38</sup> D. Libionka, *Polska ludność chrześcijańska*, 310.

His account is all the more valuable since it shows the continuity of such behaviors – those who at first looted Jewish property (or bought their clothes from them for nothing) engaged in the looting of the post-German property after the war. “In my village [in 1948] as far as clothes go you can clearly see that people are very poor. During the unrest and the Jewish catastrophe, when the Krauts gathered them and took them in an unknown direction, then some bought a whole lotta clothes from these Jews, and later they began going west to get the togs the Germans left.”<sup>39</sup>

Klukowski does not specify the social makeup of the looting crowd. However, we can infer from the text that the municipal officials were not among them. The youth and the urban poor probably constituted the majority. The residents of “infamous” districts (Czerniaków, Annopol, Wola, Powiśle, Praga) probably predominated among the Warsaw looters. They, let us remember, had gained some looting experience in September 1939. Otwock was visited most likely by peasants who came in horse-drawn wagons.<sup>40</sup> Did these people loot driven by their low material status and the “vision of the world of limited means,” or maybe because they hated Jews? This question is ill-formulated, since perhaps a mixture of both factors was involved here, with anti-Semitism not confined to any social class or stratum. However, it must be stressed that it was usually not the ethnic hatred which played the key role in the genesis of *szaber*. This was illustrated e.g. by Anna Machcewicz in *Newsweek*.

On the night of 14 August, 1944 a plane crashed in the hills surrounding Nieszko-wice Wielkie – a village near Boch-

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<sup>39</sup> *Wieś polska 1939–1948. Materiały konkursowe*, ed. K. Kersten, T. Szarota, vol. 2 (Warsaw, 1968), 18.

<sup>40</sup> I deliberately omit here the appropriation of former Jewish real property (workplaces, houses, lots) by the “new middle class.” The process was conducted in a formal way and had little to do with the looting of abandoned property. Similarly, in the subsequent part of the text I do not treat the appropriation of former German farmsteads and apartments conducted by Polish repatriates as *szaber* in the strict sense of the word.

nia. The whole Polish crew of the seventeen-person Liberator died. Panic spread in the village after the crash. After what had happened was established, some villagers began looting whatever they could: watches, wedding rings, money. Probably in the beginning, in the darkness, nobody suspected that the shot-down pilots were Polish. At dawn a detachment of the Home Army, operating in the area, discovered the truth. Germans arrived as well and they took some parts of the wreck, the radio transmitter and receiver, weapons and ammunition. They tore the insignia off the pilots' uniforms. They ordered the chair of the village council to bury the dead and they left. The peasants, who by then must have known that the pilots were Polish, resumed looting. They ripped the uniforms off the corpses. They stole the parachutes (in total a few hundred square meters of the highly valuable fabric). Like ants, they started snatching away the remains of the plane. The Home Army command organized a repossession detachment. The peasants who did not manage to hide their treasures were publicly lashed. The funeral of the killed crew took place three days later. "For many years we were ashamed of it and we didn't tell anybody about it," the villagers told Anna Machcewicz.<sup>41</sup>

The retention of authority is key to the examples of Szczepieszyn and Nieszkowice. In the first town the Germans clearly let go. They totally do not care about the looting conducted by Poles, and consequently they somehow encourage it. When the liquidation action is about to end, the order is restored and the *szaber* ceases. In the other example, the Home Army commands the minds, but its detachment comes and disappears. Moreover, it does not enjoy sufficient prestige among all the peasants since the *szaber* resumes. Chaos and the concurrent weakening of the institutions of control generate a feeling of impunity. Acting in a crowd evokes a feeling of anonymity. But it is the property left unattended which sets in motion the *szaber* mechanism. These circumstances occurred

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<sup>41</sup>A. Machcewicz, "Tajemnica liberatora," *Newsweek*, 8 October, 2006.

on a multiplied scale, due to the passing of the front line. Joy was connected with disorder, freedom with the lack of authority. The property abandoned by Germans provided an occasion for *szaber*.

### ***Szaber* in Warsaw**

There were four main waves of the “*szaber* frenzy” in the period of 1944–1945. The first one spread mostly in towns and cities, with the perpetrators being for the most part city dwellers (“unwanted people,” urban proletariat), and in the case of Warsaw also peasants. The second one went rampaging through the countryside. The third one, undoubtedly the most intense one, swept through the Recovered Territories. The fourth one (1945–1947) was mostly the domain of soldiers of regular army units, the Internal Security Corps (*Korpus Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrzznego*) as well as military policemen, and it affected the property of Ukrainians and Lemkos.

In Lublin *szaber* took place between 21 and 24 July, 1944, i.e. at the time of the Germans’ escape and the Soviet Army’s arrival. The malicious could say that the holiday of 22 July celebrated in the People’s Republic of Poland should have commemorated the looters instead of the Manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (*Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego*). According to *Gazeta Lubelska*, “sure of their impunity, the dregs of society were openly looting not only state property but often also private property. The looters got away with it.”<sup>42</sup> The moveable equipment and furniture of the city slaughterhouse at No. 107 Łęczyńska Street fell pray to *szaber*. Later on, its management called in the press for the return of the property.<sup>43</sup> In other institutions and workplaces the losses had to be equally great, to the extent that the Polish Com-

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<sup>42</sup> “Obrazki ulicy,” *Gazeta Lubelska*, 27 October, 1944.

<sup>43</sup> *Gazeta Lubelska*, 29 January, 1944.

mittee of National Liberation clerks did not have chairs to sit on, since the head of the Public Security Department (*Resort Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego*), Stanisław Radkiewicz, ordered for an announcement to be posted in the streets in which he threatened “the most severe punishment” to those who would not return the looted goods.

In Radom, liberated on the night of 15 January, 1945, people bolted to the loading platform, where they expected to loot some food: flour, sugar or groats. On Czachowskiego Street somebody ripped the boots off a dead German soldier.<sup>44</sup> After cars and railway storehouses, it was time to loot the local enterprises, with tanneries being hit the hardest. According to *Dziennik Powszechny*: “Tanneries... met the same fate as many other enterprises in our city did in the critical days of the Germans’ escape from Radom. The locals have looted everything that could be taken away.”<sup>45</sup> The use of the expression “the locals” might constitute further proof that not only “the dregs of society” participated in the *szaber* and that it had a broader social basis.

Cracow, the capital of the General Government, had more that could be looted. A few dozen thousand Germans lived in the city. They left their apartments; however, usually without furniture. Moreover, a large proportion of the industry, warehouses and military storehouses had also been under German management. When the Germans were busy escaping – on 12 and 13 January, 1945 – the people of Cracow flung themselves into *szaber*. An eyewitness claimed that the tobacco and cigarette factories on the corner of Dolnych Młynów and Czarnowiejska streets were the first to be burglarized. For a few days crowds of people with backpacks, suitcases and bags filled with tobacco and cigarettes were emerging from the factory. The *szaber* wave also passed through the Herbewo roll-

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<sup>44</sup> R. Loth, *Wspomnienia Kochanowskie czyli Radom sprzed półwiecza* (Radom, 2007), 15.

<sup>45</sup> *Dziennik Powszechny*, 19 May, 1945.

ing papers factory and gradually moved into the city center. A fabric warehouse, located in a several-story tenement on Mikołajska Street, was emptied in one day. Since it had massive doors guarding it, the looters made small holes in them in order to get inside. Then the stock was thrown out onto the street. Grocery stores were also broken into; however, there were no substantial supplies. Offices and institutions were less popular among looters. A hole was made in the oak door of the former National Socialist German Workers' Party's office located in the Old Town Square and once in a while somebody got inside. It is said that the *szaber* proceeded slowly without the nervousness characteristic of such situations.<sup>46</sup>

Lublin, Radom, Cracow – these were no exceptions. *Szaber* also took place in Łódź, immediately after the city's liberation. Among its inhabitants there was a German minority of about one hundred thousand people. The Łódź ghetto, the last one to be liquidated by the Germans, was also a scene of multiple acts of *szaber*. From January to ca. July 1945 everything that could be taken from the ghetto was taken apart and stolen away – doors, roofs, windows.<sup>47</sup> The subsequent looting of the former German and Jewish property demands special attention, as its example shows that it was an instance of the same social phenomenon.

In January 1945 the looting of German storehouses conducted by Poles was the rule in smaller towns. Some of the mills, sugar factories, distilleries, bakeries and slaughterhouses under German management met a similar fate. If some places were not looted, it was only because the people did not know about their existence or because Soviet soldiers proved to be faster. Everything proceeded totally spontaneously, without any previous organization whatsoever, in the chaos following the Germans' escape. Irena Krzywicka participated in the

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<sup>46</sup> S. Ziemia, *Czas przełomu. Wspomnienia dziennikarza z lat 1944–1946* (Cracow, 1975), 129.

<sup>47</sup> A. Sitek, M. Trębacz, “Życie codzienne w Łodzi w 1945 r.,” in *Rok 1945 w Łodzi. Studia i szkice*, ed. J. Żelazko (Łódź, 2008), 173.

*szaber* in Zalesie near Warsaw. However, according to the description, most of her companions lived in the nearby villages. The author of *Wyznania gorszycielki* [Confessions of a Scandalizer] did not regard *szaber* as something scandalous. On the contrary, she thought it a natural and fully-justified social reaction to the mass looting the Germans had indeed conducted in the fall and winter of 1944. One might infer that she regarded the *szaber* of the former German warehouses, whose owners actually “did not exist” any more, as a patriotic act. Not ignoring her genuine hatred of Germans, it seems more probable that Krzywicka, a resident of the pre-war intellectual Parnassus, many years later felt a need to explain her behavior by putting the blame on the occupant. In reality her reaction was probably spontaneous, unpremeditated and instinctive (?). Krzywicka recalls:

at night [probably it was the night of 16 January] I ran to the warehouse with Marynia. We didn't go there to find something, gain anything, but to loot the Germans, to take German property after they had taken everything away from us. We ran there and dragged home some strange things. An iron bed with a metal mattress, a can of marmalade. Anyway, quite a lot of people from the village were already there, and they were looting what they could. I thought that they were absolutely right, because everybody had been looted in some way by the Germans.<sup>48</sup>

In January and February, 1945 not only the former German property or former Jewish houses in Łódź fell prey to the looters. Ethnic strangeness was something of a marker indicating the goods to be looted – it facilitated the breaking of inner barriers, because “taking a German bed or Jewish duvet was not a sin.” Nevertheless, it was not the most important or even a necessary factor setting in motion the looting crowds. It is illustrated not only by the example of Nieszkowice, but also the

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<sup>48</sup> I. Krzywicka, *Wyznania gorszycielki* (Warsaw, 1995), 397.

example of burnt-out and empty left-bank Warsaw, which at that time underwent perhaps the most destructive raid of looters. Just one day after the liberation (17 January, 1945) *szaber* of the goods abandoned after the Uprising commenced. The attack came from two sides. The first wave came from the nearby villages on the left bank of the Vistula. In *Życie Warszawy* of 20 January we read that “crowds of plunderers, which emerged as if out of thin air, are already prowling in the abandoned houses. They are looting everything: clothes, linen, settings, pots. They are even taking furniture using hand carts and horse-drawn wagons that arrived from who knows where.”<sup>49</sup> Crossing the frozen Vistula, Praga inhabitants attacked from this district’s side. As early as on 19 January the city military commandant issued an order forbidding them to stay in left-bank Warsaw and threatened those who should break the order with provost court. The military police cordoned off the city. It did not help much.<sup>50</sup> Not only was the pressure too great, but some of the military policemen also wanted to cash in on it.<sup>51</sup> The article under a title typical of the period – *Żądamy surowych kar dla rabusiów* [We Request Severe Punishment for the Plunderers] – which appeared in *Życie Warszawy* describes the situation

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<sup>49</sup> “Warszawa żyje,” *Życie Warszawy*, 20 January, 1945.

<sup>50</sup> The report of the deputy Citizens’ Militia (*Milicja Obywatelska*) chief of the capital city of Warsaw of 26 January reads: “Only in one case are the militiamen not able to cope with their duties: they cannot stop mass theft and robberies conducted by criminal elements from the suburbs and nearby villages. This phenomenon came about due to the absence of the owners of the salvaged basements and not yet penetrated apartments. This pillaging is on a mass scale and on account of it the authorities have issued a series of orders by virtue of which nobody can enter the city of Warsaw, newcomers cannot settle in the city, objects and furniture cannot be transported, etc. (Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej [Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance, later: AIPN], 01265/379, p. 3).

<sup>51</sup> The report on the activity of operational officers for political and educational affairs sent to Warsaw in September, 1944 reads: “Citizens’ Militia, majority of which participated in the looting under various pretexts, was yet another obstacle in the way of fighting the civilians’ marauding.” (Archiwum Akt Nowych [Archive of New Records, later: AAN], PPR, 295/IX-353, p. 1).



at the beginning of February: “One can spot women carrying household appliances, children with sacks of books, men pulling carts full of furniture. Comfortable armchairs are thrown out of the windows and they fall into the stretched-out hands of the plunderers. Gangs of plunderers storm into abandoned apartments through broken doors, just to emerge a moment later with the loot.”<sup>52</sup> In a way the author traditionally accused “the dregs of society, the scum,” but others commenced looting as well. The most frequently mentioned group are the peasants, who were walking from apartment to apartment with a sack on their back. They peeked through broken windows. When they saw the owner, they muttered, “Oh, you’ve already taken the apartment,” and they went to loot someplace else.<sup>53</sup>

Let us examine this scene, because it says a lot about the nature of *szaber* – conducted without violence but also without the owner, whose absence made the property right somehow vague. Our moral obligations (including the commandment “you shall not steal”) encompass, first and foremost, familiar persons, “our” people, and when “they are not there,” these obligations rapidly waver. As Dariusz Stola points out, *szaber* is a relation between people and things and not between people, and as a result the inner barrier against it is weaker.<sup>54</sup> In Warsaw, where looters turned out to be faster than the returning apartment owners, the latter usually saw a sight similar to this one: “When we entered the house, we saw a scene of destruction: all the doors were torn from the hinges, the leather furniture was all stripped off. There were plenty of feathers from the bedding, because the looters took the filling, and the whole apartment was littered with feathers.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> “Żądamy surowych kar dla rabusiów,” *Życie Warszawy*, 8 February, 1945.

<sup>53</sup> W. Dąbrowska, *Z Bielan do Zalesia in Exodus Warszawy. Ludzie i miasto po powstaniu 1944. Pamiętniki i relacje*, vol. 1, selection and ed. M. Berezowska, E. Borecka, K. Dunin-Wąsowicz, J. Korpetta, H. Szwanowska (Warsaw, 1992), 245.

<sup>54</sup> See footnote 13.

<sup>55</sup> F. Borycka, *Exodus z Powiśla in Exodus Warszawy*, 192.

The second wave of *szaber* spread in the provinces. This time the looters were mostly peasants, farm laborers, country “unwanted people,” with landed property being the aim of their attacks. Yet again the role of authority proved to be of key importance. In this case it was the role of the new regime, which during the landowner reform encouraged people to take land into their own hands, so that “historic justice” would be served. During the partition of the property the farming appliances and tools were sometimes looted, which the communist authorities did not really object to. Initially, the Home Army managed to counter such situations, but as it was becoming less effective in field operations, the acts of *szaber* became more frequent. To give one example, the mansion abandoned by its owners in the village of Morawsko near Jarosław was taken apart and only its foundations remained in place.<sup>56</sup> Another example can be found in Franciszek Starowieyski’s memoirs. They provide a description of a typical *szaber* scenario: the race for valuables, anonymity guaranteed by the over-exploited personal pronoun “we.” The means of transport the same as usual – horse-drawn wagons. Despite the fact that the presence of women and children in the mansion somehow upsets the *szaber* scenario, we should remember that for peasants the woman was, unlike the man, a second-class owner. And perhaps in their opinion it was already a “dead class.” Starowieyski recalls:

The first raid on the mansion commenced when only women and children remained there. A few wagons packed with armed people arrived. But they were poorly armed and they were wearing half-Polish, half-Russian uniforms. About four or five wagons came and the search in the mansion [started] – in the name of the people. Great *szaber* commenced... They were looting whatever they could. They even took some of our toys, my paintbrushes... Some of the things had already been removed. They were not looting the things which would be valuable to

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<sup>56</sup> *Kronika rodzin Kopeckich i Turnauów*, ed. K. Kopecki, A. Bogdańska-Zarembina, E. Sawicka (Warsaw, 2001).

us. They were looking for jewelry, money, furs... it was a frantic search for hiding places, things that could be appropriated, fast, fast, because their companions might find a better tidbit.

Then a document had to be signed, certifying that this or that had been confiscated in the name of the people. It was the beginning of the manner of speaking which we would hear every day for the next forty years. Nobody was an 'I,' everybody was a 'we.' We – everybody referred to themselves so – we – this way of speaking got to people instantly.<sup>57</sup>

### Looters' Union

The third and most devastating wave of the “*szaber* frenzy” spread in the territories belonging to the Reich and in the Polish territories where a colonization action was conducted. It started as early as in winter, and with respect to the number of participants it reached its peak in the summer and fall of 1945. It is difficult to say if people of specific age, sex or social class predominated among the looters. “Perhaps *szaber* is not the only sin of our society,” admitted *Głos Narodu* from Częstochowa in August 1945, “... but fortunately there is no other ‘plague’ so widespread in the whole society regardless of age, profession and social class. Hundreds of people are looting, beginning from half-blind beggars dragging along to Silesia and ending with clever young men, who drive west in automobiles every week.”<sup>58</sup>

The range of this “plague” is also difficult to define. However, it will not be an exaggeration if we call it a mass one. Some villages and towns, especially those on the Polish side of the Reich border, became almost completely deserted. Wanting to use the opportunity to loot, thousands went to Lower Silesia or to Gdańsk and its vicinities. *Dziennik Bałtycki* of 1 June, 1945

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<sup>57</sup> *Franciszka Starowieyskiego opowieść o końcu świata, czyli reforma rol-  
na*, written down by K. Uniechowska (Warsaw, 1994), 115, 116.

<sup>58</sup> “Zaraza,” *Głos Narodu*, 29 August, 1945.

reads: “In the last months we saw tens, hundreds and thousands of people gripped by the frenzy of looting other people’s apartments and farmsteads. They swarmed after the army like locusts. They stormed into towns and villages abandoned by Germans – and they robbed, destroyed and trampled.”<sup>59</sup> In November there was a manhunt, one of many at that time, at one of the railway stations in Poznań. Reportedly, looters made up about 60 percent of the travelers. Even if the group were half as numerous – “people on a journey” are a very important element of the landscape then – it still does say a lot about the scale of the phenomenon. Most of them came from Warsaw, Cracow and Tarnów.<sup>60</sup> But we must remember this was only the number of looters traveling by train. Statistically speaking, most looters, at least in the beginning, went hunting on foot, by horse-drawn wagons or were given lifts by Soviet drivers. And so the biggest “looting belts” were located in the Augustów region, in northern Mazovia, in Kaszuby, in western Greater Poland or Lesser Poland and in the area around Częstochowa. Everybody went to the place closest to them. For instance, Elbląg became the gold vein for the inhabitants of Kaszuby. Edmund Osmańczyk came across “bands of the worst dregs of society” who traveled to the Opole region from the Kielce and the Częstochowa Provinces and from the [Coal] Basin.<sup>61</sup> Looters from Zakopane went to the Sudeten Mountains, from where they brought i.a. telescopes to view Giewont from Gubałówka. Stanisław Ziemia, the then editor-in-chief of *Dziennik Zachodni*, a daily describing the situation in the area along the Oder River in detail, recalled that its circulation was especially good in the Rzeszów region and in central Poland. In his opinion the readers from those regions were mostly “travelers” who went to Silesia to get “stuff” and after each return home they wanted to have up-to-date news as to

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<sup>59</sup> “Skończyć z szabrem,” *Dziennik Bałtycki*, 1 June, 1945.

<sup>60</sup> “Nagonka na szabrowników,” *Ilustrowany Kurier Polski*, 17 November, 1945.

<sup>61</sup> E. Osmańczyk, “Szabrownicy,” *Dziennik Polski*, 7 April, 1945.

whether something had changed in those regions and if they could risk another journey to the west.<sup>62</sup> If it had really been so, it would testify to the fact that the looting journeys became professionalized to a certain degree. However, the beginnings were different.

We can distinguish a few phases of *szaber*.

The first one occurred in the ethnically mixed regions immediately after the passing of the front line. It was the most chaotic, incidental phase, in the course of which blind fury sometimes revealed its presence. Taking everything that fell into their hands, looters wrought senseless havoc. A teacher from Racice in the Inowrocław district in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Province recalls the demolition of the school:

The long-lasting occupation had warped people's minds, which was the most evident during the first days after the Germans' escape. The inhabitants of the village, who stayed in one place during the whole occupation, decided, if I can put it like that, to make use of the economic situation. They immediately flung themselves into looting, taking everything which could be taken and which had any value whatsoever, or they began destroying things. Former German farms were looted. So were the farms belonging to deported Poles. They did not even spare the school. A band of rowdy people with axes shattered the door and stole everything that was there, that is: furniture, pots, paintings, books, gymnastics equipment, charts, globes (which they then broke into pieces in the courtyard), radio receivers, etc. They even stole a whole window, the stove grills and they pulled out the hooks from the walls. Only four bare walls were left. The floor was covered with plaster and garbage.<sup>63</sup>

Since it is not the only piece of information about a school being destroyed by a village crowd, in all likelihood the first reaction to the "interregnum" in the border area was often a

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<sup>62</sup> S. Ziemia, *Czas przełomu*, 213.

<sup>63</sup> *Więś polska 1939–1948. Materiały konkursowe*, vol. 1, 157.

mad race conducted under the principle: who is going to get more?<sup>64</sup>

The second phase did not commence immediately after the first one. Military operations were being conducted in Lower Silesia and along the whole length of the coast. Red Army units were quartered everywhere. Further journeys from the place of residence posed a great deal of danger. Consequently, only those who could not stay in their homes. The front line moved west in April 1945, which to some extent triggered the next *szaber* wave which was somehow following the retreating army. According to a village diarist from the Łódź province,

Inexpressible joy pervaded in the countryside. Inhabitants of the village of Bzów went to nearby Silesia by Soviet cars and by the immediately activated trains. They were looking for what they had lost and there was plenty to go there for: sewing machines, bikes, radio receivers, various kitchen appliances, linen, clothes, shoes. They were taking what they had lost under the German occupation, i.e. their economic well-being.<sup>65</sup>

Encouraged by the prospect of treasures abandoned by Germans, people became braver and started coming from more and more distant places. Nevertheless, they were still taking mainly small objects, which they could carry or transport by cart. Initially, only the army was able to loot bigger objects, since only the military had the necessary vehicles. With the

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<sup>64</sup> The village of Chmielinko, Nowy Tomyśl district: "During the critical January days, after the Germans had escaped in panic and before the Russians' arrival the village plunged into an interregnum and anarchy, which lasted about a dozen hours. Poles – farmhands who did not escape together with their employers [who were Germans – author's note] – knew how to make use of such an opportunity. They made up for all the suffering and for want they had to endure from the hands of the German employers during the whole occupation. They took all the former German objects they could, first and foremost clothes, shoes, linen, bicycles and other things, and they brought the stuff to their relatives living nearby. They took revenge even on the school, whose doors, desks and cabinets they smashed with axes while searching for valuable things" (ibidem, 418).

<sup>65</sup> Ibidem, 647.

passing of time gangs of looters were formed. They were able to comb the area more methodically, i.e. house after house, they were setting up dens and transfer points as well as bribing clerks to obtain necessary permissions. Maria Zientara-Malewska recalls:

The first looters appeared in Olsztyn as early as in March. They loaded onto trucks whatever they could and took it away. They walked from house to house, looking for treasures. They would remove from the houses the best furniture, carpets, china, glassware and paintings – everything they could get hold of. They were so greedy that sometimes they took things which they then left in the street while they were looking for new ones. More and more objects and pieces of furniture were lying on the streets... If these were things left behind by refugees at the mercy of fortune – it was half as bad. But often people who were there lost everything they had. I saw with my own eyes people bringing whole loads of sewing machines, carpets and furniture from the nearby villages into the tenement in Pułaski Square in which I lived. It must be added that *szaber* was going on not only in Olsztyn. Armed gangs traveled to villages in order to rob their defenseless inhabitants. They did not ask whether something belonged to Poles or Germans. They simply took it.<sup>66</sup>

In one of the apartments on Brata Alberta Street in Wrocław there was a storehouse of looted goods, which were to be sold. “The floor in the apartment was covered with carpets lying one on top of the other, forming a thick layer. Paintings, actually of various value, wall clocks, grandfather clocks, wrist-watches and pocket watches were piled by the walls. In the adjacent room there were a few pianos.”<sup>67</sup> The professionalization of *szaber* proceeded gradually: it was becoming an occupation,

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<sup>66</sup> M. Zientara-Malewska, *Śladami twardej drogi* (Warsaw, 1966), 247, 248.

<sup>67</sup> J. Konopińska, *Tamten wrocławski rok. Dziennik 1945–1946* (Wrocław, 1987), 148, 149.

the main source of income and a way of life. According to an epigram popular at that time:

A new trade union's been set up,  
Its members innumerable –  
,Thea Looters' Union.<sup>68</sup>

A system of communicating vessels was formed: some people looted, some provided necessary papers, others transported the stuff east or south and finally the last group sold the loot. Looters' bands had their people among city clerks, militiamen and at the railway. Militiamen and soldiers were often looters themselves. Actually, the initial anti-looting "round-ups" at railways stations were conducted in order for the Citizens' Militia and railway guards to be able to appropriate the goods previously looted by somebody else. On the one hand, it seems that among the looters there were many demobilized, unemployed and occupation-time smugglers. On the other hand, *szaber* relatively quickly ceased to be a peasant phenomenon limited only to the "unwanted people." It began to be a matter of the whole society. Officials also became infected with the "looting frenzy." According to the envoy of the Ministry of Public Administration of Lower Silesia and the Opole region (*Ministerstwo Administracji Publicznej na Dolny Śląsk i Opolszczyznę*), half of the employees of public agencies left their offices during working hours in order to loot or trade.<sup>69</sup> Higherranking officials used public cars as well as their powers thanks to which they could e.g. take over apartments and empty them. Afterwards, they could establish patronclient links thanks to the distribution of such apartments. In Lower Silesia, only during a few weeks of August and September, the causes of as many as fourteen district governors and mayors were

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<sup>68</sup> Ibidem, 73.

<sup>69</sup> AAN, MAP, 2443, Kazimierz Janczewski, Sprawozdanie z lustracji Śląska Opolskiego oraz województwa dolnośląskiego, 15–25 October, 1945, p. 41.



directed to the public prosecution office.<sup>70</sup> The phenomenon can be partly explained by the meager salaries of public servants and militiamen. It is difficult to deny that especially people who had to provide for their families simply could not get by on such salaries, and everybody was aware of that. But the collective imperative was also important – the general conviction that since various goods were literally lying in the street, one needed to take them because everybody was doing so. The report written by Jerzy Zubek, one of the more intelligent inspectors in Lower Silesia, reads: “People who came here with an ideological attitude succumbed to the psychosis the minute they found themselves in the ‘gold rush’ atmosphere.”<sup>71</sup> It was especially evident during the deportations of Germans, which Poles impatiently awaited. The excitement felt by some, the joy they experienced when they managed to obtain something valuable, but also the brutalization of the attitude toward Germans when the gains turned out to be too small – all these should be included among the symptoms of the “*szaber frenzy*.”

In the Recovered Territories Germans constituted an important group of looters. These were almost exclusively women who knew where to look for things appropriate as loot and which they then exchanged for food in the so-called “*szaber-squares*.” Joanna Konopińska described the all-knowing “old Miss Weiss,” who brought home various goods in order to exchange them for food at Grunwald Square in Wrocław.<sup>72</sup> The situation in other cities and towns was similar. In Bytom “German women were bringing various objects to the bazaar, which they laid out on towels spread on the ground...; in turn the repatriates acted according to the rule: buy at a low price, sell at a higher one. At the end of the day one came home with

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<sup>70</sup> Ibidem, p. 40.

<sup>71</sup> AAN, MAP, 2443, Jerzy Zubek, Sprawozdanie z przeprowadzonej inspekcji, 18 August, 1945, p. 31.

<sup>72</sup> Ibidem, p. 63, 95.

a meager profit, sometimes with the unsold merchandise.”<sup>73</sup> Next, Polish “ants” (small-scale smugglers) transported to the center of the country the things which they had bought for nothing or which they had looted. Often they carried the objects on themselves. One of the first reports describing Pomerania after the war featured the following scene, probably slightly exaggerated: “A huge pack on the back, suitcases in both hands, bike tubes around the neck and some lesser “looted” acquisition dangling by the belt. And the said citizen can barely breathe under the burden as heavy as a pack animal’s; he is staring somewhere far ahead as if he wants to bring his Poznań, Łódź or Warsaw closer.”<sup>74</sup>

Such people filled the post-war trains and railway stations. Orbis opened a coach line from Warsaw to Wrocław, which soon began to be known as the “szaber-bus.”<sup>75</sup> Some people returned a few or a few dozen times – maybe more. Czesław Borek, a 28-year-old turner’s helper, having spent a short time in the Citizens’ Militia, started buying various things in Jelenia Góra and then transporting them to the center of the country. In his testimony before the Special Commission he admitted to visiting Jelenia Góra about ten times. Moreover, he sent some of the things by mail. He was not directly involved in *szaber*. He sometimes bought the stuff from Germans but mostly from Citizens’ Militia functionaries, with whom he had long been acquainted.<sup>76</sup> In February 1946 two unemployed women were apprehended. They had been constantly traveling back and forth between the Recovered Territories and Poznań (one since April and the other one since July 1945). They had transported watches, cameras and clothes in order to sell them in a consignment shop. At the time of their arrest they had three

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<sup>73</sup> T. Wróbel, *Przystanek Gliwice. Dalsze losy chłopca z Borysławia* (Warsaw, 2004), 11.

<sup>74</sup> Z. Drózdź, W. Milczarek, *Zakochani w Pomorzu* (Cracow, 1945), 24.

<sup>75</sup> M. Urbaneck, *Wielki szaber*.

<sup>76</sup> AAN, Special Commission, 1079, Akta sprawy przeciwko Czesławowi Borkowi, p. 2.

suitcases with them which contained among other things tablecloths, linen, two motorcycle rims and a coil of cable.<sup>77</sup> They were retailers, though.

### Types of *Szaber*

“Ants” were actually the most numerous; however, gradually *szaber* became divided into branches – it underwent diversification with respect to the assortment. Clothes, shoes, carpets, domestic appliances such as sewing machines and radio receivers did not require major specialization. By contrast, transporting furniture, not to mention farming machines, did take a lot of effort. Thousands of UNRRA trucks, which came to Poland across the Czech border, continued their journey to Warsaw and other cities and towns bursting at the seams with furniture and other goods. Coffee machines, grinders, kitchen appliances for cafes and restaurants, as well as plates and cups from which the Varsovians drank coffee and tea were brought, probably on request, from Wrocław or Gdańsk.

Some looters specialized in car parts, while others – e.g. the gangs of employees of the Post Offices and Telegraphs Head Office [*Dyrekcja Poczty i Telegrafów*] in Katowice – specialized in telecommunications devices (using a mail car, the group looted e.g. the switchboard in Strzelce Opolskie.<sup>78</sup>)

There were also “specialists” who penetrated abandoned drug stores and transported expensive and rare medications to the country center.<sup>79</sup> Another common sub-type of *szaber* involved appropriation and emptying former German apartments, after which the looters moved into another apartment. Kudowa’s deputy district governor changed his company apart-

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<sup>77</sup> Ibidem, 1088, Akta dochodzenia przeciwko Krzywińskiej Ludwice i Jacek Wiktorii, p. 1, 18.

<sup>78</sup> Ibidem, 760, Akta sprawy przeciwko Stanisławowi M., Władysławowi P., Franciszkowi I., Henrykowi P., Ludwikowi L., p. 8–10.

<sup>79</sup> A. Ropelewski, *Pionierskie lato* (Warsaw, 1972), 172.

ment five times in six months. Despite the fact that he stayed in one of them for less than a day, he took all the furnishings with him each time.<sup>80</sup>

There was yet another type of looters – “cultural looters.” According to Stanisław Ziemia, as far as cultural property is concerned, the *szaber* of books commenced the latest. “In the beginning there were no adepts of this discipline among the loot-ers.”<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, books found their enthusiasts pretty soon as well.<sup>82</sup> At the beginning of August 1945 dozens of people began wandering about Gdańsk looking for works of art, which they hoped to sell (probably these were hungry Germans who knew where to look).<sup>83</sup> According to the files of Stanisław Ziewiec’s investigation, in the first half of 1946 he smuggled from the Recovered Territories four Afghan and Persian carpets, three Dutch school painting, one Munich school painting, four paintings in the Empire style and many smaller objects.<sup>84</sup> Putti, which until this day decorate some apartments of the intelligentsia, must have been removed from a ruined church after the war. In the files of the Special Committee there is evidence against a person who in September 1946 bought

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<sup>80</sup> M. Urbanek, *Wielki szaber*.

<sup>81</sup> S. Ziemia, *Czas przełomu*, 215.

<sup>82</sup> The report *Zakochani w Pomorzu (In Love with Pomerania)* features a grossly exaggerated description of one of them: “Then there is a newly-accepted student, an enthusiast of ‘rara avis,’ the face of an ascetic, the nose as long as a woodpecker’s due to his eagerness to learn. Huge glasses with American frames hide his piggy eyes, sly and crafty. Initially one is surprised by his articulation and the knowledge of the topic – one might infer that he is a curator or an artistic or cultural director. He is rummaging through a heap of parchments and Bibles from the 13<sup>th</sup> century; his sticky, alert fingers seem to multiply like a pill bug. He catches something, puts it inside and ties it... And one feels like laughing and vomiting at the same time, and in the end one is tempted to come up to him, spit in his festered peepers, grab him by the collar and throw him out of the third floor window onto the dumpster so that this hyena would not tarnish the precious books turned grey over the ages. (Z. Drózdź, W. Milczarek, *Zakochani w Pomorzu*, 25).

<sup>83</sup> “Szabrownicy kultury,” *Dziennik Polski*, 6 August, 1945.

<sup>84</sup> AAN, Special Commission, 3155, Akta dochodzeń przeciwko Ziewcowi Stanisławowi, p. 66.

from somebody in Kłodzko nineteen showcases with a collection of butterflies and beetles. As a result, the said person spent three months in a labor camp.<sup>85</sup>

There was also – let us say – an official kind of *szaber* for which one usually did not go to jail. It began in the devastated Warsaw and it was successfully continued later as well. A great number of institutions, e.g. universities, suffered from a total lack of furniture and equipment. Therefore, looking for a solution to the problem, they sent searching teams “on business trips,” during which they were to look for chairs, desks, typewriters, books.<sup>86</sup> Many schools, libraries and health centers, especially in the Recovered Territories, but also in the center of the country, commenced their activity thanks to prior trips of that kind. At times, the inhabitants’ genuine civic concern was involved. Wanting to open a school or library, they brought everything that could possibly prove useful and which they had looted elsewhere.<sup>87</sup> It is difficult to regard such behavior as *szaber* in the strict sense of the word, since they were not aimed at private profit. Nevertheless, the “official *szaber*” had its negative educational effects – it showed that the elites were looters too.

Some behaviors should be regarded as something between *szaber* and – let us say – being houseproud. For instance, the takeover of former German property conducted by the settlers by virtue of law cannot be regarded as *szaber*. But how should we treat a repatriate who was given an empty farmstead and who was looking for the furniture he needed at another, more affluent farmstead, and who, having found the table and chairs, never set out on such trips again? Nobody came to the Recovered Territories with full hands. Everything was valuable after the war – basins, buckets, bicycles, windows, etc.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibidem, 1094, Akta dochodzenia przeciwko Edwardowi Kaczanowskiemu, p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> See e.g. Z. Samsonowicz, *Wspomnienia o Straży Akademickiej Politechniki we Wrocławiu* (Wrocław, 2002).

<sup>87</sup> Cf. C. Priebe, “Szkola szabru,” *Karta* 14 (1994): 79–91.

Undoubtedly, criminal behavior on the part of Polish soldiers and militiamen toward Germans and Ukrainians cannot be labeled as “*szaber*.” However, the deportations were often conducted in a criminal fashion. Deportees did not have time to pack and they could take only a limited amount of baggage, which meant that later the “abandoned” property could be looted. During Operation “Wisła,” such practices became almost the rule.

Looters, especially the young ones, easily turned into thieves, or even bandits, if they found the owners present in an allegedly abandoned German house. The image of Poles imprinted in the Germans’ collective memory is an image of a band taking everything brutally and mindlessly. The boundary between *szaber* and armed robbery with the use of violence was commonly breached in the contacts with Germans and Ukrainians. Sometimes the victims of such aggression were Poles: autochthons and recently repatriated ones. According to an inhabitant of the area around Olsztyn:

One felt totally insecure. At that time the looters would come and steal things at night or, more often, they came armed, in broad daylight, and they would take everything they could, that is actually everything that was left: eiderdowns, clocks, somehow salvaged bikes, clothes, linen, sewing machines, etc. Each and every day the looters paid some villagers a visit. The tragedy consisted in the fact that they were Poles, our brothers, and that these very brothers came to rob their brothers.<sup>88</sup>

Digging up cemeteries resembled looting behaviors. As perhaps everybody knows this phenomenon has been known to humanity for thousands of years. One of the first war-time examples comes from Jasło, where graves were looted in the fall of 1944, when the Germans were still present in the town. Not only was it the

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<sup>88</sup> *Wieś polska 1939–1948. Materiały konkursowe*, vol. 1, 91.

Germans' initiative, but the German soldiers were also the perpetrators of the devastation. An article from *Dziennik Polski* from March 1945 reads: "After these operations the cemetery looked like a battlefield. The ground was covered with dozens of corpses dragged out of their coffins. The city of the dead began to resemble the city of the 'alive.'"<sup>89</sup> It is difficult to say whether the article served as an inspiration to Poles searching for gold teeth. It is important that the idea was popularized, e.g. in nearby Cracow. A private letter (of May 21, 1945) written by a female inhabitant of the city, whose family had probably been buried at one of the local cemeteries, reads as follows:

The thieves have been looting the tombs at the cemetery for a week, they are looking for gold teeth. Kazio's tomb has also been opened and three coffins have been moved – Kazio's, Wanda's mother's, and the sister's. We saw Kazio's coffin, it was lying on its side... On Saturday night twenty-four tombs were opened and looted. Of course the board is to blame, because they watch the graves during the day, they close [the cemetery?] in advance, but even the board cannot do much these days.<sup>90</sup>

The example of Treblinka is the most infamous one. Local peasants became specialists in looting the graves of the murdered Jews. In the fall of 1945 the whole area of the former camp looked like an open-pit mine – dug and burrowed, full of holes with human bones lying about. The stench of the decomposing bodies lingered in the air. Some "gold-diggers" were using bombs in order to bring the corpses to the surface. Thanks to the gold obtained in that way the neighboring villages enjoyed financial revival.<sup>91</sup> Legends of alleged hidden Jewish treasures circulated in the whole country. The press was reporting on

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<sup>89</sup> S. Peters, "Jasło – miasto śmierci," *Dziennik Polski*, 10 March, 1945.

<sup>90</sup> AIPN, MBP 3378, Specjalne doniesienie dot. działalności dywersyjnych band, p. 75b.

<sup>91</sup> M. Rusiniak, *Obóz zagłady Treblinka II w pamięci społecznej (1943–1989)* (Warsaw, 2008), 29–33.

that.<sup>92</sup> The script of the 1949 film *Skarb* [The Treasure] could have been written under the influence of such stories. Looking for gold teeth and wedding rings, robbers were also destroying the German burial sites in the Recovered Territories. Later on some of the cemeteries – e.g. in Kołobrzeg – were leveled to the ground in the name of bringing back Polishness. The dug-up graves and ravaged crypts should be included among the images of the post-war period.

### Causes and Effects

*Szaber* stemmed from the war-time demoralization, and at the same time deepened it. The report of the deputy provincial commandant of the MO (*Milicja Obywatelska*, Citizens' Militia) in Lower Silesia dated November 1945 reads:

a stranger coming to Lower Silesia is struck by the moral gangrene festering around everybody. It is a problem of public prosecutors and district governors, of the province apparatus, of all ranks of the security authorities or the administrative and judiciary apparatus, of all social strata. Moreover, a wave of people is coming here only to steal everything they possible can and to transport the stuff off to Central Poland. Bribery is an everyday phenomenon, one can get anything done anywhere for money. *Szaber*, that is actually the theft of public property, is almost a component of the air one breathes here. People have completely lost their grasp of basic ethics.<sup>93</sup>

As we can see *szaber* became a component of the air, an element of the post-war style of life. Outside the official, intellectual discourse hardly anybody treated it as something

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<sup>92</sup> "Poszukiwaczy skarbów wystraszyło widmo śmierci," *Echo Wieczorne*, 23 December, 1946.

<sup>93</sup> AIPN, KG MO, 35/922, Raport sytuacyjny zastępcy komendanta wojewódzkiego MO do spraw polityczno-wychowawczych na Dolnym Śląsku za czas od dn. 25 października 1945 r. do dn. 10 listopada 1945 r., p. 58, 59.



wrong. On the contrary, the objects appropriated by such means were something to be proud of. People exchanged them with one another.<sup>94</sup> Their distribution in the Recovered Territories played a very important role in the construction of social bonds, which often had a kind of patron-client character.<sup>95</sup> A mayor gave something to the Polish Worker's Party secretary, the chief of a Citizens' Militia station gave something to the mayor, the latter gave something to the so indispensable doctors and teachers, and last but not least the Soviet commander also got his share – in such a way furniture, apartments, horses and all other required goods were transferred. This gave rise to connections, constellations and links – i.e. to society. In central Poland successful journeys to “the Wild West” proved one's virile resourcefulness and shrewdness. *Szaber* influenced the everyday culture of the times: the system of values, material culture, leisure. An epigram written to the tune of a mazurka declared:

One more *szaber* today –  
The car won't break down –  
One more lady's fur  
And we're moving on...<sup>96</sup>

*Szaber* questioned the sense of work. As we have seen, it demoralized people. It simply did not pay to work conscientiously or to work at all, since a small effort ensured life in relative affluence. In the Recovered Territories it was common for officials to quit their jobs. For who would sit at the desk with the “looting frenzy” raging outside the window? Breathing the

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<sup>94</sup> “Those who would not stoop to stealing even a penny are now shamelessly looting property worth hundreds of thousands of zlotys. And they are not ashamed of their activity. On the contrary, they proudly announce that they have managed to loot this or that.” (“Zaraza,” *Głos Narodu*, 29 August 1945).

<sup>95</sup> Cf. C. Priebe, *Szkoła szabru*.

<sup>96</sup> M. Urbanek, *Wielki szaber*.

air with an admixture of *szaber* weakened the immunological barriers preventing people from committing other crimes.

I would like to ask one question: if *szaber* had not been such a widespread phenomenon, would the militiamen who – colloquially speaking – sought to conduct a stickup have stormed into the Jewish community house on Planty Street in Kielce (and thereby started a pogrom)? Why, their colleagues in Lower Silesia were looting freely. The other thing is that it must have been extremely frustrating for those who – like the Kielce militiamen – “did not luck into” *szaber*.

The “frenzy” was triggered by the passing of the front-line, the chaos and the weakness of the institutions of control. Germany’s surrender gave many Poles a feeling of victors’ impunity. In turn, the moment of suspension, war-time disorder and the “interregnum” made people feel almost completely anonymous. As psychologists point out, when all members of a group are in a similar state, their psychological functioning changes: they are living in a widened context of the present, which makes the past and the future irrelevant. Feelings take over the reason, and action dominates over reflection.<sup>97</sup> Consequently, it facilitates the situations we have observed during *szaber*: the mindless ravaging of buildings, the mad race to seize the abandoned property, the digging up of graves. According to a former soldier of the National Military Union (*Narodowe Zjednoczenie Wojskowe*) in the Olsztyn province, “In these ‘Recovered Territories’ people went amuck, even quite sensible people were destroying everything. Perhaps it was an act of revenge against the Germans for the occupation years? Even I felt that if I saw a whole, German window, I would have to smash it.”<sup>98</sup>

The phenomenon of thousands of Poles “snatching away” other people’s property can be explained in terms of the moral degradation which took place during the war and the occupa-

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<sup>97</sup>P. Zimbardo, op. cit., 240.

<sup>98</sup>J. Karwowski “Newada,” “Ludzie akcji specjalnej,” *Karta* 14 (1994): 21.

tion. However, we need to bear in mind the fact that *szaber* is a behavior much older than WWII, that it is a child of chaos. It took place in Warsaw in September 1939 even before the Germans had marched into the city. It appeared in Jedwabne and in other small towns in the Białystok region as well as at the Polish eastern frontier in July 1941, before we could point to the demoralizing influence of the German occupation. On the other hand, we cannot undermine the importance of the over-five-year-long school of *szaber*, which Poles were treated to. The topic of the most important lesson was: there is war. You are beyond good and evil, turn off your morality. Obviously, the scope of the post-war “looting plague” should be explained in terms of the lesson learnt in 1942 in the looted ghettos. As for the looting education, the Red Army soldiers also did their best. The trophy-collecting mood (i.e. looting) firstly passed onto Polish soldiers and then necessarily had to radiate onto society as well. It was difficult not to notice Soviet transports going east, filled to the brim with German goods. A private letter of August 1945 reads:

Theft and bribery from the bottom up are flourishing... For the last five years people have grown used to people's property being plundered with impunity; they are robbing each other[,] it is called looting... rags are being transported from the regained territories on a great scale. Germans are harmed in the course of that, as are local Poles and new settlers.<sup>99</sup>

The *szaber* wave would not have reached the scale of a tsunami if it had not been for the resettlement of Germans who left – from the Polish point of view – enormous wealth in the Recovered Territories. Despite the fact that the hatred the French or Belgians felt towards Germans could be compared with the emotions of Poles, the *szaber* in Western Europe could not be compared with the one which occurred along the Oder or at the Baltic Sea, for in the West the Germans neither aban-

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<sup>99</sup> AIPN, MBP, 3378, Specjalne doniesienie, p. 104.

doned nor deserted their property. Hence, the condition essential for *szaber* to take place did not arise: there was no ownerless property. In turn, looting behavior did take place in the Czech Sudeten Mountains, on a smaller scale though; but there – as we know – the Germans were forced to leave their domiciles. The other thing is that the French, Belgians, the Dutch or even Czechs were incomparably wealthier than Poles and they simply did not have to pitch into bed clothing, clothes or shoes. In other words, they were familiar with the “vision of the world of restricted means” to a much more limited extent.

Poverty was undoubtedly one of the key motives of *szaber*. If it had not been for the lack of shoes, clothes, sewing machines, bicycles, furniture, radio receivers, nobody would have set out on risky journeys. Similarly, nobody would pull out doorknobs from the door, take windows out of the window frames or ravage kitchen stoves in order to take the grills. The war-time and post-war *szaber* can be treated as a kind of reaction of the marginalized, who became marginalized firstly during the Depression (by living in basements and through unemployment), and then during the war (by being reduced to the role of “subhumans” (*Untermenschen*)). We must also remember that due to the post-war destabilization of the economy, the unemployment and subsistence wages, *szaber* often turned out to be the only available source of income for thousands of people. As for the genesis of the phenomenon, it was important that there was a common conviction, which was perhaps involved in all previous “gold rushes” – a conviction that it was the only moment in one’s life when one could get rich fast, “take revenge” or “fix something up.” Stanisław Łach suggests one more interpretation, within the category of crowd psychology: he sees *szaber* as an irrational behavior which sometimes can be summed up by the saying “first come, first served.”<sup>100</sup> One

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<sup>100</sup> S. Łach, *Osadnictwo miejskie na ziemiach odzyskanych w latach 1945–1950* (Słupsk, 1996), 219.

might infer that the looters were guided by the motto: “Don’t waste your time, go on, loot.”<sup>101</sup>

The imaginative sphere proved important too: the legends about “Polish Canada”<sup>102</sup> in the Recovered Territories and the rags-to-riches stories both stimulated people’s imagination. The new regime’s propaganda contributed to the creation of the myth of the Recovered Territories as a land of milk and honey. The regime thought that successful settlement of the region would be a useful legitimizing argument, a remedy to most social problems. Descriptions of abandoned towns abounding in all goods and with plenty of abandoned farms just waiting for new owners, published in newspapers, had a magnetic power over the readers. Jerzy Zubek, quoted herein, remarked that the expectations raised in this way, which not everybody could fulfill, motivated people to loot. In August 1945 he reported that

[t]he propaganda portrayed Lower Silesia as a land of milk and money; it was screaming that there were luxurious, fully-furnished villas just waiting for those who would kindly deign to take possession of them, that there was plenty of everything, that one had to go and take it.

And people went with such an attitude to the Enchanted Land – and they faced disappointment. The villas are there but they are occupied by Germans, there is board but in canteens. They wanted to get everything immediately, because the articles had promised them that, but the reality was different.

Therefore, in order not to come back empty-handed people took up looting and that is how it started. The germ of *szaber* lies in bad, botched propaganda.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> “Kto pierwszy, ten lepszy” (*First Come, First Served*) – the title of a short note in *Dziennik Polski* (26 July, 1946) – referred to people setting off to the Recovered Territories in order to settle down; it did, however, express another, more general trend.

<sup>102</sup> “Kanada” (Canada) was then a synonym of a land or situation of prosperity and abundance [transl.].

<sup>103</sup> AAN, MAP, 2443, Jerzy Zubek, *Sprawozdanie z przeprowadzonej inspekcji*, 18 August, 1945, p. 31.

There is also a naturalistic interpretation. After a fire, according to the immemorial ritual of nature, the world needs to come back to life, to recover after the destruction. That is what was said at that time. Was it that the urge to loot stemmed to some extent from the urge to live?

The “*szaber frenzy*” began to decline in the spring-summer of 1946. The looting went on, but on a much smaller scale. The intensification of the settlement process turned out to be the remedy. It was becoming more and more difficult to come across houses and apartments not inhabited by Poles. The fount of *szaber* began to dry up. The authorities’ activities – such as the organization of “roundups” at train stations,<sup>104</sup> the combing of squares and marketplaces, the confiscation of looted objects, the punishment of apprehended looters, including sending them to labor camps – all contributed to it. In the fall of 1945 Wrocław was blockaded by means of barriers at which sentries were searching everybody leaving the city. All objects without the so-called red cards – special permissions issued by the government’s plenipotentiary – were confiscated and their owners were directed to the “concentration camp for looters.” The authorities were also threatening the driverstransporting hot cargo that they would be directed there too and that their driving license and cars would also be subject to confiscation, regardless of whom they belonged to.<sup>105</sup> Despite these bans and barriers, obtaining the necessary papers did not pose a problem in corrupted post-war Poland.<sup>106</sup> Consequently, in March

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<sup>104</sup> A description of one of such “roundups” S. Babisiak, „Na tropach przestępców i szabrowników. Jak pracuje Milicja Obywatelska – Nocna obława,” *Ziemia Pomorska*, 29 September, 1945.

<sup>105</sup> Wrocław walczy z szabrownictwem,” Julian Podolski’s interview with Wrocław vice-president Alfred Górny, *Dziennik Polski*, 3 October, 1945.

<sup>106</sup> “The authorities have declared an uncompromising war on rampaging *szaber*. During one of the round-ups at a railway station it turned out that the majority of the train passengers were looters who unfortunately could present formal travel permits. One of them even had a document issued by a district governor certifying that he was going to Wrocław in order to ‘look for his lost pigs.’ ‘Looted’ things, mostly linen and clothes, were confiscated

1946 Władysław Gomułka, the Recovered Territories minister, appointed himself as the only person in charge of issuing such permissions.<sup>107</sup> Clearly, at least in this subject matter he did not trust even his closest co-workers. In May 1946 he came to the conclusion that the stick was not enough, and he issued an order by virtue of which those who contributed to the discovery of property illegally transported from the Recovered Territories were to be rewarded.<sup>108</sup> Transporting furniture to the center of Poland ceased to be easy. Moreover, more and more corrupted officials had to face punishment. In other words: the authorities began replacing windows. Nevertheless, the tradition of *szaber* did not vanish from the nation. Justyna Kowalska-Leder was correct in saying that the waves of *szaber* subsequent to 1939 made Poles disrespect other people's property, especially public property, and taught them to affirm "wangling" or "fixing-up" goods difficult to obtain, which was often done by means of simple theft, except that it occasioned fewer qualms of conscience.<sup>109</sup> Mass "carrying out" from public workplaces of practically everything which could come in handy or which was of any value serves as the best example of the looting culture's long "life after life."

Translated by *Anna Brzostowska* and *Jerzy Giebułtowski*

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and given to the district social services and the looters were directed to work at road repair." ("Nieubłagana walka z szabrownictwem," *Dziennik Polski*, 11 July, 1945).

<sup>107</sup> A. Kochański, *Polska 1944–1991. Informator historyczny*, vol. 1 (Warsaw, 1996), 139.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibidem*, 146.

<sup>109</sup> J. Kowalska-Leder, *Szaber*, 341.





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