

**The Martyrdom and Extermination  
of the Jews in Kielce During World War II**



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On a cover

I – The burnt Great Synagogue in Kielce. 1945

II – A monument commemorating the murder of Jewish children on 23 Mai 1943

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in memory of his family members  
who lived in Kielce and were murdered in the Holocaust*

*great-grandmother Lea Goldszajd;  
grandmother Chaya Kotlicki (nee Garfinkel);  
grandparents Jacob & Rywka Goldszajd (nee Wikinski);  
uncles and aunts Haim Goldszajd, Chana Goldszajd,  
Chana Kotlicki, Israel Kotlicki, and their families;*

*and in memory of the Honorable Jewish Community  
of Kielce, obliterated from earth about 60 years ago*

*and*

*In memory and honor of his parents*

*Sara (nee Goldszajd)  
and Zwi (Hershel) Kotlicki  
(survivor of the Kielce Pogrom of 1946)*



# INTRODUCTION

Looking back from the perspective of the year 2005 we can safely assume that the Jewish community from Kielce, taking into account 20 942 inhabitants at the beginning of the 2nd World War, has got at least a profound scientific description of their history. Numerous editions of books, articles, reports, assemblages of documents have been issued, not leaving on account of such difficult matters as incident in 1946.

This book refers to the hardest period of time concerning Jews from Kielce, the time of the War and occupation, when Germans murdered most of Jews with full premeditation and intent, and appropriated their belongings. The crime was planned and executed with high precision. In February 1945 there were only 201 people of Jewish origin in Kielce.

Some archival materials of the Chief Commission for the Investigation of the Genocide Committed on the Polish Nation (placed in Warsaw) and the Territorial Commission of Kielce, were used in this composition. The records of the Attorney General of Poland found in the National Record Office in Kielce appeared extremely valuable to the author. The data found in the newspaper „Gazeta Żydowska” (The Jewish Gazette), which had been published from 1940 till 1942 by permission of the authorities in occupation, were treated with great care. In Kielce there was a branch of the Gazette publishing house at Czwartaków Street, so the fact makes the materials found in the Gazette very valuable. We can find there some information about the Judenrat; their framework, activity for the poorest people and disposition. There are also some particulars concerning the Jewish Order Service (Jewish police force).

The State Journals issued by the Governor General, the Chief of the Radom District and the Starost of the Kielce District, were very helpful to the author too. We can find there the law aspects of decreasing the Jewish people's rights and eventually settling them in the Ghetto. That meant isolation from Polish people and difficulty in finding food, clothes and medicines.

Unfortunately not many recollections have remained till now, so the author has scrupulously examined all those that were found in the Jewish Historical Institute and in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. Thanks to Wiliam Mandel, Rafa-el Blumenfeld and the kindness of the management of Yed Vashem the author could look through all the inestimable testimonies he had found there.

In the work there were also used some remembrances of Poles which were sent for a competition organized in 1974 by the Cultural Department of the Town Office of Kielce and by the Provincial Public Library placed at Pociuszka Street.

In the materials we can find some atmosphere of the occupation period, see the relationship between Poles and Jews and learn some aspects of help given by Polish people.

Of a great importance for the history of Kielce are the letters of Gertruda Zeisler who came to the town from Vienna. Her letters sent from Kielce to her family, which was spread all over the world, showed her mental state and incredibly hard conditions of living in isolation. Since she was intelligent, well educated and fluent in German language she was a sharp observer of the activity of Germans, the Judenrat and native Jews. Her remembrances confirmed the point of view that a lot of Jews could not believe that Germans as a nation of great cultural roots would bring the Jews community to the complete extermination. She was killed at Treblinka Camp as most of the Jews from Kielce.

Very interesting information were obtained from the Jews who had survived the War and after some years decided to visit their hometown. A lot of precious details were found in letters of the following men: Henryk Gringras alias Zvi Ganoth, Henryk and Bernard Zelinger, Seweryn Piasecki, Dawid Szczekociński, Rafael Blumenfeld, Dawid Lewartowski and some others. The letters delineate the martyrdom of the Jewish people from Kielce under the Nazi occupation as well as show the hard times of the Jews in the territory of Soviet Union, the Jews that lived eastward of the Bug River in 1939.

Very useful were the following scientific descriptions: the complete edition of „The modern history of the Jews in Poland „, edited by Prof. Jerzy Tomaszewski in 1993 and „Kielce during Nazi occupation 1939 - 1945” edited by Adam Massalski and Stanisław Meducki in 1986.

The were also used some assemblages of articles and remembrances inserted in „About our house which was devastated” and „Eighty



anniversary Kielce” - bulletins edited by Koło Kielczan (Circle of the Kielce Citizens) in New York, in 1985.

The martyrdom and extermination of the Jews in Kielce during the War as well as their life in the Ghetto was not easy to reconstruct. Now in Poland there are practically no Jews that went through the Ghetto and survived the occupation. At that time Polish people were worrying themselves about everyday living and they did not know the real situation in the Ghetto or they knew very little of it. On the other hand the initiation of examining the documents and remembrances began relatively late. Many eyewitnesses had already died when the County Commission for Nazi Crimes Investigation in Kielce started their investigation in 1961. Besides, they put their attention mostly on the Pogrom in Kielce in 1946.

As many years have gone by since the end of the War it is still more and more difficult to verify the correctness of data, numbers and names. Quite a lot of those Jews that were serving in the Judenrat and police knew what was the purpose of the institutions. They tried with all their might not to let their names be ever seen in „The Jewish Gazette”. The result was that it was not possible to ascertain the entire composition of the Judenrat and the Jewish Order Service.

At the final part of the book the author touched the problem of help given to Jews by Polish people and the Polish Underground. As the invaders way of treatment in relation to Polish people was very severe, the help was not realized in the extent that would provide for the Jewish people’s needs as far as food or medicines are concerned. Moreover Poland was the only occupied country in Europe where any sign of help for Jews was punished with death. And it was not an empty thread. A few Poles were shot within the Ghetto and quite a big number of people were sent to extermination camps. Nevertheless many Poles from Kielce and neighbouring villages sheltered Jews when the Ghetto was being liquidated in August 1942. It should be pointed out that when Nazis committed the extermination of Jews from Kielce in the Treblinka Camp in August 1942 the German troops were spread throughout Europe from Pyrenees to Moscow and Nazi flag was waving on top of the Elbrus Mountain. It was the apogee of German power. The end of the War was to come in three years time.

The author would like to acknowledge the particular help of Mr. Yaacov Kotlicki in English edition of the book.



Chapter I

**JEWISH COMMUNITY  
IN KIELCE IN THE INTERWAR  
PERIOD**

In the years 1918-1939 the Jewish municipal department of Kielce was one of six departments in the Kielce Poviát. In September 1939 it numbered 20942 people, 75% of who constituted Orthodox Jews wearing characteristic black gabardines, yarmulkes and white stockings. In Kielce about 400 Jewish families out of 3500 lived in affluence and sometimes even in luxury. These were families of factories' owners, attorneys, doctors and civil officers. An equal number of the population lived in poverty; 100-150 families needed constant or temporary support of different charitable institutions. Unfortunately, as time went on the Jewish Community was getting poorer and poorer, which affected the standard of life. In 1930s there were periods, when over 300 families received free matzoth from the Rabbinate and the Board of the Jewish Community at Passover.

According to the „Gazeta Kielecka” of 1939, 1600 properties out of 8010 - 20,7%<sup>1</sup> that is 1660 belonged to Jews. These were houses, grounds and plots. Most houses in Kielce were built of broken stone and in general didn't have current water and canalization. According to the Municipality, 85% of the buildings carried away the sewage directly into gutters. In better conditions lived people on the main streets: Sienkiewicza, Focha, Słowackiego, Śniadeckich, Hipoteczna and Mickiewicza. Those houses were built with the purpose to profit from renting flats, which required their high standards. Although they were expensive, they didn't lack customers, the number of wealthy people - both Poles and Jews was growing. However, the majority of the families lived in only one room. According to the studies carried out by the Jewish health care under the leadership of doctor Mojżesz Pelc, about 25% Jewish families in Poland lived in attics, basements or had a workshop or a shop in the room where they lived. It affected badly the health of people of such occupations as: saddler, shoe-top maker, shoe maker due to toxic substances escaping from leather and chemicals. The health care knew the situation and tried to protect first of all the youth. At the doctors' suggestion schools introduced obligatory distribution of cod-liver oil, summer camps and periodic follow-up examinations.

The main occupation of the Jewish residents of Kielce was trade and craftsmanship. In little shops with modest windows but with excellently outfitted interiors the owners would patiently wait for custo-

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<sup>1</sup> „Gazeta Kielecka”(hereafter GK) 1938, No. 96

mers always offering them «the best» and «the cheapest» goods. Great sign-boards, ingenious advertising and the assurance that one could haggle over the price encouraged people to shopping. An exquisite picture of Kielce with its trade on the eve of the outbreak of the Second World War can be found in the memories of Jadwiga Henl:

„...from the corner of Kościuszki Street up to the market there stretched small, scruffy houses or dirty tenement houses, dotted on the ground floor with Jewish shop windows. The pavement was cluttered with barrels full of herrings and on the frames of the wooden houses there were broomsticks, brushes, paintbrushes, spades and baskets. It was a vibrant street (...); everywhere could be heard the guttural sounds of Jewish words. Everywhere, in broken Polish, people would praise their goods and over the streets wafted up the smells of herrings and garlic.(...) A Jewess sitting in the street used to sell lime - in front of her there was a decimal balance and a spade. Such was the arrangement of a primitive stall.”<sup>2</sup>

Since the competition in trade was enormous (24 residents for one stall, 52 for one grocer's shop), some Polish merchants tried to depreciate the Jewish trade accusing them of not obeying the basic hygienic rules. We must, however, agree with Aleksander Hertz, who wrote: „A primitive and dirty Jewish stall derived from primitive and dirty peasant villages, which derived from primitive and dirty towns and the general economic situation of the country.”<sup>3</sup> The „Gazeta Kielecka” of May 1938 wrote about Kielce: „The further from the city center, the less pleasant, clean and pretty...”<sup>4</sup> The Jews dominated the peddling. According to the Municipality, in 1938 the Jews owned 61,8% business establishments in Kielce; predominantly fabric, outfit shops and grocer's. The wholesale of coal was dominated by the Herszkowicz, of iron - by the Mordkowicz and the Eisenbergs, of the food products - by the Rotenbergs, Goldblums and Lewis. In car trade dominant were the Jankielewskis and the Kahans.<sup>5</sup> If somebody had enough cash, it was possible to import within a few days cars produced in Western Europe or in the USA. To significant companies belonged

<sup>2</sup> J. Henl, *Ze wspomnień kielczanki*, „Raptularz Świętokrzyski” 1986, No.3

<sup>3</sup> A. Hertz, *Żydzi w kulturze polskiej*, Warsaw 1998, p.155

<sup>4</sup> GK 1938, No.36

<sup>5</sup> *The State Archive in Kielce (hereinafter AP Kielce) the Delegation of the General Office of the State Attorney (hereinafter ZDPGRP), call No. 3025*

also the Trade and Commission Houses owned by the Wilners and Cukiermans.

Merchants had a great opportunity to sell their goods at the fairs and markets, which in Kielce took place twice a week - on Tuesdays and Fridays. On the stalls of the merchants from Kielce one could buy fabrics, outfit and shoes. The comers from the neighboring villages and the Jews from Ponidzie used to sell flour, grits, dairies, bread, poultry, fruit and products of village craftsmen. Teofilia Muszyńska recollects: „Although in 1930 it was possible to get everything in shops, the markets still had their unique charm. One could see the product, touch, choose as well as haggle. Everybody was willing to lower the price by a few grosz, which was quite important.”<sup>6</sup> The Jewish trade was consolidated and at the same time supervised by the Association of Jewish Merchants and the Jewish Union of Small Merchants and Salesmen.

In the Interwar period the Jewish craftsmanship developed. In 1930 the Jewish residents owned 56,7% of craftsman's workshops. Dominant were shoemakers, tailors, shoe-top makers, bakers, butchers and saddlers.<sup>7</sup> The competition was enormous, especially when taking into account that one tailor's workshop was for 278 people and one bakery for 712 people!<sup>8</sup> In the best situation were jewelers, furriers and confectioners; in the hardest conditions lived shoemakers and tailors. In 1932 the situation of shoemakers, who had already experienced the results of the crisis, was worsen by the opening of a shop „Bata”, which imported cheap, machine made shoes from Czechoslovakia. In 1938 the crisis affected the Jewish butchers due to a law limiting the ritual slaughter.

In order to protect the interest of the Jewish craftsmen as early as in 1920s the Association of Jewish Craftsmen was established with its seat at 2 Kozia Street. It organized educating courses, gave legal advice and tried to run cultural activity. In 1927 first Jewish guilds were created. The most numerous one, with 247 members, was the Poviast Guild of Shoemakers, Tanners and Saddlers<sup>9</sup>. Also in the established in 1929 House of Craftsmen, which catered for raw material, educated

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<sup>6</sup> G.T. Muszyńska, *Memories*, p.3, manuscript (in possession of the autor)

<sup>7</sup> AP Kielce, Voivodship Government I, call No. 12093; *Księga adresowa Polski (together with the Free City. Gdańsk) for trade, industry and agriculture*, Warsaw 1930, pp.216-226

<sup>8</sup> GK 1936, No.314

<sup>9</sup> *Sprawozdanie Izby Rzemieślniczej w Kielcach za rok 1931, Kielce 1932*, p.55

craftsmen and fought against illegal craftsmanship, there were also Jewish members: Boruch Laks, Judka Bekerman, Chaim Tenenbaum, Szmul Nusynowicz and Josek Zylberberg.

In the Kielce industry definitely dominated moderate capital which exploited the available, rather modest mineral resources. Out of 12 significant on the provincial scale industrial factories the following ones were owned by Jews in 1938: The Limestone Factories and Quarries «Wietrznia» (Lipowa Street) owned by the Zagajskis and the Wilners, The Limestone Factories and Quarries «Kadzielnia» joint-stock company (Legionów Street) owned by the Ehrlichs, The Kielce Industrial and Woodwork Factories «Henryków» (Młynarska Street) owned by the Nowaks, Bruners and Lewis, The Factory of Feathers and Fluff Processing «Plumapol» (Okrzei Street) owned by the Frieds (vel Fryd), and The Automatic Mill „Kłos” (Legionów Street) owned by the Grauzes, Zylberings and the Grünbergs.<sup>10</sup>

Among the most significant industrial plants in the city numbered: Electrical Mill «Ekonomia» (Chęcińska Street) owned by the Mintzes, Owsianys and Ajchlers, Brick factories (Legionów Street) owned by Rachmil Rozenholc, brick field „Głębozka” (Piotrkowska Street) rented by the Cukiermans, Marksons and Gołębiowski, the brick field „Podwietrznia” (Poniatowskiego Street) owned by the Rabinowicz. The Factory of Processing the Kielce Marble owned by Józef Urbajt, limestone quarries „Międzygórze” (Lipowa Street) owned by the Lipszyc.<sup>11</sup>

46 Jewish companies worked in the timber industry exploiting the Kielce forests. They were organized into the Union of Producers and Timber Merchants of the district of Radom and Kielce. The potentates in this branch (sawmills, storehouses of timber) were the following families: Nowak, Bruner, Lewi, Ajzenberg, Dębski, Bugajer, Machtynger, Prajs, Kestenberga and Maliniak. In the tanning industry dominant were the following family names: Bekerman, Tenenbaum, Grünberg, Zylbering, Urbajt, Moszkowicz.<sup>12</sup> In connection with the development of car communication Dawid, Mojżesz and Icek Kahane built modern storehouses of fuel on Chęcińska Street. The families of

<sup>10</sup> State Archive Radom (hereinafter AP Radom), *The Governor of the District of Radom*, call No. 113, p.20

<sup>11</sup> AP. Kielce, Voivodship Government (hereinafter UW I), call No. 12093; *ibidem*, the *Powiat Starosty of Kielce* (hereinafter SPK), call No. 2424; *Księga adresowa...*, pp.216-226

<sup>12</sup> AP Kielce, the District Court in Kielce (hereinafter SO Kielce), the Department of Commercial Registry (hereinafter WRH), call No. 462, 885, 888.

the Wilners, Erlichs and Zagajskis got also involved in the trade with crude oil, naphtha and petrol.

The prospering industrial, craftsmen's and trading factories advertised their products on a large scale: they printed brochures, catalogues, visiting-cards, put advertisements in newspapers, made occasional prints and the so-called *Księgi adresowe* (Address-books). Smaller printing was done usually in Jewish printing houses: of Boruch Wajnryb, Josek Moszenberg, Mendel Perl and Majloch Najmiller.

The possibility of investment and development depended to a high degree on obtaining a low-interest credit. In Kielce it wasn't very difficult. The Jews used the Credit Society of Kielce, The Communal Savings Bank, banks, banking houses and 18 credit co-operatives, 12 of which belonged to Jewish shareholders. Among the most significant companies can be numbered: The Kielce Branch of the Bank Łódzki (Sienkiewicza Street), Dawid Rozenberg's Banking House (Sienkiewicza Street), People's Bank (Niecała Street), Co-operative Bank of Real Estate Owners (the Marketplace)<sup>13</sup>. There were also loan banks at the guilds and the Board of the Jewish Community. From 150 to 200 families practiced the so-called professions. These were: doctors, lawyers, barber-surgeons, notaries, debt collectors and pharmacists. Worth mentioning is also a group of doctors. In 1932 out of 38 doctors practicing in Kielce 15 were Jews.<sup>14</sup> Towards the end of the 1930s this number increased to 22. The best known and the most valued were: M. Pelc (internal diseases), Jerzy Fleszler (urologist), Gerszon Harkawi (laryngologist), Józef Lewinson (internal diseases), Izaak Lewin (oculist), Jakub Goldsztajn (radiologist), Gabriel Szyfter, Beniamin Serwetnik, Etlia Sołomanik, Maria Krauz, Bajla Hirszon, and Uda Ajzenberg (dentists). The dentists were assisted by 7 dental technicians. There were also a few exquisite barber-surgeons, such as Szłoma Rotman. The doctors were united in the Union of Jewish Doctors initially presided over by doctor J. Lewinson and then by doctor M. Pelc. S. Rotman and then Moryc Binsztok were the presidents of the Union of Jewish Barber-surgeons.

The following lawyers had their own practices: Jakub Manela, Izidor Zimmer, Eisig Rottner, Herman Frejzynger, Adolf Weisenfreud and Henryk Fruks.

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<sup>13</sup> *Księga adresowa...*, pp.216-226

<sup>14</sup> GK 1932, No.175



A few dozen people were employed in education: cheders, yeshivas and high schools. The teachers distinguished themselves by their education and devotion to the youth. To the best pedagogues numbered: doctor Noe Braun, engineer Antoni Russak, doctor Izaak Zieliński, doctor Salomon Feuer, doctor Szymon Datner, Stefania Wolman, Sara and Małka Minc.<sup>15</sup>

The life of Jewish society in the commune was regulated by the Council and the Board. The Board's duties were: establishing and maintaining synagogues, prayer houses, schools, rabbinate, the mikveh, the cemetery, supporting charities and supervising the religious upbringing of the youth. The Board, according to the decisions of the Council had the right to collect municipality tax, which allowed a great active-ness on the social-religious field: „A simple man couldn't imagine life outside the commune and without the control of the rabbinate.”<sup>16</sup> The commune helped the poorest social groups, forced the richest through imposing taxes to share their wealth. In Kielce there were elected 20 members of the Council and an equal number of deputies, in the Board there were from 10 to 14 members and an equal number of deputies. The Council was successively presided over by: factory owner Herszel Zagajski and merchants Dawid Rotenberg and Abram Piotrowski; the Board by: factory owner Herman Lewi, bank clerk Izaak Rajzman and merchants Wolf Kluska and Symcha Goldman.<sup>17</sup> The board office was on Leonarda Street.

The Board elections took place in 1920s, 1924, 1931-1932, 1936.<sup>18</sup> In the Board elected in 1931, consisting of 14 members, there were 8 merchants, 4 craftsmen, a bank clerk and a farmer, which reflected the professional structure among the Kielce Jews.<sup>19</sup> During the elections, and then at the Board meetings there were lively and sometimes fierce discussions between Orthodox Jews, Zionists and Mizrachists; the members of the Union boycotted the elections of communal boards. In 1920s the strongest group constituted the adherents of Aguda and later on the Zionists, who competed with the so-called non-party religious Jews.

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<sup>15</sup> AP Kielce, *the Municipal School Council (hereinafter RSM)*, call No. 28, 32, 46.

<sup>16</sup> Z. Borzymińska, R. Żebrowski, *Po-Lin. Kultura Żydów Polskich w XX wieku*, Warsaw 1993, p.57

<sup>17</sup> K. Urbański..., p.126.

<sup>18</sup> In 1932 the voivodship authorities ordered to repeat the elections of 1931 because it had been stated that the chosen President of the Board of the Jewish Community was involved in illegal trade with parcels.

<sup>19</sup> AP Kielce, SPK, call No. 1911.

In 1930s the budget of the Kielce Jewish Community had an income of 200-300 zloty annually. This amount came mainly from municipality fees and from the ritual slaughter of cattle and poultry. The collected funds were divided into three parts: the first one was allocated for keeping the rabbis, religious supervisors, cantors and the synagogue choir, the second part - for keeping the communal clerks, maintaining the ritual cuisine, hospital fees and repairs, the third one - for subsidizing the educational system as well as cultural, charitable and social institutions (in this case not only the Jewish ones).<sup>20</sup>

During the crisis of the years 1939-1933 considerable amounts were given to the Kielce craftsmanship. In the latter parts of the 1930s the People's Bank, where savings of the poorest Jews were allocated, had to be supported due to threatening bankruptcy. Unfortunately, in the course of years the situation of the bank was constantly deteriorating. In 1925 the fee was paid by 1953 families, in 1927 only by 1607 and in 1939 - by 1135 families.<sup>21</sup> There were attempts to save the budget, asking for help associations of compatriots in Canada and in the United States but there was hardly any answer. Those societies weren't rich either.

In the Kielce rabbinate there were three rabbis appointed at the time of Austrian occupation and confirmed in 1918 by the Polish state. The supreme rabbi of Kielce was Abela Rapoport, the son of Gutman, born in 1878; his deputy was Alter Hochberg (spelled also Horberg), born in 1871, the function of rabbi's assessor performed Hersz Grynszpan, born in 1875. They had all passed rabbi's examinations under the Russian occupation. Rapoport always declared himself as a non-party, the others as orthodox. In 1918 the rabbi supported the Polish reasons of State and was always loyal to Poland. He was one of the first rabbis in Poland, who ordered prayers for the intention of saving Poland and defeating the Bolsheviks in 1920; throughout the whole interwar period he would order prayers on the anniversary of the Constitution of 3rd May and 11th November. His relationships with the Town Council, Voivodship Government and the Curia of the Diocese were excellent.<sup>22</sup> To Rapoport's prestige testifies the fact that he was commissio-

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, SPK, call No. 1902, p. 81-84; *ibidem*, SPK, call No. 1908, pp. 27-29.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, SPK, call No. 1913, pp. 10,10; *ibidem*, SPK, call No. 1903, p.1; *ibidem*, SPK, call No. 1921, pp.1-2

<sup>22</sup> J. Śledzianowski, *Ksiądz Czesław Kaczmarek, biskup kielecki 1895-1963, Kielce 1991, pp.59-60*

ned organizing a rabbis' meeting from 2 to 4 July 1933. 250 people came to the meeting, including rabbis from Lublin, Zamość, Koprzywnica, Małogoszcz and Nowa Słupia. There were invited also people who had in Kielce the title of rabbi but didn't perform the function: Szaja Ber, Efroim Rabinowicz, Lejzor Finkler, Izrael Kestenberk and Bima Goldman. The subject of the conference was „overcoming ignorance and demoralization and improving the religious condition of the Jews.”<sup>23</sup> The participants also broached the subject of the economic crisis and the situation of Jews in Germany.

When on September 3, 1938 the new bishop - Czesław Kaczmarek - came to Kielce, rabbi A. Rapoport undertook actions to come into closer contact with the superior of the Catholics. The opportunity arose during the celebrations related to the death of Pope Pius XI. On February 15, 1939 the rabbi informed the Curia of the Diocese that the Jewish Community in Kielce would commemorate the death of His Holiness Pope Pius XI with a requiem service in the Great Synagogue and the memoirs about the Pope would be delivered by the rabbi himself.<sup>24</sup>

Apart from the Great Synagogue there were in Kielce over 30 prayer houses. A part of them was related to people who came to Kielce from neighboring towns and had common names: „Chęciny”, „Chmielnik”, „Raków”, „Pilica”. In the Orthodox environment zaddiks Cejmach Rabinowicz and Szaja Goldman enjoyed a great respect. At 39 Piotrkowska Street used to meet the followers of the zaddik from Radomsk. There was a yeshiva „Keter Tora” financed by orthodox Jews from the whole Poland. The head of the yeshiva was reb (a way to address respected members of the commune and older men) Cwi Elemanach Szapiro, the lectures were delivered among others by zaddiks from Tarnów and Chmielnik.<sup>25</sup> Influential was also zaddik from Radoszyce Chaim Uszer Finkler. Ichaak Blumenfeld propagated the teachings of zaddik Mordechaj Alter from Góra Kalwaria.

The political life of the Kielce Jews was characterized by immense disarray, from extreme orthodoxy to extreme revolutionism. At the beginning of the Polish state the dominating position had the Central Organization of Orthodox Jews in Poland, Aguda. It had about 500

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<sup>23</sup> AP Kielce, SPK, call No. 823, p.3

<sup>24</sup> J. Śledzianowski..., pp.59-60.

<sup>25</sup> About our house..., pp.28-29

active members and an equal number of opponents. If necessary, it could mobilize 2-3 thousand people.

The leading activists of Aguda were: Henoch Kaminer, Pikus Finkler, Jankiel Pasyrman, Mordka Fiszel Kaminer.<sup>26</sup> The Board of Aguda created the following supporting organizations: The Union of the Workers of Zion, the Youth of the Israel Union, the Society of Saturday Celebrating and the Society Rabi Meir Baal Nes. The seat of Aguda was at 13 Kozia Street. The Board used to order prayers for strengthening the economy and defense. The Aguda's activists participated in the elections of the Sejm, Senate, the Town Council and the Board of the Jewish Community.

While the Aguda was supported mainly by older people, the youth was attracted to the Zionists. The Kielce branch of the Zionist Organization in Poland had its seat at 28 Wesola Street. Two fractions were developing - „Ejt Liwnot” (Time to build) and „Al Hamiszmar” (On guard). In the meetings participated from 80 to 150 people but the strength of the party was estimated at 300 active members and an equal number of sympathizers. The leading members were: Izaak Rajzman, Alter Ehrlich, Chaim Zielony and Moryc Zieliński. The youth section of the party constituted the scouts' organization „Haszomer Hacair” (Young Scout), which had its seat at 68 Sienkiewicza Street. The 80-100 members of the party were mainly pupils of the Kielce high schools. An extension of the Zionist Organization constituted the Women's International Zionist Organization - WIZO, which had in Kielce about 40 activists. On Czarnowska Street their seats had „Cejre Syjon” (Sons of Zion) and „Bures Syjon” (Daughters of Zion). With the party co-operated the Jewish Immigration Association with its seat at 57 Sienkiewicza Street and the Zionist Club on Wesola Street.

The activists and members of the Union of Zionists Revisionists „Brith Hacochar”, who aimed at the reconstruction and development of Palestine, recruited from moderately wealthy middle class. The Board was active through its specialized sections: propaganda, professional training and physical education. The Board's members were among others: doctor Jakub Szatz, Michał Wittlin, Jechele Preis and Lucjan Kopf. At their invitation several times in Kielce Włodzimierz Żabotyński stayed.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> AP. Kielce, SPK, call No. 627; *ibidem* UWK, call No. 2557, p.2

<sup>27</sup> GK 1933, No.47.

In December 1933 the Zionists created the Union of Promoting the Physical Development among the Jews on the name of W. Żabotyński. Its members wore brown uniforms and fiercely exercised on the Kielce Stadium, where there were sports rifle ranges. The commandant of the sub-district of Kielce was Adolf Lew and the head of the managing department was the co owner of the Polish Hotel Salomon Zelinger <sup>28</sup>.

At the beginning of 1932 the founding meeting of the Young Zionists Revisionists „Masada” took place in Kielce, during which it was emphasized that the Jews should participate in the coming war and fight for an independent Jewish state.

The need of mass development of all kinds of sports was stressed also at the meeting of the Kielce branch of the J. Trumpeldor Youth Association in December 1933. On that day the representatives of 28 circles of Bejtara established the Independent Kielce District.

At the beginning of 1936, basing on the funds provided by merchant Leon Rodal, a branch of the Independent Zionist Organization, which comprised of about 50 members, was created. The head of the Board was A. Lew.

For many years at 16 Market Square there was the seat of the board of the Organization of Zionists Orthodoxies „Mizrachi”, which comprised about 300 members. The party played a significant role in the Council and the Board of the Jewish Community; it supported religious education, fought to obtain the funds to keep the Jewish Male High School. The leading activists were: Eliaz Rozenblum, Wolf Kluska, Izaak Kohn and Abram Ajzenberg. A base of the party constituted „Cejrej Mizrachi” (The youth from Mizrachi), consisting of about 150 members and the Jewish Cultural-Educative Society «Tarbut»<sup>29</sup>. The authorities of the voivodship permitted the creation of the Food Association „Mizrachi”, which financially supported the activity of the party.

The Kielce branch of the Zionist Labor Party „Hitachdut” with its seat at 1 Leonarda Street never had more members than 100. Its programme provided activities aiming at the creation of a Jewish society in Palestine, which would work on a collective basis, characteristic for the Hebrew culture. To the party’s activists belonged: Kalman Kluska, Chil Rozenkranc and Estera Zylbersztajn and others.

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<sup>28</sup> AP. Kielce, UWK I, call No. 2598, p.367

<sup>29</sup> *ibidem*, SPK call No. 369, p.155

In Kielce there were also several socialist parties. On the threshold of independence a great role played the General Workers' Union - the Bund. It participated among others in the creation of the Council of Workers' Deputies, organized strikes and public meetings.<sup>30</sup> In 1922, after some members had gone over to the Communist Labor Party of Poland, the Bund actually existed only thanks to the financial help of the Radom branch. A kind of revival could be seen not earlier than in 1927, due to an enthusiastic activist of the board Chil Weltman. The work of „Kultur Liga” was noticed, reading room „Muza” was created and trade unions enjoyed greater interest, at the same time winning support among transporters, unskilled workers and the workers of the leather industry.<sup>31</sup> The leading members of the party were: Ch. Weltman, Izaak Szmulewicz and Mojżesz Trajster. The party had its office at 6 Bodzentyńska Street.

In 1926 the Poviát Starosty in Kielce became an object of interest of the Poalej Zion-Right (PZ-Right) and Poalej Zion-Left (PZ-Left). Both parties promoted socialistic ideas, fought for a lay commune and wanted to remove religion from public institutions. They suggested that the Hebrew language should be the national language in a Jewish state, whereas Yiddish should be sufficient for everyday communication. The difference between the parties constituted their attitude to „...general actions, such as collections for the National Funds and the Foundation Funds, which at the same time means participation in general stream of Zionism.”<sup>32</sup>

PZ-Left had about 400 members, PZ-Right - 300. The leading activists of the first fraction were: Abram Kirszenbaum, Szaja Cukier, Aron Bursztyn, Mordka Mordkowicz; of the other fraction: Abram Wajncwajg, Mendel Borensztajn, Szaja Gros, Mojżesz Berliner.<sup>33</sup> Under the influence of PZ-Right were 80% members of the Trade Union of the Food Industry Workers; PZ-Left enjoyed a strong support among the members of the Class Trade Union of Jewish craftsmen. The parties organized meetings, public meetings, lectures and youth schooling. They also put stress on sports. The office of the Board of PZ-Right was on Duża Street and of PZ-Left on Czysta (Focha) Street.

<sup>30</sup> J. Naumiuk, *Robotnicze Kielce, Łódź 1972, pp.28,42.*

<sup>31</sup> AP. Kielce, SPK, call No. 368; *ibidem*, UWK I, call No. 3885, p.39.

<sup>32</sup> Z. Borzymińska, *R. Żebrowski...*,p.69.

<sup>33</sup> AP. Kielce, SPK, call No. 395, p.11; *ibidem*, SPK, call No. 364, p.5.

Only 60-70 members belonged to the Jewish Labor Party in Kielce („Jidisze Folks Partej in Pojlen”). The seat of its board was on Czar-nowska Street. Except for a few meetings and readings a year, it didn't show any activity.

It's difficult to give the precise number of Jews involved in the work of the Association of the Communist Youth (ZMK) and the Communist Party of Poland (KPP). Revolutionary ideas were popular as long as they propagated the principle of equality, which the Jews felt strongly about. Since 1925 there hadn't been in Kielce any greater political process without Jewish activists in the dock. After an analysis of the processes and police files we can assume that in 1918-1938 about 300 Jews from Kielce came across the ZMK and KPP. The leading activists were: Abram Biedny, Abram Włoszczowski, Leokadia Szyndler, Zyndel Fuchs, Hersz Rapoport, Elias Wilk, Ales Goldsztajn, Icek Paciorkowski and Chana Wygańska. When in 1937 the political police in Kielce began to prepare a list of people who could possibly be interned in case of a war or internal riots; among 178 Kielce residents there were 50 Jews - the KPP, ZMK and trade unions activists.<sup>34</sup>

The majority of orthodox Jews kept themselves in the background of the political and social life, whereas the intelligentsia tried to participate actively in the city life. Already during the first elections of the Town Council assimilators, Zionists and socialists fought for votes. That situation repeated in the following elections. During the interwar period the functions of councilors were performed by: Abram Ber Ajzenberg, Moszek Dawid Ajzenberg, Noe Braun, Józef Fiszman, Szapsia Goldszajder, Gustaw Goldwasser, Szmul Goldman, Wincenty Jokiel, Moszek Kaminer, Herman Lewi, Mendel Lipszyc, Mojżesz Pelc, Izaak Rajzman, Markus Rawicki, Jakub Rotenberg, Dawid Rozenberg, Józef Skórecki, Mojżesz Solarz and Herszel Zagajski. Those were people who enjoyed respect both in the Jewish and in the Polish society. M. Rawicki worked in the provision committee, N. Braun was a member of the sanitary committee and H. Lewi occupied himself with student grants.<sup>35</sup>

In the interwar period there existed 40 different associations, unions and Jewish organizations in Kielce. These were associations which sup-

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<sup>34</sup> *ibidem*, The former electoral committee (KW) of PZPR, the Records of the District Court, call No. 1/28.

<sup>35</sup> GK 1930, No. 37,92.

ported health care, education, culture and associated different trade and youth groups, as well as people involved in charity. (see: annex 1)

In the interwar period the Jewish education system in Kielce developed. Dominant were the reformed cheders, where the children learned apart from religious subjects, Jewish history, Hebrew and Yiddish also the Polish language, history, geography, calligraphy and sometimes book-keeping. A religious education provided the following schools: „Talmud Tora”, near the junction of Planty and Sienkiewicza Street; „Jesoda Tora”, at 2 Kozia Street, Mizrahi School „Jawne” at 15 Rynek (Market Square); „Keter Tora” on Piotrkowska Street and „Bejs Jakow” for girls, at 3 Aleksandra Street. There were also schools by the Great Synagogue and the Association of Jewish Craftsmen.

The Jewish religious education wasn't financed by the state; therefore its keeping fell mainly upon the Board of the Jewish Community, associations and parties.

A good command of Polish had later on, during the occupation, a great significance for people hiding under the so called „Aryan papers”; it gave them the opportunity to survive among the Poles. Unfortunately, according to the Jews who survived the war, the religious schools didn't give such opportunities.

On Mickiewiczza Street Sara Rajzman ran a 7-class school for Jewish girls, a similar school ran also sisters Sara and Małka Minc on Silniczna Street. An 8-class humanistic school ran Stefania and Władysław Zimnowoda at 1 Słowackiego Street. The classes were conducted in Polish and apart from that also Hebrew was taught. For boys there was the Jewish Male High School attended by 150-200 pupils.<sup>36</sup> In the interwar period more and more Jews sent their children to state high schools. It facilitated a later university admission. Boys usually chose Żeromski High School and girls Blessed Kinga High School.<sup>37</sup> Also Śniadecki High school was appreciated.<sup>38</sup>

An important form of education constituted different courses. By PZ-Left there existed an Association of „Evening Courses” for workers; PZ-Right organized „Evening Courses Kibbutz”; the Association of Jewish Craftsmen ran journeymen and master's courses.

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<sup>36</sup> AP Kielce, RSM, call No. 30, p.28, „Kielce Cajtung” 1932, No.17,19; *ibidem*, SPK, call No. 1894.

<sup>37</sup> A. Birnhak, *Koniec pięknej epoki*, „Przemiany” 1987, No.11, p.31

<sup>38</sup> J. Młynarczyk, *Śniadeczczyk*, Kielce 1993, pp.132-153.



In the years 1918-1939 in the Jewish society could be observed the development of different associations and cultural institutions. Among the most significant ones numbers the Jewish Cultural-Educative Society «Tarbut» at 15 Wesola Street. It promoted the Jewish culture, the Hebrew language, ran a library, which had 6927 books in 1929. Annually, about 300 readers used the collections of the library. At 15 Market Square there was the seat of the Cultural-Educative Society „Jawne”, which promoted the Hebrew language and culture. The Cultural Association „Liga” (At 6 Bodzentyńska Street) had about 50 members; it also promoted music, literature and arts. An equal number of members had the Association of Music and Literature „Hazomir”, which promoted Jewish music and arts. The association managed to organize „The Jewish Choral Society”. The Jewish Artistic Scene, which was created in 1931, assembled about 40 theatre enthusiasts. Kielce had an exquisite Jewish Synagogue Choir with over 200 members. It was led by its subsequent cantors. It added splendour to all kinds of celebrations organized by the Communal Board.

In the years 1926-1934 there existed J.L. Perc Library. It had its seat at 19 Leonarda Street and possessed a collection in Polish, Hebrew and Yiddish; it also organized readings, literary soirées, and created theatre clubs. In 1937 the library was closed down, accused of spreading communism. The book collection was taken over by the „Hechaluc Pionier”.<sup>39</sup>

Also political parties, social and youth organizations and schools were involved in cultural activity. Worth mentioning are the Jewish Scouts Organization, the Circle of Friends of Zimnowodas' High School and a similar club at the Jewish Male High School. A great popularity enjoyed also the concerts organized by the Union of Professional Musicians, which had existed in Kielce since 1922, as well as recitals organized by some families, such as the Grostals and Gringrases.

In 1926 Maks Ellenchwajg built on Staszica Street a modern cinema, which had 486 seats. At the end of 1930 the most modern in the country sound apparatus was installed there. In the repertoire predominant were German and American movies and the Polish ones constituted about 5%. There were also movies with Yiddish subtitles, watched massively by the Jewish youth.

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<sup>39</sup> M. Meducka, *Żydowskie instytucje kulturalne w Kielcach (1918-1939)*, „Biuletyn ŻIH” 1984, No.1-2, pp.61-75

It was always possible to play chess, read newspapers in numerous pubs, cafés and tea-gardens. The best known were: the Club of Jewish Intelligentsia on Wesoła Street, the Jewish Craftsmen's Club on Kozia Street, the Zionist Club at the Market Square and the Jewish Craftsmen's Tea-Garden on Mała Street. Due to the great crisis of 1929-1933 the theatres from big cities began to come to Kielce, friendly welcomed by its residents. The Kielce residents could see plays performed by the Vilnius Jewish People's Theatre, the Chamber Theatre „Ararat” from Łódź and the Jewish Chamber Theatre from Warsaw.<sup>40</sup>

It was attempted to keep a significant press organ but it was impossible for a longer time because Kielce was too small. A good beginning made the school youth in 1921 editing the magazine „Olamejn”. There were only 5 issues. The magazine was reedited in 1927 in 1000 copies. The editor and the publisher was teacher Boruch Graubart. In 1932 appeared the magazine Masada issued by the Union of Zionist Revisionist Youth. It came out in 500 copies, in Polish and Hebrew. An urban character had the following newspapers:

- The „Kielcer Wochenblat” - a publicist-literary weekly, edited by Hersz Niebelski in 1926

- The „Kielcer Radomer Wochenblat” - a social-cultural weekly, came out in 1929

- The „Kielcer Unser Express” - issued in November and December 1931, a mutation of the Warsaw „Unser Express”. The Kielce column was edited by H. Niebelski

- The „Kielcer Cajtung” - a newspaper addressed mainly to Zionists, edited by Mojżesz Trejger and H. Niebelski. It came out in 1932 in 500 copies.

- The „Naje Kielcer Cajtung” - appeared in 1934, edited by Szaja Hausler, an activist of the „Hitachut” and the „Help to the Working in Palestine League” The magazine was issued in 600 copies.

- „Kielcer Cajtung” - a weekly, came out in 1935-1937 in 400-700 copies.<sup>41</sup> It was edited by Józef Landau, published by Trejger and Mendel Wajnsztok. It had a Zionist-revisionist character.

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<sup>40</sup> GK 1930, No.100; M. Pawlina-Meducka, *Życie kulturalne Kielce 1918-1939*, Warszawa, Kraków 1983.

<sup>41</sup> AP Kielce, UWK I, Presidential Department, call No. 42, p.67; *ibidem*, SPK, call No. 829, p.7; M. Adamczyk, *Cztery epoki prasy kieleckiej 1911-1956*, Kraków-Kielce 1991, p.69.

Sports and recreation played quite an important role in life of the Kielce Jews. The most active Jewish club in Kielce was the Sports and Gymnastic Society „Makabi”, which assembled activists and the youth sympathizing with the Zionist ideology. The society was created on the initiative of a colonel of the Polish Army - doctor Stanisław Zylberszłak. The leading activists were: Rachmil Kupferberg, Grisza Sobel and Adolf Mauerberger. The board had initially its seat on Słowackiego and then on Leonarda Street. Till 1928 they focused on the football section. The football team „Makabi” played successfully in group B. Later on the stress moved onto tennis. In 1935 modern court at 76 Sienkiewicza Street was given for use. In the years 1935-1936 a box section grew in strength and fairly popular was also the cycling section.<sup>42</sup>

The Jewish Sports Club „Sztern” (Star) was financed by Poalej Zion-Left. It assembled mainly the craftsmen’s youth.

The football section was on a good level, especially in the years 1934-1935. Under the influence of Poalej Zion-Right remained the Jewish Workmen’s Sports Club „Kraft” (Strength), which consisted of workmen’s and craftsmen’s youth. The club ran a football, gymnastics and a table tennis section. Also the Jewish Workmen’s Sports Club „Hapoel” (Workmen) and the Kielce Jewish Sports Club „Bar Kochba” were related to PZ-Right. The clubs organized common rooms, campfires, sports camp for young people and mass tourism. In 1925 the Sports Club „Jutrznia” was created, which remained under the influence of the Bund. It had about 40 active members. Due to a lack of funds the club was limited only to three sections: gymnastics, table tennis and a tourist section. The club didn’t develop until 1934, when it was joined by the activists of the „Sztern”, dissolved by the police.<sup>43</sup> The communist youth owned the Sports Club „Odzież”, which was financed by the Jewish Tailors’ Guild. It had: a football, table tennis, chess and a tourist section.<sup>44</sup>

In 1930 all-day recreation and Sundays and holidays became fashionable in the Jewish society; especially outings to the forest of the district Stadion, where there were a rifle-range, swimming pool and

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<sup>42</sup> AP Kielce, SPK, call No. 619, GK 1935, No.70, 193, 170, 237.

<sup>43</sup> M. Meducka, *Żydowskie Stowarzyszenia Sportowe w województwie kieleckim w latach 1918-1939*, „Biuletyn PIH” 1990, No. 3-4.

<sup>44</sup> *About our house...*,p.117.

tennis courts. At no great expense one could hire a Jewish cart on Krakowska Rogatka and go to Słowik, Sitkówka or Chęciny. In summer the richer used to go to renowned health resorts, for example the rabbi, who many times went to Karlove Vary. At the end of the 1930s holidays in Czarnecka Góra and Jastarnia came into fashion. There were enough activities for those who stayed in Kielce: bridge, billiards, cinema or newspapers. Those who liked risk called at the lottery shops of Majer Opatowski on Siekiewicza Street or of Leon Szarogreder on Duża Street. But one needed money. The social life of the Jewish poor was strongly limited; they used to meet on the occasion of weddings, baptisms, confirmations and various anniversaries; sometimes wealthier workmen, shop assistants, salesmen met in the Jewish Workmen's Tea Garden at 2 Mała Street, where one could drink beer, tea, eat a piece of cake and even dance. In spring the favourite rendezvous place was the municipal park, where the firefighters' and military orchestras gave performances and it was possible to take a boat trip on the pond. Many wealthy Jewish families had an „open house” and invited acquaintances for dances, balls and social gatherings.<sup>45</sup> It was often connected to all kinds of collections of money so as to support charitable institutions.

On the professional ground there was a strong link between the Poles and the Jews while the social contacts were reduced to minimum. Alicja Birnhak characterizes this problem in 1930 in Kielce as follows: „Mom and auntie Pola were absorbed in social life (...) the sisters belonged to a social club, played cards and gave parties. At that time Jews and Catholic Poles hardly ever mingled socially therefore the circle of my mother's friends and acquaintances were almost wholly Jewish: doctors', lawyers' and engineers' wives.”<sup>46</sup>

A considerable part of the Kielce Jews reacted to the creation of the Polish state in 1918 with expectation and some anxiety. They were especially worried by a wave of pogroms. It reached Kielce on 11 November 1918 and caused antagonisms between the Jews and the Poles. The first move towards reconciliation was made by the Jewish intelligentsia, who already on 11 November announced that they wanted to cooperate with Poles in order to support the restoration of the Polish

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<sup>45</sup> S.Król, *Memories księgarza, manuscript, p.73 (the text in the possession of the author's family).*

<sup>46</sup> A. Birnhak, *Koniec pięknej...*, p.28.

state. An important role played the conciliatory attitude of rabbi A. Rapoport. In January 1919 a group of Jews under the leadership of doctor J. Lewinson started a collection of bread, clothes and money for the benefit of the starving people in Lvov. On February 8, 1920 there were ordered prayers in the synagogue on the occasion of Poland's regaining access to the sea,<sup>47</sup> and in mid 1920 for the intention of the Polish troops withdrawing from Kiev. The Committee of the State Defence obtained financial support. Considerable amounts were given to the committee by: Jankiel Urbajtel, Jakub Szternfeld, Małka Goldszmidt, Mordka Fiszel Kaminer, Berek Piotrowski and Adolf Lew.<sup>48</sup> On August 25, 1920 there was organized a collection of blankets, shoes and clothes within the frames of a single loan ordered by the Council of the State Defence. The Jews weren't indifferent to the Silesian uprisings. Considerable amounts were given by: H. Zagajski, A. Ehrlich, M. Ellencweig, M.F Kaminer and H. Lewi. The two latter were also members of the Defence Committee of the western Borderland and participated in the organization of the Week of Defence of the Eastern Borderlands.<sup>49</sup>

On June 3, 1920 the Jewish Commission of National Loan Propaganda was created. Its members were: rabbi A. Rapoport, producer Bernard Bugajer, bank clerk Chaim Ajzenberg and merchants: Benjamin Lew, Boruch Moszenberg and Aron Ajzenberg.<sup>50</sup> When the Russians reached Warsaw the rabbi ordered prayers for the intention of defeating the Bolsheviks.

The rabbinate and the Board of the Jewish Community consistently supported all forms of improving the defence of the country. There were created circles of the Leagues of Air and Anti-gas Defence (LOPP). In the Board of the Municipal Circle were: H. Zagajski, M. Pelc and L. Bugajerowicz. The Board of the Jewish Community paid annually from 40 to 200 zloty to support the LOPP. The LOPP circles were created by Jewish schools, guilds, institutions and associations. When on the tenth anniversary of establishing the LOPP (that is in 1933) a procession was organized in Kielce, the Zimnowodas' School was highly commen-

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<sup>47</sup> GK 1920, No. 3.

<sup>48</sup> GK 1920, No.156.

<sup>49</sup> GK 1920, No.52.

<sup>50</sup> GK 1920 No. 125.

ded by the press for original decorations.<sup>51</sup> When in 1935 a circle of LOPP was created by a hairdressers and photographers' guild it was decided at President Mordka Szpiegelglas's suggestion that 10% of annual income would be given for defence. Even the *Gazeta Kielecka* emphasised that that example should find followers <sup>52</sup>

After the board fixed a national loan at 120 million zloty in 1933 „Kielcer Cajtung” appealed: „Jewish Merchants! The state is calling you! (...) we must buy the National Loan in a common effort with all the people!”<sup>53</sup> In Mai 1935 at Adolf Mauerberger's proposal, the president of the board of the Association of Real Estates Owners, there was a meeting with the President of Kielce, Stefan Artwiński. The declaration was sold for 10000 zloty. „Gazeta Kielecka” wrote: „... a loyal and civic attitude to the loan and kindness towards the head of our city.”<sup>54</sup> The money was raised also for the banners of the Kielce regiment, the monument of „Czwórka” (four legionaries) and a sanctuary of J. Piłsudski. The Marshal was respected by the Kielce Jews, forasmuch as he knew some people from the war and was a friend of major M. Pelc. There existed a common conviction that he was a philosemite. The Marshal's death was taken with sincere sorrow. The rabbinate and the Board of the Jewish Community immediately sent a telegram to the President of Poland; there were also requiem services in the synagogue.<sup>55</sup>

On May 14 in the office of the Union of Jewish Workmen there took place a meeting of seven guilds, at which homage was paid to the Marshal. Icek Gutman read the manifesto in a standing posture: „...Jewish craftsmen of Kielce unite with the whole Polish nation in unutterable pain caused by the death of the First Marshal of Poland Józef Piłsudski and they honor the historic contribution of the Renovator and the Builder of the Great Poland.”<sup>56</sup>

The Jewish residents massively participated in the funeral. They also decided to contribute to the building of the J. Piłsudski House of Immigrant in Palestine. Every year on the anniversary of the Marshal's death the rabbinate ordered requiem prayers.

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<sup>51</sup> *GK 1933, No. 37, 38.*

<sup>52</sup> *GK 1935, No.129.*

<sup>53</sup> *Kielce Cajtung 1933, No.36.*

<sup>54</sup> *GK 1935, No.128.*

<sup>55</sup> *GK 1935, No. 135.*

<sup>56</sup> *GK 1935, No. 134.*

Piłsudski's death was followed by considerable changes in the attitude to the Jewish issue. The Jews worried about the bench ghetto, limits imposed on the ritual slaughter and sharper and sharper declarations of some politicians. In January 1939 „Gazeta Kielceka” reported the declaration of a Kielce MP, Colonel Zygmunt Wenda: „We are only waiting for a command to clean our national home.”<sup>57</sup> It didn't stop the Jewish generosity for the sake of the national defence. On 1st April 1939 doctor J. Lewinson and doctor J. Fleszler gave 1000 zloty to the National Defence Funds (FON), raised among the Kielce doctors.<sup>58</sup> They also joined the action of collecting valuables for the FON. Under the leadership of rabbi's wife Sara Rapoport in the collections participated: Stefania Rembiszewska, Estera Kajzer, Ewa Zylberberg, Sara Pachl, Pola Pelc, Mojżesz Pelc, Judka Cukierman, Dorota Ehrlich, Cyna Cytryn and Ellenbogen. 71 golden wedding rings, 57 rings, 9 watches, 13 pairs of earrings and 1536 silver coins were collected.<sup>59</sup> Also the producers participated in the action. The manager of „Kadzielnia” gave 100 tons of coal and 100 tons of broken stone, the manager of „Wietrznia” - 200 wagons of lime.<sup>60</sup>

It appears from the records and memories that a major part of the Jewish intelligentsia was reluctant not only to Germany, especially after 1933, but also to the Soviet Union. Well-read Jews who maintained business contacts with many European countries thought that the communism consistently aimed at destroying the intelligentsia. The successes of the Russian economy were regarded as exaggerated because both in the years 1923-24 and in 1932 it was necessary to collect matzoth for hungering Jews in Russia. Different was the situation of a part of the youth mainly from poor Jewish families. The USSR was seen as a country where settlement zones were abolished, where the Jews were accepted into military schools and enjoyed equal rights. For many people the life of Lew Trocki constituted a model of career.<sup>61</sup> Russia was uncritically perceived by the activists of the KPP and ZMK, as well as by some members of the Bund. They didn't

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<sup>57</sup> GK 1939, No.1 Colonel Wenda lived in Warsaw, he was a deputy from the central list of Kielce.

<sup>58</sup> GK 1939, No.28.

<sup>59</sup> GK 1939, No.48.

<sup>60</sup> GK 1938, No.72; 1939, No.20.

<sup>61</sup> S.A. Kielce, the Poviát Headquarters of State Police, call No. 17, pp.1-5.

believe in purges, starving people to death or the exterminations of whole nations in the USSR. The note about shooting Polish communist leaders in the USSR written in the „Gazeta Kielecka” was regarded as propaganda of bourgeoisie.<sup>62</sup> Poland was considered to be an obstacle in the world’s revolution. A change of attitude towards the Polish state could be observed not earlier than at the end of 1930s. In August 1939 the imprisoned in Kielce communists, mainly Jews, addressed the following application to the prosecutor:” Facing the danger of Hitler’s invasion on Poland, the undersigned prisoners, convicted on the base of articles 93-97 of the code penal, declare, in accordance with our anti-fascist views, the will to join the nation as a volunteer of the Polish Army in order to protect our homeland. At the same time we stress that after fulfilling our duty for the country we will present ourselves to the authorities in order to serve the due sentence.”<sup>63</sup> Obviously, the contemporary administration didn’t have any reasons to believe in such declarations; therefore the applications were put into the prison archive.

The attitude towards the Great Britain and France depended on the attitude of these countries to the Palestine question and the possibility to emigrate. In 1920 in Kielce appeared an English mission, which undertook the organization of travels to Palestine. It supervised the creation of the Emigration Syndicate, at 57 Sienkiewicza Street. The decision of Winston Churchill opened the gates of Palestine but in practice „The Jews could obtain settlers’ visas if they could produce 2500 \$.”<sup>64</sup> It was an immense amount, mainly for the poor Halucec youth. Hence the fight for the funds to finance the travel. In 1922 there were some big public meetings in Kielce, at which the Zionists agitated for the departure. However, the first bigger groups left Kielce not earlier than on the turn of 1924-1925, under the direction of Abram Piwko, Moszek Meer and Aleksander Tanewurcel. A tannery owner - Alter Ehrlich and a teacher - Dawid Księski strongly supported the idea of the departure of the youth, who received from them all kinds of help. At the same time people were emigrating to Canada, the United States, Argentina and Brazil.

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<sup>62</sup> GK 1938, No.91.

<sup>63</sup> *The Museum of Independence in Warsaw (the former Museum of the Labor Movement), the Kielce Prison, smuggled messages, Call No.:3256-3259, 3261-3263, 3266, 3270-3271.*

<sup>64</sup> P. Johnson, *Historia Żydów, Kraków 1993, p.471.*



In Kielce theoretically everyone was in favour of leaving for Palestine. The Board of the Jewish Community, where the Aguda and the Zionists had a strong position, gave annually from 500 to 1000 zloty to the National Funds and the Funds of Buying Back the Lands. The creation of the Hebrew University was enthusiastically welcomed and people decided to pay 200 zloty annually for its maintenance.<sup>65</sup>

In 1929 a pogrom of the Jews took place in Palestine, during which 150 people died.<sup>66</sup> When the news reached Kielce a public meeting was organized in the „Orfeum” room on 2nd September on the Market Square, where leading British politicians were accused, not without a cause, of anti-Semitism. When the murder of a well known Zionist activist Chaim Arlosoroff on June 16, 1933 became generally known it was decided to transfer the funds raised during the latest collection of money in order to finance his monument in Palestine. Every year there were organized solemn meetings on the anniversaries of Teodor Herzl and Ber Borochow’s death. In 1933 the board of the „Haluvec Pionier” invited for a meeting 120 boys and girls from Kobryń, Korzec and Włodawa, who were doing a traineeship in the Kielce factories, before their leaving for Palestine, in order to hold them up as models for the Kielce youth.<sup>67</sup>

When Hitler’s Germany came to power the number of Jews leaving Europe rapidly increased. In 1934 42359 Jews from Europe, including 16829 from Poland, went to Palestine.<sup>68</sup> It brought about a protest of the Arabs and the Great Britain declared that it would limit the Jewish immigration. In this connection at the appeal of the Board of the Jewish Community and the Rabbinate a great public meeting took place near the synagogue, during which the murders of Jews and the anti Jewish policy of Great Britain were criticised. When the Board and the Rabbinate heard about the attacks in Jafa, Nablus and Jerusalem and the injuries of three Jews from Poland<sup>69</sup> in 1936 they responded with a public meeting on 28 August. Apart from condemning England, it was declared that nothing would stop the Jewish emigration to their old

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<sup>65</sup> AP Kielce, PSK, call No. 1900, pp.74 -76.

<sup>66</sup> Ch. Weizmann, *Trial and Terror*, London 1949, p. 411.

<sup>67</sup> GK 1933, No.75.

<sup>68</sup> GK 1935, No.49; According to the „Gazeta Kielecka” in 1936, No.182 - the most Jews who left for Palestine were from Poland

<sup>69</sup> GK 1936, No. 187, 231.

Homeland. Similar opinions prevailed during a requiem celebration organized in connection with Nachum Sokołow's death, the president of the World Zionist Organization.<sup>70</sup>

In 1937 the English decided to limit the Jewish immigration to 12000 people, which caused numerous protests among the Jews, including the Kielce Jews. Since 1933 the problem of immigration to Palestine had been associated with the situation in Germany. On March 27, 1933 at a great public meeting their official pronouncements made: Rabbi A. Rapoport, juror B. Lew, deputy rabbi A. Hochberg, secondary school teacher B. Graubart, merchant L. Rodal. People were exhorted to boycott German products, the Polish government received thanks for the attitude of the Polish consuls in Germany, and Great Britain was criticised for the limits imposed on immigration. After the meeting 5000 people went to the Town Council, where D. Fryszman submitted their petition to the voivode. The crowd was carrying banners with the slogans: „Down with Hitler”, „Open the gates to Palestine”, „Building a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan will solve the Jewish question”<sup>71</sup>

At a meeting of the Rabbinate and the Board of the Jewish Community it was decided that the delegation from Kielce would participate in the conference of the commune in Warsaw concerning the contemporary situation of the Jews.<sup>72</sup> It was also declared that a petition would be sent to the League of Nations. Meanwhile, a rise in the number of departures from Poland could be observed. In the interwar period about 300 people left Kielce and moved to Palestine. To the increase of Kielce residents in Palestine testified the creation of the Association of Jewish Compatriots of Kielce in 1938.<sup>73</sup> It was third such association of the Kielce Jews, after the United States and Canada.

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<sup>70</sup> GK 1936, No.117.

<sup>71</sup> AP. Kielce, UWK I, call No. 2602, p.34; GK 1933, No.26.

<sup>72</sup> AP. Kielce,SPK, call No. 1908, p.19.

<sup>73</sup> *About our house...*, p. 89-90; I. Markowitz, *A society of brotherhood*, in: *Eighty anniversary Kielce*, New York 1985, p.23.

## Chapter II

# Time of War and Plunder

In the second month of holidays - in August 1939 there existed a common conviction in the Jewish society in Kielce that the war could break out any time, which was manifested in the registration of men who could be employed in war industry, appeals for keeping bicycles, motorbikes, carts and autos in good condition and repeating information about self-defense courses. The press printed in bold the following slogans: „Let’s be soldiers”, „Attention, the spy is sniffing!”<sup>74</sup> More provident residents began cleaning the attics, strengthening beams in the cellars, preparing fire-control and buying gas masks. They also gathered bigger than usually provisions of food. T. Muszyńska recollects: „At the end of August 1939 a Jew who used to sell us food came to us and said straight away: «Mrs Muszyńska, people say that there will be a war, so I’ve brought you some food.’ Indeed, in the yard there was a cart loaded with various sacks. When I was explaining that I didn’t have enough cash at home I heard the words he always used to say: «Am I asking for money? You’ll pay when you have money’. We decided that I would pay in three installments. I put some sacks of flour, groats, beans and peas into the pantry. We didn’t have to wait long to see that he had been right. The first winter under occupation was quite calm for us thanks to those unexpected provisions.”<sup>75</sup> At the end of August anti-aircraft trenches began to be dug in the park, on Marshal J. Piłsudski’s Square and in some backyards. On window panes people glued stripes of paper, which would protect them from broken glass falling during bombing. Although nobody panicked there was some anxiety. Henryk Opara, a worker of the foundry „Ludwików” writes: In the months preceding Hitler’s attack on Poland we worked the way we always did but one could feel anxiety among the workers.”<sup>76</sup> Some families decided to leave the town and go to their relatives living either in big cities or in deep provinces. Many Kielce residents decided to move temporarily behind the Bug, mainly to Lvov, Vilnius and Stanisławów. At the same time to Kielce were coming Jewish families from: Łódź, Cracow, Warsaw and small towns from Podidzie: Raków, Działoszyce, Wiślica, Pińczów. This is how A. Birnhak recollects August 1939 as she was coming back from her holidays on Podkarpacie: „When we

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<sup>74</sup> GK 1939, No. 62 and 66.

<sup>75</sup> T. Muszyńska..., p.5

<sup>76</sup> H. Opara, *Z długoletniej pracy w Kieleckich Zakładów wyrobów Metalowych*, manuscript, p.1, collections of WBP.

were coming back to Kielce at the end of August there was already panic. The roads were full of people returning homes to their families. It was also the end of our childhood and carefree youth...<sup>77</sup>

Sara and Blima Preis looked for shelter in Lipsk, in Jedlnia - Henryk Szarogreder, in Kunów - Frajda and Lejzor Rajzman, in Milanówek - Irena Nowak with her son Piotr. To Warsaw moved: Bajla Fryd, Stefan Nowak, Salomon Zelinger; behind the river Bug went: Aba Goldszajd, Sara Goldszajd, Herszel Kotlicki, Igra Dwojra, Mendel Wittlin, Jusek Lubochiński, Jusek and Leon Zajączkowski, Berek Urbajtel, Jurek and Pola Pelc, Guta, Alicja and Henryk Strumw, Malina Kaminer, Icek, Mojżesz and Szarlota Kahan, Icek Dziura, Chaim Weisbrot, Icek Obarzański and Sara Zylbersztajn.

In their own car, towards Kowel, set out the Gringrases: Adolf, Hana, Lila, Maurycy, Lola, Henryk, Leopold, Maryla, Eliza, Ruth and Julian. In Kielce stayed the senior of the family Kopel Gringras with his wife Fajgla.

A part of the Kielce Jews who had a military grade were called up to their units. Jerzy Ehrlich, the manager of „Kadzielnia” got to the 1st Battalion of Light Tanks in the army „Prusy” as Second Lieutenant of armored weapons. To the 2nd Regiment of Legion Light Artillery, which belonged to the 2nd Division of Legion Infantry (Army Łódź), were mobilized: Lieutenant doctor S. Zylberszlak, Captain doctor J. Fleszler, Second Lieutenant doctor Jerzy Rotman and Hilel Nusynowicz.<sup>78</sup> When the war broke out also H. Rotman, M. Pelc and Oskar Strumw received call-up papers.

The Kielce residents learnt about the outbreak of the war from radio announcements and on hearing the bombs that fell on the army barracks on Bukówka, the sports airport in Masłów and on waterworks in Białogon. On 3 September civil refugees and soldiers of the defeated near Janów 7. Infantry Division came through the city. It was a signal for many people to flee from Kielce. On 4 and 5 September Kielce was severely bombed. Many buildings were destroyed and devastated, including the railway station, power station and the municipal waterworks; in the city water and electricity were cut off. German airmen were shooting with machine-guns at the crowds waiting for trains in front of the railway station; the witnesses estimated the number of

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<sup>77</sup> A. Birnhak, *Koniec pięknej...*, p.31.

<sup>78</sup> B. Kołodziejczyk, J. Sikorski, *Szpital miejski w Kielcach 1939-1945*, „Przegląd Lekarski” 1986, No.1, p.76.

dead at about 80 people. Among the injured there was also Major doctor M. Pelc, who was trying to get to his unit.<sup>79</sup>

Maria Chodnikiewicz described those events: „The first days of September shocked the city. The bombs that fell on the railway station, the drone of German airplanes, withdrawing troops of our army and above all the waves of civilians streaming through out city, the refugees moving to the east (...) all that caused growing panic...”<sup>80</sup>

During the bombings destroyed were: a part of the foundry „Ludwików” and the factory „Granat”, a tannery in Białogon that belonged to the Bekermans, Moszek Dębski’s sawmill on Zagańska Street, and the houses of: the Rubinsztajns on Piotrkowska Street, the Szmulowicz on Sienkiewicza Street, the Nissengarts on Focha Street and the Zysholzes on Bodzentyńska Street.<sup>81</sup>

Facing the approach of German troops a group of 50 workers from the foundry „Ludwików” led by engineer Adam Sobol set out towards Lvov.<sup>82</sup>

In response to the appeal to move to the east directed to all men able to carry guns the following residents left Kielce: Icek and Moszek Baum, Szłoma Bońko, Józef Borensztajn, Szmul Brukier, Berek Cukier, Moszek Jakub Dębski, Mendel Dutkiewicz, Pinkus Ejzenberg, Szmul Eljasiewicz, Machel Finkielsztajn, Artur Frajtag, Majer Fuks, Lejbuś Gnat, Naftuli and Szymon Kaner, Moszek Rutkowski, Herszel and Moszek Sokołowski, Hersz Sonczow, Adam Żernicki and Mojżesz Zielonedrzewo as well as Gustaw Herling Grudziński.<sup>83</sup>

On 2 September, on the order of the Prison Department, several dozen of criminal prisoners (Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians) were evacuated towards Sandomierz. In their cells remained a group of 11 communists (including 7 Jews) from the latest big, mass process, called „Łaskawski’s process” and a few dozen of prisoners transported to Kielce from prisons in Greater Poland, sentenced for diversion and spying for the III Reich.

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<sup>79</sup> A. Birnhak, *Getto, „Przemiany” 1987, No.12, p.32.*

<sup>80</sup> M. Chodnikiewicz, *Kielczanki w walce z okupantem hitlerowskim 1939-1945, manuscript, p. 1, collections of WBP.*

<sup>81</sup> *AP Kielce, ZDPGRP, call No. 1799, 2228, 4306; A. Massalski, S. Meducki...,p.33.*

<sup>82</sup> *H. Opara...,p.1*

<sup>83</sup> B. Kołodziejczyk, J. Sikorski...,*Sikorki.73; An interview of 08.09.1993 with H. Gringras from Israel; J. Paclawski, Gustaw Herling-Grudziński w Kielcach, in: O Gustawie Herlingu-Grudzińskim, edited by I. Furnal and J. Paclawski, Kielce 1992, p.8.*

Since the morning of September 5, 1939 there had been lasting fights of the Polish troops with the attacking Kielce 2. Light Division of Wehrmacht, a part of XV Army Corps. In the evening, after the loss of 40 soldiers and with 60 injured ones the Poles withdrew from Kielce. During the fights for the city and after its seizure the Germans killed several civilians, among others Jew Krauze.<sup>84</sup> Several dozen Jews, who had hidden in the building of B. Borochow Kibbutz on Szeroka Street, were battered.

After seizing Kielce there were placards put up on walls with a declaration of the land forces commander, General Walter Brauchitsch that the civilians were safe. However, at the same time there were created courts-martial that could immediately sentence to death people attacking German soldiers. Curfew was introduced and people were ordered to hand over weapons. Customarily to Germans, hostages were kept so as to guarantee peace in the city. Apart from a large group of Poles they kept also Jewish hostages. They were taken in groups from 6 till 27 September 1939.<sup>85</sup> By means of a special writing each person was called to turn up in the prison with clothes and a blanket. Among the hostages were personalities, well known and respected in the Jewish society, such as: Henryk Bruner and Jozek Dębski (producers), Maks Ellenweig (a cinema's owner), Henryk Fruks (attorney), Oskar Strumw and Oskar Serwetnik (doctors), Szloma Rotman (barber surgeon), Todorys, Fiszal and Izrael Herszkowicz (owners of coal storehouses). \*See: Annexe 2.

In order to frighten the residents, Polish captives were driven through the city towards improvised war prisoners' camps. Zdzisław Tchórz writes: „...columns of Polish captives are going along the streets of Kielce and the Germans are sitting on cars and throwing crust and fag-ends at them - and taking pictures.”<sup>86</sup>

As soon as the Nazis took control over the city they immediately introduced their troops to bigger factories and began plundering the Polish property. Henryk Kozłowski, a worker of „Społem”, recalls the first contacts with the occupier: „Immediately they began taking away the stored products that hadn't been delivered to the customers.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> A. Massalski, S. Meducki..., *Meducki*. 26.

<sup>85</sup> AP Kielce, *Records of the city of Kielce (hereinafter AmK), call No. 2652, a list of Jewish hostages in Kielce.*

<sup>86</sup> Z. Tchórz, *Moje życie, moja praca*, p.1, manuscript (collections of WBPk).

<sup>87</sup> H. Kozłowski, *W starej cementowni*, p.47, manuscript (collections of WBPk).

In similar situation were the foundry „Ludwików” and the factory „Granat”. On September 9, 1939 the municipal hospital was removed from the buildings on Kościuszki Street, where a high percentage of the patients were soldiers injured during the September battles: „...the ill, the injured and the hospital workers were thrown out from the Kielce hospital on the command well known from the time of occupation: raus! Everybody had to leave the hospital; they weren't allowed to take anything with them, even their personal belongings.”<sup>88</sup>

It was the Wehrmacht that commanded to move the hospital in order to locate theirs injured there. Thanks to the friendliness of the Curia the hospital found shelter in the building of the Theological Seminary.

Following the front troops other police squads appeared in the city: the Order Police (Ordnungspolizei - Orpo), the Security Police and the Security Service (Der Sicherheitspolizei and Sicherheitsdienste - Sipo), the Municipal Police (Schutzpolizei - Schupo), the Secret State Police (Geheime Staatspolizei - Gestapo) and gendarmerie. On September 19, 1939 the chief of the Civil Administration, which acted within the operational zone of the 10. Wehrmacht's Army, appointed doctor Richard Wendler commissioner of Kielce (Stadtskommissar). The soldiers and the police occupied the buildings of the Teachers' Seminary and the School of Exercises on Leśna Street, the seat of the Revenue Office on Poniatowskiego Street, the buildings at the junctions of Focha and Solna Street and Wesola and Mickiewicza Street, the Hotel Polski, the building of the PWiWF (Military Training and Physical Education) and the schools. The Germans behaved arrogantly and hostile especially to the Jews. Marian Anyst recalls: „When we were going to the town with Bogdan along Kilińskiego (Mała) Street we got a hiding from a German soldier who took us for Jews...”<sup>89</sup>

When in mid September the occupier decided to cover up the traces of military operations in the city they decided to use brigades composed mainly of the Jewish residents. It was a huge wave of prosecutions. This is how Szaja Zalberg recalls the first days of the Nazi occupation in Kielce:

„They were plundering Jewish houses, forcing people to work. They were mocking at the Jews. They would throw them into the anti-air-

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<sup>88</sup> J. Sikorski, Marian Greeh, „Przegląd Lekarski” 1983, No.1.

<sup>89</sup> M. Anyst, *Memories*, p. 4-5, manuscript (collections of WBPk).



craft pits; burry up to the neck and laugh at their fear (...) They would tear hair of the heads and beards of Jews walking down the streets (...) and bullied them all the time. Once a German went out of the Hotel Polski, in a blood-stained butcher's apron, with a knife and caught Jews from the street. He dragged them one by one inside, where terrible screams were heard, as if he had been cutting their throats. The rest had to wait for their turn, sure that they would be killed. In such tension and horror we waited till the evening. It turned out that (...) the German had dragged the Jews from the street to strip feathers of hens and geese which he was killing."<sup>90</sup> Mojżesz Bahn recollects:

„Since the first day of occupation the Jews had had to do the dirtiest jobs. They were ordered to clean toilets or cover up shelter pits. The Jews with beard suffered most. They were forced to clean toilets with their coats, etc. The Gendarmerie in the Hotel Polski wouldn't let a Jew out without hurting him. Ambulances had to be called (...) because they were unable to stand on their legs. Some of those people died in hospital (...) the repressions were carried out systematically in two directions: to rob our property and to convert us into slaves staggering under the burden of forced labor. There was a lot of work to do. They took 24 hostages, among them rabbi Rapoport, who was then 50 years old. He was forced to clean toilets and they set fire to his beautiful long beard.”<sup>91</sup>

During the government of military administration it was occasionally suggested that the Jews leave for the USSR.<sup>92</sup> It can be proved by the relation of Jan Łaskawski, who was in prison on Zamkowa Street when the war started:

„In the second decade of September there were 11 prisoners (4 Poles and 7 Jews), sentenced in 1937 to many years of prison for communist activity. One day the Germans informed us that we would be soon released. They were right. On giving up the documents our Jewish companions were advised to leave for the USSR.”

In the released group were the following Poles: Jan Łaskawski, Wincenty Krawczyk, Jan Zasada, Władysław Rusiecki and Jews: Neoch

<sup>90</sup> *The Archive of the Jewish Institute of History (hereinafter AŻIH), Wspomnienia Sz. Zalcberga., Call No. 301/1705, p.1.*

<sup>91</sup> *ibidem, Wspomnienia M. Bahna, call No. 301/66, p.1-2.*

<sup>92</sup> *T. Berenstein, A. Rutkowski, Prześladowanie ludności żydowskiej w okresie hitlerowskiej administracji wojskowej w Polsce (1.09-25.10.1939), „Biuletyn ŻIH) 1961, No.1, p.71.*

Trajster, Izrael Majer Gotfryd, Mordka Lejba Goździński, Jankiel Jakubowicz, Icek Majer Kantor, Lejzor Meszberg and Majer Opatowski.

„When we reached Lvov, we found out that there were many activists of the former KPP. Some of us decided to come back to Kielce and fetch their families. There were no greater difficulties on the way back home; we packed our property and set out again towards the Bug. After crossing the temporary border between Germany and the USSR we were stopped by a Soviet patrol.”<sup>93</sup>

After the military operations had stopped some people decided to go back home. A. Birnhak recollects:

„It was rumored in Lvov that in Kielce the situation «wasn't so bad'. My mother and aunt indulged in illusions that the Germans were gentlemen, so that women and children could feel safe with them. My aunt remembered the gallant and chivalrous Austrian officers she used to dance with at the balls in Żabiec during that beautiful First World War (...) My mother and aunt decided to go back to Kielce to their husbands. The aunt worried about uncle Pelc, who had diabetes (...). She decided to go back but in her opinion Jurek should stay in Lvov because as a young man he could become an object of prosecutions, for example forced labors. At that time, in an early phase of the war the borders weren't well guarded and it was easy to get to Kielce. I wanted to stay with Jurek in Lvov (...) but my mother insisted that in such moments a child should be with its family and besides the war wouldn't last long (...). In this way we went back to Kielce...”<sup>94</sup>

In the course of time it was becoming difficult to get to the General Gouvenment. H. Gringras writes: „...in winter we tried to get to Kielce through Rawa Ruska but we didn't manage to cross the border illegally and we came back to Lvov.”<sup>95</sup> Only I. Obarzański had enough luck.

At the end of September and at the beginning of October 1939 more and more people were coming back from the so called «reise», for example doctors Gerszon Harkawi and Jerzy Rotman, medical student Szymon Fleszler and to his parents' house came Tadeusz Rotman, temporarily domiciled in Vilnius. The doctors immediately joined the local health care. Apart from treating injured soldiers they

<sup>93</sup> J. Łaskawski, *Memories, a relation recorded by the Department of the History of the KW PZPR in Kielce, AP Kielce, Archives of the former KW PZPR, collection of tape recordings.*

<sup>94</sup> A. Birnhak, *Getto...*, p.33.

<sup>95</sup> Z. Ganoth, *Curriculum Vitae, p.1, manuscript (in the possession of the autor).*

tried to protect seriously wounded ones and officers from deportation to Germany: „In those actions various methods were applied, such as disguising the captives in civilian clothes or cassocks, giving them false documents, escaping or swapping the alive for the dead. The activity that was supported by numerous Kielce residents who provided civilian clothes or shelter to the fugitives, brought very good results...”<sup>96</sup>

M. Chodnikiewicz describes the situation in the municipal hospital as follows;

„On the first and on the second floor there were injured soldiers and Polish officers. Dysentery was raging among them. German guards were on sentry inside the building - on the first and on the second floor and in front of the building there were posted soldiers. Even though, the nurses managed to rescue many captives who escaped in disguise from the hospital.”<sup>97</sup>

The following Jewish doctors participated in the actions: M. Pelc, O. Strumw, G. Harkawi and J. and T. Rotman.

In the city there were many refugees from all sides of Poland. Some of them needed help. One of the fugitives from Warsaw, who received help from a Kielce bishop Czesław Kaczmarek, was a well known author of the monument of airmen in Warsaw - a Jew by birth, Mieczysław Lubelski. The bishop helped him get a job in the Marbles of Kielce (Kieleckie Marmury). However, somebody denounced him. Then, with father Karol Szrant's help he found temporary shelter on Karczówka Hill. When the whole issue quieted down the priest chaplain Stanisław Wojas was ordered by the bishop to go to Karczówka and to help Lubelski get to the station on Słowik, where he would catch a train to Warsaw. In Warsaw he worked in conspiracy. During the Warsaw Uprising he produced weapons for the Home Army (AK).<sup>98</sup>

People who were coming back to Kielce often gave misleading and unverified information. J. Ehrlich was said to have been killed in tank battle of Głowaczow, one rumor said that also S. Zylberszlak and J. Fleszler died. It turned out that Lieutenant J. Ehrlich had destroyed two German tanks<sup>99</sup> and later on, safe and sound, withdrew to the east. After the capitulation he was taken prisoner by the Germans. After the Septem-

<sup>96</sup> B. Kołodziejczyk, J. Sokorski...,p.76.

<sup>97</sup> M. Chodnikiewicz...,p.2.

<sup>98</sup> J. Śledzianowski...,p.72.

<sup>99</sup> Cz. Zwolski, *Walki obronne na Ziemi Radomskiej w 1939 roku, Radom 1989, p.18.*

ber fights had stopped captain J. Fleszler tried to get to Romania. Unfortunately, caught by the Russians, he got to the camp in Kozielsk. Julian Ehrlich reached Great Britain and began the naval service.

The military operations in September 1939 brought about serious disturbances in the Kielce industry. Bigger factories ceased to work, among them the ones that belonged to Jews: „Kadzielnia”, „Wietrznia”, „Henryków” and the photo-chemical factory „Orion”. Also the quarries of the region of Kielce, which belonged to the Lipszyces, the Jewish printing-houses and the shops suspended their work. Kazimierz Cichoń recollects: „The shops where one could run up an account were now closed. The owners of the shops and bakeries didn't know what to do.”<sup>100</sup> Some stores and shops weren't opened for fear of plunders. It was remarkable that many Jews regarded the first days of occupation as less terrible than they had expected. It was easy to notice that the Nazi terror was aimed above all against the Poles. If there were any illusions they were disappearing in the course of time.

By Adolf Hitler's decree of October 12, 1939 the General Gouvernement for the occupied regions was created on 26 September, which comprised the former voivodships of: Cracow, Lublin, Kielce, Warsaw and a part of the voivodship of Łódź. The people living there were to be treated as „slaves of the great German power.” When the military operations stopped more and more clear means was undertaken to intimidate and starve the Jewish residents as well as to plunder their property. The Nazis attempted to isolate the Poles from the Jews, break the long-lasting economic, social and cultural links. It was a carefully planned German action, which can be proved by the occupier's orders, easy to verify as in October 1939 the „Verordnungsblatt des Generalgouvernements für die besetzten polinischen Gebiete”, (Journal of General Governor's orders for the occupied Polish regions) began to be published and since November 20, 1939 „Amtsblatt des Chiefs des Distrikts Radom in Generalgouvernement für die besetzten polnischen Gebiete” (Official Journal of the Chief of the Radom District for the occupied Polish regions) had been appearing.

An analysis of all the orders issued by the occupier reveals the enormity of the crime committed on the Jewish population, even before the decision of its total extermination.

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<sup>100</sup> K. Cichoń, *Memories*, p.28, manuscript (collections of WBPk).

On October 26, 1939 appeared an ordinance concerning the introduction of forced labor for the Jews in the General Gouvenment. In the first paragraph it was declared: „For the Jews domiciled in the General Gouvenment there is herewith introduced an obligation to work with immediate implementation. Therefore the Jews shall be called up to groups of forced laborers.”<sup>101</sup> The punishment for not meeting that obligation was prison or concentration camp.

On October 26 the ritual slaughter was banned under the penalty of severe imprisonment or concentration camp.

On November 20, 1939 an ordinance was issued which allowed the Jews to settle in the USSR. People leaving were allowed to take food, clothes and blankets. They could also hire carts for special coupons. They were to cross the border in Puławy and Dęblin. The opportunity to leave used for example the native of Kielce Seweryn Piasecki.

The second part of the ordinance concerned the Jews who decided to stay under the German occupation. According to the first point „In every Jewish community a Council of Jewish Elders, comprising outstanding individuals and rabbis, was to be created. To each Council should belong up to 24 men (depending on the size of the community)”. The second point provided: „The Council of Jewish Elders is fully responsible for proper and prompt fulfilling of all orders. Any case of sabotage of the issued orders will meet with most severe repressions.”<sup>102</sup>

Three days later, on November 23 appeared „The ordinance of marking the Jews and Jewesses in the General Gouvenment”. The first paragraph provided: „All Jews and Jewesses in the General Gouvenment over the age of 10 are obliged to wear on the right sleeve of their outer clothes white arm-band at least 10cm wide with the Star of David.” Paragraph 2.: „The Jews and Jewesses should provide for such arm-bands by themselves.”<sup>103</sup> Infringing this law would be punished with death. On the same day marking of Jewish-owned shops was ordered: „Jewish shops must display a visible from the street Star of David, German boards are prohibited.”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> „Verordnungsblatt des Generalgouvernens für die besetzten polnischen Gebiete „ (Journal of General Governor's ordinances for the occupied Polish regions) 1939, No.1, p.6.

<sup>102</sup> *ibidem*, No.8, p.61.

<sup>103</sup> *ibidem*.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibidem*; marking Polish and German shops was also demanded.

On November 28 the second ordinance concerning Jewish Councils (Judenrats) appeared. It stated that in communes up to 10000 inhabitants they would comprise 12 members and in communes with over 10000 inhabitants - 24. „The Jewish Council shall choose from their circle the chairman and his deputy. The Jewish Council is obliged to receive orders of German authorities by the chairman or his deputy and is responsible for thorough fulfillment of the orders. The Jews and Jewesses must obey the instructions given by the Council in order to execute German orders.”<sup>105</sup> The Council elections should be held by December 31, 1939 at the very latest. The composition of the Judenrat had to be confirmed by the staroste or the municipal staroste.

On December 11 and 12 appeared two other executive provisions to the „Ordinance to introduce forced labor of the Jewish population” passed on October 26, 1939. In the first provision the right of the Jews to move in the General Gouvenment was restricted. In the first paragraph we can read:” From January 1, 1940 on all Jews living in the General Gouvenment are forbidden (...) without written permission of the appropriate local German administrative authorities to change their permanent residence or to cross the border of their commune.” Paragraph 2.: „All Jews immigrating to or living in the General Government must immediately after finding accommodation (...) not later than in the span of 24 hours (...) report to the mayor (...). The Jewish Council is obliged to keep a register of reports in written form which shall be submitted on every Monday to the mayor with written acknowledgement.” Paragraph 4:”All Jews in the General Gouvenment are forbidden to leave their homes and use public roads, streets and squares from 9 p.m. till 5 a.m. without (...) written permission of the appropriate local German administrative authorities.”<sup>106</sup> People contravening the rules would be summarily directed to „rigorous, long-lasting labor.”

The second executive provision regulated the question of the forced labor. The Jews of age between 14 and 60 were obliged to that kind of work, which lasted 2 years and could be prolonged: „Jews (...) called up to forced labor must appear at the assembly point punctually at the appointed time. They should have food for 2 days and 2 clean blankets with them. Craftsmen, especially owners of workshops are to give in

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*, No. 9, p.72.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibidem*, No.14, pp. 231-232

all their tools.”<sup>107</sup> People who tried to avoid the work were threatened with severe imprisonment and the loss of their property. In similar way would be punished people helping Jews to avoid work! The verdicts in those cases were to be given by the German Special Court.

We must also turn our attention to other two ordinances issued in 1939, directed against Jews. The ordinance of December 9 deprived the Jews of the possibility to apply for subsistence allowance given to pensioners; the ordinance of December 20 deprived them of benefit that military pensioners were entitled to.<sup>108</sup>

In order to explain who was to be treated as «sub men» the occupier issued on July 24, 1940 „The ordinance about definition of the word „Jew” in the General Government”.

In section 1 of the above mentioned ordinance it was stated;

„If the legal and administrative regulations use the word „Jew” it should be understood as:

1. A person who according to legal regulations is or is regarded as a Jew.
2. A person who, as a former Polish citizen or without any national status, is or is regarded as a Jew due to paragraph 2 of this ordinance.

Section 2., point 1. A Jew is someone who is descended from three grandparents who were racially full Jews, in so far as he or she belonged to the Jewish religious community on September 1 or joined the community later.

a) In so far as he or she was married to a Jewish person at the time this law was issued, or married one subsequently.

b) In so far as he or she is the offspring of an extramarital relationship with a Jew in the sense of Section 1 and was born after May 31, 1941.”

Section 4 defined Jewish companies.

Point 1: „A company is regarded as Jewish if the owner is a Jew according to section 1.”; point 2: „A company is regarded as Jewish if (...) one or more (...) partners are Jewish.”; point 3: A company of a judicial person is regarded as Jewish: a) if one or more people empowered to legal representation or one or more members are Jews, b) if Jews have the decisive number of shares according to the capital or the right to vote.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *ibidem*, No. 14, p. 246.

<sup>108</sup> *ibidem*, 1940, No.1, p. 1; *ibidem*, No.12, p.206

<sup>109</sup> *ibidem*, No. 48, p.231.

On February 20, 1941 the „Ordinance about the usage of public transport by the Jews in the General Gouvovernment” was issued. It allowed the Jews to use the public transport only on the base of an individual permission given by the poviat (municipal) staroste and only for strictly limited time.<sup>110</sup>

The Kielce Jews were not only obliged to obey the ordinances passed on for the whole GG but also various orders issued by the chief of the Radom District and the municipal staroste in Kielce. And thus on January 10, 1940 an order of the chief of the Radom District appeared concerning „Baking white bread, cake and similar bread”, in which it was stated: „All Jewish bakers or Jewish businessmen who have so far baked white bread, confectionery, cakes and similar bread aren't allowed to process flour for other purposes than only for baking rye bread.” People infringing this law shall be fined up to 10000 zloty and/or imprisoned.<sup>111</sup> Also the municipal staroste in Kielce adopted a particular policy towards the Jews. On September 30, 1940 a curfew was announced for Poles from 11 p.m. till 5 a.m. and for Jews from 8 p.m. till 5 a.m. When on October 10, 1941 Hans Frank came to Kielce the Jewish residents were forbidden to leave their homes or places of work from 10 a.m. till 4.30 p.m.<sup>112</sup> From November 9, 1940 on every Jew caught in the street without the identity card could be «severely punished». A part of the laws issued was to show that the Germans treated the Jews as «sub men». On September 9, 1940 the Jews were banned from entering the Market Square, which had now the «proud» name of „Adolf Hitler Platz”. A Jew caught there could be fined or imprisoned.<sup>113</sup>

The laws were followed by a wave of terror. Therefore they were to be quickly put in force. All tailors' workshops started sewing the required arm-bands with the Star of David. They were sold for 10 zloty and given free to the poorest. Marking shops and storehouses was ably conducted. More provident merchants located a part of their goods at friendly Polish families' fearing, with reason, that the marking

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<sup>110</sup> „Verordnungsblatt für das Generalgouvovernment” (*Journal of General Government's ordinances*) 1941, No. 14, p. 69.

<sup>111</sup> „Amtsblatt des Chefs des Distrikts Radom in Generalgouvovernment” (*Official Journal of the Chief of the Radom District for the occupied Polish regions* 1940, No.1, p.5

<sup>112</sup> „Anordnungsblatt für die Stadt Kielce (*The Journal of ordinances for the city of Kielce*). 1940, No.9.

<sup>113</sup> *ibidem*, No. 14.



would be the first step of robberies and confiscations. And it was indeed. In the «front line» were shops with radio and optical equipment. In October 1939 the occupier started throwing Jews from better houses on the main streets: Sienkiewicza, Złota, Wspólna, Równa, Żytnia and Focha. Those who were forced out of their homes had to leave the furniture and bedclothes.<sup>114</sup> They could only take hand luggage.

Blocking bank accounts and a ban on having more cash than 2000 zloty made many shop owners close their shops after selling the goods and look for another job. No equivalent was paid for the 100- and 500-zloty notes that were taken from the inhabitants.<sup>115</sup> In spite of the military operations the German authorities didn't forget to collect all taxes due for 1939, which made many people spend their private savings. At the same time the Jewish inhabitants of Kielce were laid under two contributions: the first one of 100000 and the other of 500000 zloty.

The fact of creating the Judenrat by the German authorities (the seat originally at 23 Leonarda Street and then at 4 Orła Street) evoked some hopes of the Jewish population. The Chairman of the Council was doctor M. Pelc, a major of the reserve of the Polish Army. It was a man who enjoyed significant respect, particularly among the Jewish intelligentsia. He had been awarded with the Iron Cross for heroism on the battlefield during the First World War. In the Austrian Army he was a corporal, accepted in the Polish Army. In 1926 he supported J. Piłsudski and was promoted to major. Even the Germans called him „Der stolze Jude” (the proud Jew). He spoke fluent German because he had finished his medical studies in Graz, where he obtained a doctor of medical sciences degree specializing in surgery.<sup>116</sup> Since 1921 he had been living in Kielce and had proved to be an exquisite doctor and a great social worker. Since 1933 he had been a town councilor. For many years he presided over the Society of Aid to Poor Ill Jews and was a cocreator of the Old People's House of the Foundation of the Zagajskis brothers. On the professional ground he maintained close contacts with the Polish society. It seemed an excellent solution that he should take up the post of the chairman of the Judenrat. His energy

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<sup>114</sup> A. Rokicki, *Diaries*, v. 2, manuscript (collections of WBPk).

<sup>115</sup> F. Skalniak, *Bank Emisyjny w Polsce 1939-1945*, Warsaw 1966, pp.56-57.

<sup>116</sup> J. Sikorski, *Ten dumny Żyd*, „Przemiany” 1988, No.7, p.19

and ability to cooperate with the Poles became apparent already during the first epidemic of typhus at the beginning of 1940. He managed to get medicine and vaccines, to get to work all doctors, barber-surgeons and nurses, which in effect led to bringing the epidemic under control. In February 1940 the Germans ordered the Jews to leave the hospital building on Kościuszki Street and to move to two buildings at 18-20 Radomska Street. Within a month a very well working hospital was created. The move took place on March 26, 1940. Seriously ill patients were transported by ambulance „Jutrzenka”, which before the war had belonged to the Jewish Ambulance Service. M. Pelc personally supervised the transport of people and equipment with the help of barber-surgeon Dawid Proszowski.

The hospital soon won respect among the Kielce Jews. In the „Gazeta Żydowska” appeared an article titled: „Wzorowy szpital żydowski w Kielcach” (A model Jewish hospital in Kielce), where it was written:

„We go up wide, comfortable stairs to the first floor of the hospital building. On the first, second and third floor there are hospital rooms, the fourth floor is occupied by sewing work-room and on the ground floor there is the hospital office and the office of the head doctor. The hospital kitchen is in a building in the courtyard. The hospital has two tasks to perform: to take care of the patients and to prevent from new diseases. The second task is carried out by supervision of the cleanness of the houses and the inhabitants and the Jewish population of Kielce.(...) The Jewish hospital is financed by the Council of Jewish Elders and maintains contacts with the Department of the Social Welfare at the Judenrat. Besides, it is supported by the „Joint” (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) and TOZ (Society of Health Care) (...). The hospital staff consists of paid doctors as well as of those who work disinterestedly. Next to the building there is an isolate hospital with 70 beds, which in case of another outbreak of an epidemic would make possible a quarantine of patients’ families.”<sup>117</sup>

It appears from the article that the poorest could have a bath and disinfect their clothes twice a week free of charge and on other days it was possible against a „small fee”. Doctors and nurses were organized into the Flying Sanitary Commissions, which inspected houses and

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<sup>117</sup> „Gazeta Żydowska” (hereinafter GŻ) 1940, No.37; On May 7, 1940 89 people were recorded as infected with typhus, on May 17 - 38, on August 8 the last patients left the hospital.

examined random people. The Sanitary Department had at its disposal two carts where one could disinfect clothes, underwear and bedding. Thanks to devoted help of the doctors the following wards functioned in May: internist, gynecological-obstetric, surgery and special diseases. In June out-patients' department and a pharmacy were opened and in July a dentist's clinic. The poorest could purchase medicine at 50% discount.<sup>118</sup> Doctor M. Pelc managed also to organize a few other nursing courses in consultation with the TOZ. The girls learnt a profession and obtained a certificate of permanent job, which was necessary especially after the ghetto had been created.

In doctor Zofia Mikołajczyk-Kurowska's memories we can read that Jewish children were treated also in Władysław Buszkowski children's hospital:

„There were (...) Polish, Jewish and German children in hospital. All were ill and unhappy; all needed equal care and treatment. It couldn't be different and it wasn't. However, thanks to the presence of German children doctor Kurowska could win from the occupiers some vitamin C, sulphonamide and calcium. She could also threaten the Germans that otherwise contagious diseases would spread and in this way she was able to employ PCK sisters (Polish Red Cross)...”<sup>119</sup>

The danger of an epidemic struck terror among the doctors. Already during the first epidemic typhus spread even into houses of wealthy Jews. The daughter of doctor Oskar Strumw wrote: „In the first year of occupation I fell down with typhus and nearly died (...). Uncle Pelc saved me (...) During my recovery (...) dad was going to neighboring villages and visiting his former patients who helped him buy eggs, hens and vegetables so that my mom could cook tonic broths for me.”<sup>120</sup>

One of the problems that the Judenrat was facing was all kinds of displacing. They constituted an important instrument of the occupier to prostrate the Jewish population and they were usually connected with plundering property, physical exhaustion and moral torment. By the decree of October 30, 1939 the Nazis decided to displace to the General Government 300000 Poles and Jews from the so-called Warta Land. The first transportations got to the Radom District already in

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>119</sup> J. Karolczak, *Na każde wezwanie*, „Przemiany” 1988, No. 8, p.10.

<sup>120</sup> A. Birnhak, *Koniec pięknej...*, p.31.

December 1939. Till March 12, 1940 three big transportations had already reached Kielce. A part of the people stayed in Kielce and the rest were transported to Suchedniów and Nowa Słupia.<sup>121</sup>

According to what Michał Grynberg wrote, Kielce was a trans-shiping point, from where Jews were directed to Częstochowa, Janów, Żarki, Busko, Wiślica, Chmielnik, Bodzentyn, Nowa Słupia and Suchedniów.<sup>122</sup> The Jews from the Warta Land were transported in severe winter without food, water in freight cars without any sanitary facilities. The majority of those who came from Łódź had previously been kept in transit camps, where there was hunger, coldness and no medical care.<sup>123</sup> That number was increased by those who voluntarily moved to Kielce. According to estimations of the Municipality between September 1, 1939 and May 24, 1940 662 people, including 414 Jews and 208 Poles arrived in Kielce.<sup>124</sup> In general, whereas in 1939 there were 20942 Jewish residents in Kielce, on March 10, 1940 that number increased to 25400.<sup>125</sup> At the beginning of August 1940 the Kielce Judenrat agreed to receive a part of the displaced persons from Cracow. The „Gazeta Żydowska” wrote:

„They report from Kielce that (...) 3000 displaced persons arrived there. The Chairman of the Council of Jewish Elders has undertaken all necessary steps to come to their aid. The question if they all will stay in Kielce is still to be discussed. The commune in Kielce has agreed to admit a big part of the displaced, although due to a new organization of the city the number of rooms has significantly decreased.”<sup>126</sup> The „new organization of the city” meant the creation of a new German district comprising among others the following streets: Sienkiewiczza, Focha, Wspólna, Żłota, Równa and Żytnia. The Jews were brutally displaced from there, allowed to take only hand luggage. Because most displaced people from Cracow were „stony-broke” the Citizen Displaced Persons’ Committee appealed to the Jews in the GG” „Jews! Open your pockets. Fulfill this duty for your sake. We know that we

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<sup>121</sup> A. Rutkowski, *Martyrologia, walka i zagłada ludności żydowskiej w dystrykcie radomskim podczas okupacji*, „Biuletyn ŻIH” 1955, No. 15-16, p.91.

<sup>122</sup> M. Grynberg, *Żydzi rejencji ciechanowskiej 1939-1942*, Warsaw 1984, p.104.

<sup>123</sup> R. Małecki, *Pod herbem Wandalów*, Łódź 1985, pp. 26-27.

<sup>124</sup> AP Kielce, AmK, call No. 2643.

<sup>125</sup> A. Rutkowski..., p. 77; A. Massalski, S. Meducki...,p.56.

<sup>126</sup> GŻ 1940, No.5.

are appealing when your provisions have nearly run out but believe us that we are appealing at a turning point, at a moment we haven't experienced so far..."<sup>127</sup>

In that situation one of the most important problems of the Kielce Judenrat was how to provide for food. Around Kielce there were enough villages to feed the city in the interwar period. Till December 1939 many Kielce Jews had been occupied with food trade. Masses of people would go to villages and bring poultry, vegetables, meat and dairy products. It was necessary because Jewish shops were eliminated from the system of distributing food for coupons. Since January 1940 the Jews were forbidden to leave the town, which limited the possibility to trade with the inhabitants of the neighboring villages and led to rising prices of basic agricultural products.

It must be also remembered that from the very beginning of the war the Germans had been plundering the fruits of earth. Special agencies were created for this purpose. Some took animals' skins and fur, others – food: „Trade with the villages, so far in the hands of Polish and Jewish merchants, has been taken over by a company established by the Trust Government in Poznań, „Landwarenhandelsgesellschaft für den deutschen Osten m.b.H.”<sup>128</sup> The system of penalties for illegal food trade was sharpened, especially when it was suspected that the food was given to Jews. In 1941 the occupier created even the Department of Junk and Waste Material Managing, which controlled all Jewish institutions that traded with such material.

As early as at the beginning of 1940 welfare institutions and hospitals found themselves in a very difficult situation. Lack of food and medicine made every epidemic bring about death of many people. According to testimonies of the Jews who survived the war the following people of typhus died in Kielce: Abram Goldman, Bajla Gnat, Mojżesz Kiersz, Cypla Krawczyk, Mojżesz Kuperberg, Brandla and Mojżesz Laks, Rywka and Kałma Sandał, Motel Leśniewski, Fiszel Goldgrób, Róża Wygnańska, Mojżesz Tysan, Zelman Wodzisławski, Gitla, Rywka, Lejbuś Urbach, Ruchla Łaja Goldgrób, Herszel and Saul Gołębiowski, and others.

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<sup>127</sup> *ibidem*.

<sup>128</sup> T. Brustin-Berenstein, *O niektórych zagadnieniach gospodarczych w tzw. Generalnym Gubernatorstwie w świetle „Dzienników Franka”, „Biuletyn ŻIH” 1955, No. 15-16, p. 249.*

In order to avoid starvation many residents who owned gardens or bigger yards started growing vegetables, keeping goats, rabbits and pigeons in spring 1940. It gave them some meat, milk and fruit. This is what A Birnhak wrote about Pola Pelc, the wife of M. Pelc:

„She cultivated a small garden, flowers and vegetables, which reminded us of better times and gave hope that normal life could return.”<sup>129</sup>

The introduced in mid October 1939 food coupons plainly discriminated Jews. Also the determined on September 1, 1940 food rations were a mere discrimination of the Jews. They could obtain only bread, ersatz coffee and sugar coupons. They didn't get rations of flour, meat, marmalade, eggs and grease. Whereas the Polish population received 4,2 kg of bread a month, the Jews could obtain only 2,8 kg; the Poles got 0,400 kg of sugar and the Jews 0,200 kg, they only received an equal amount of ersatz coffee: 0,160 kg.<sup>130</sup> The rations were far below the minimum necessary amount and forced the people to buy most of the food on the free market. The Germans were promising an improvement of food supplies through the introduction of special additional coupons, mainly for seasonal goods such as potatoes, pulses and fruit but the promises given to Jews weren't always kept. Within the scope of supply the Kielce Judenrat cooperated closely with the Poviatic Caring Committee ŻSS (Jewish Mutual Aid Society), which supervised its branches in Suchedniów, Bodzentyn, Skarżysko Kamienna, Nowa Słupia, Bliżyn, Chęciny, Daleszyce, Białogon and Łopuszno. Thanks to that cooperation it was possible to get for the Kielce Jews additional transports of groats, marmalade, flour, margarine, sugar and artificial honey.<sup>131</sup> Due to the above mentioned occupier's decisions, „... during one year of the war the prices of everything increased 10 times”.<sup>132</sup> It made itself felt especially in bigger agglomerations of cities. As far as the costs of living were concerned Kielce was the third most expensive city, after Piotrków Trybunalski and Częstochowa.

The Germans obliged the Jewish inhabitants between 14 and 60 years old to forced labor, which was supposed to have an „educative” character, whereas in fact it led to systematic extermination of the

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<sup>129</sup> A. Birnhak, *Koniec pięknej...*, p.28.

<sup>130</sup> A. Massalski, *S. Meducki...*, p.156.

<sup>131</sup> „GŻ” 1941, No.50.

<sup>132</sup> M. Sowiński, *Memories*, p. 12, manuscript (collections of WBPk).

Jewish population by killing long hours of work the more that the laborers were fed only on a bowl of soup and a slice of bread. The German orders were to be executed by the Judenrats, which evoke hatred of the Jews towards that institution. In Kielce Jewish brigades were employed in metal and timber factories, quarries, gardening at unloading goods on railway stations Kielce and Kielce Herby as well as at building and repairing railways. Because in Kielce there was a branch of the issued in Cracow „Gazeta Żydowska” we have a lot of information about events occurring in the town. According to the records the Kielce Jews worked in the following quarries: Zagnańska, Sitkówki, Jaworznia, Rykoszyn and others. About 600 people were hired there. In his report *Dzień pracy w kamieniołomach I*. Staszewski describes the daily work of young Kielce Jews at mining and burning stone:

„The city was still fast asleep. The night police were going their round in their soldier-like tramp and their steps echoed dully in the silence of the night. The clock of the old historical cathedral struck: one, two, three, and four. On the streets appeared shadows rushing towards the railway station. It was the Jewish youth of Kielce going to work in quarries (...) From 400 to 600 Jews aged 18-35. Among the hastening people one could see even older ones. Those were „volunteers”, people who had left all bridges of the past burnt behind them (...). In front of the railway station groups stand „in Vordermann”. Each one with its „Gruppenkommandant”. They are standing disciplined on a level. At the command of the „Obergruppenkommandants” they all move towards the platform and get on the train (...) In the cars the boys are very calm. Some are continuing the interrupted sleep; others are humming an old, very old song. There are still others who are praying. At work. From the station you go to the place of work usually on foot, singing a song (...) Seven o’clock. A long whistle of the factory’s siren. The „beaters” put on special glasses and down in the mine (...) the Jews beat the hard stone. They beat. Collect. Put into trolleys. Wheel to the cars (...). In the quarry the pampered children of delicate parents look like strange creatures with those masks and glasses. (...) Outside there’s heat, in the quarry it’s boiling hot like in hell and the boys wheel the still burning lime on barrows to the cars. (...) It is dirty and hard work to unload the coal from the cars to the mine. Boys wearing bathing-drawers, covered with coal dust bathe in their own sweat in the sun. The sun, the damned sun!

And the bloody black dust gets everywhere: into the nose, into the eyes and into the mouth, damn! But the niggers are going to get warm dinner from the factory kitchen.

Accompanied by shots. A warning signal in the mine and on the surface in the forest. In a minute there will be a shot - tearing the rock with dynamite. Our novices move away in a slow pace. An experienced worker cries: boys, you must run away faster! Last week there was an accident (...) Dinner. 2 o'clock. Whistle. Boys go to a quiet forest on the territory of the mine to eat their modest, cold dinner. Some „limers” and „coalers” give up the warm dinner in the factory kitchen; they need some shadow and peace. Oh, how quiet and cool (...) After dinner. If before the noon the heat was supportable, now it's become unbearable. Water! Water! Only water! (...) Hammers, forks and spades slip from perspiring hands. The work drags on. The head is spinning. The hands refuse to work (...) and here is a sound of the siren. It's half past four. The end of work. The „novices” leave the tools in the mine; the „old” ones take them: the hammer on the belt at their side, the glasses on the cup - soldiers of work! To the train (...) in a soldier-like march. One, two, three, four. And again a song. With energy, with humor, in time with the music. And again the peasants are wondering: Jews are working in the quarry and singing? How strange is it! And you will also think: such youth won't die (...) if they decide to live, they will!!!”<sup>133</sup>

And yet, not everybody would come back home. As M. Bahn said: „Everyday 10-20 people fewer came back home because they couldn't endure the torture of the work.”<sup>134</sup>

Although the above quoted article had an optimistic character, it is obvious that it was a killing work. The people had to wake up at 4 a.m., go to the place of work which lasted from 7 till 17.30. Few groups got warm dinner. It corresponded with the views of H. Frank, who during his visit in Radom on November 25, 1939 said to German starosts, commissioners and mayors gathered there: „We won't fuss about the Jews. What a joy! At last we can tan the hide of the Jewish race. The more of them die the better. Let them feel that we've come. We will harass the Jews wherever we can.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> GŻ 1940, No.17.

<sup>134</sup> AŻIH, M. Bahn, Testimony, call No. 301/66, p.3.

<sup>135</sup> J. Franecki, Zagłada Żydów radomskich w czasie II wojny światowej, „Radomir” 1987, No. 5, p. 47.



In spring 1940 the Germans started public works in order to partially reduce unemployment. They decided to introduce architectonic changes so as to make Kielce similar to cities of the Reich. A reconstruction of the Market Square and the Holy Mary Square began and it was decided to plaster the former bishops' palace, where the local NSDAP had its seat. Also the building of the PWiWF was adapted and changed into the Soldier's House. The Jews organized in columns of workers were used as bricklayers at the former bishop's palace. From the preserved photos it appears that they were supervised by German gendarmerie with dogs. Jews, mainly women, were taken to agricultural work on the farm in the Czarnów district. The farm in Czarnów had been used in the interwar period to school haculecs, who were going to Palestine and during the occupation it was subordinate to the Judenrat.

In the article Kwitnący ogród put in the „Gazeta Żydowska” we can read:

„On the outskirts of our city there is a unique work center. The work belongs surely to the most pleasant and the easiest forced labor. It is (...) a center of work for women and weak men. The work has already been going on for a few months and will probably last till the late fall. When I enter the garden my eyes are struck by a nice view. Over thoroughly dug beds were leaning girls in colorful scarves on their heads, here and there were also men (...) Some of them were weeding vegetables beds, others were hoeing, cleaning paths, while still others were watering flowers, scything and raking grass on lawns. Almost a miniature of field works. (...) How many people are working in the garden, I'm asking. Now about 50 people (...) We also have professionals, Jews (...) they supervise the work, instruct the workers and sometimes do themselves the work that requires an experienced and precise hand. Under their supervision the garden works are done. There are some instructors, all the time ready to give advice and inform (...) One of the women says: I've been working here since early spring and I remember digging the hard earth, frozen by morning ground frosts. We had to remove dry stalks and stems, extract the deeply stuck roots of last year's withered plants. Because it was decided to use the whole ground for sowing, even the one that hadn't been cultivated for a long time, our spades got stuck in virgin earth, where nothing had been sown for several years (...) It's almost 2 o'clock. The workers give up

their tools and go home (...) What am I thinking about? I can't help comparing the garden work with the field work and I'm wondering at its significance. I've just witnessed „haszara” - a preparing course, training before the future emigration.”<sup>136</sup>

Did anyone in the society of the Kielce Jews believe in the possibility to emigrate? The „Gazeta Żydowska” would write at length about this subject and several times discussed the question of Jewish settlements in Shanghai, Brazil and Chile. In the correspondence from Piotrków it was reported that since December 1939 there had even existed an Emigration Commission there.<sup>137</sup>

According to oral reports at the beginning of the occupation a dozen or so Jewish families who had passports of the countries of Latin America managed to leave Kielce but unfortunately there is no information if that action was continued. It was a common knowledge that many Jewish families in Kielce had Polish passports. To the fact that the possibility to leave was discussed and that there was hope testifies the following poem of Lusja Szmeterling from Kielce, published in November 1940 in the „Weekly Page for Children” of the already mentioned „Gazeta Żydowska”:

„A morning dream  
Fills my heart with inexpressible joy,  
My greatest wish has come true  
For Homeland left by ship  
And saved was every Jew”.<sup>138</sup>

On April 25, 1940 in Kielce appeared an announcement informing that due to an agreement between the Reich and the USSR people wanting to go over the Bug were being registered. It applied to those who had lived in the eastern border lands before the war or had there families that would receive them. At the same time it was announced that the Jews who due to military operations found themselves behind the Bug could come back. People willing to return to the GG could go to repatriation points in Przemyśl, Brześć, Kowel, Włodzimierz Wołyński and Lvov.

The following Jews were willing to leave Kielce: to Augustów - Berek Lejzor Baranowski and Szaja Gros, to Brześć - Rywka Kapłan,

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<sup>136</sup> GŻ 1940, No. 19.

<sup>137</sup> *ibidem*.

<sup>138</sup> *ibidem*, 1940, No. 38.

Mordka Dubna, Cynia and Złata Grajsblat, to Lvov - Frajda Tekele, Mania Liba Altschüler, to Nowogródek - Asna, Chawa, Doba, Kajdla and Kałma Gnat, to Stołpiec - Henocho Pinczewski vel Feldgajer, to Stryj - Jetla Ala Zylberberg, to Stanisławów - Pikus Abramowicz, to Włodzimierz Wołyński - Beniamin and Sara Wajner, to Vilnius - Izaak Goldfarb, Paja Tajc, to Żółkwia - Bruno Vogelhut, to Kiev - Jakub Pawłowski, to Minsk - Sara Rywka Hachman, to Human - Mendel, Ruchla, Ruda, Pesla, Mojżesz, Szyfra and Roman Bogomolny. Among them there were also families from Kielce: the Grajsblats, the Gnats and Hilda Hajman.<sup>139</sup>

For M. Pelc as chairman of the Judenrat an important issue constituted the youth. At the beginning the occupier announced that it was possible to start Jewish education. Five teachers applied for permission to open private schools. Three of them obtained the permission: Mojżesz Manela, Laura Wittlin and Rozalia Zimnowoda. It was, however stressed, that only children up to 13 years old could be taught because older children were obliged to work. In that situation the majority of children were taught at unofficial completes. At first it didn't cause greater difficulties, it was possible to move freely in the city and buy books and notebooks. In many houses of the Jewish intelligentsia there were well equipped libraries. A. Birnhak recalls: „The first year of the war wasn't so bad, my friends used to come, there were books, and we could sit around at home without the danger of being selected.”<sup>140</sup> Later on it was worse because the Germans consistently forced the Jews, including the youth, to work.

From the first days of the occupation the Germans started removing Jews from the most important institutions in the industry, craftsmanship and trade. Great German concerns, such as Göring, Röchling, Hugo Schneider, IG Farbenm Preussag and many others took over the key industry branches and the sources of raw material. The plundered Jewish property was taken by the Head Trust Government - East, created already on November 1, 1939, which had its branches - Circuit Trust Governments (Treuhanstelle). They carried out confiscations and appointed commissioner managers. They handed over the plundered property and companies:”...usually to different newly created Ger-

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<sup>139</sup> AP Kielce, AmK, call No. 2644.

<sup>140</sup> A. Birnhak, *Koniec pięknej...*, p.31.

man societies, established mainly as limited liability companies. The shareholders of those private-capitalist companies were very often, beside bigger German capitalists, different Nazi officials from the administration of the police apparatus.”<sup>141</sup>

One of the bigger timber factories in Kielce, belonging to Jewish shareholders and employing 200-300 workers, specializing in the production of furniture, wheels, gun-carriages and canon trailers, was subordinated to the foundry „Ludwików”, which was taken over by commissioner government and was called „Maschinen- und Waggonbau G.m.b.H.” The „Henryków” was managed by treuhändler Kazimierz Śliwa, the quarries „Kadzielnia” and „Wietrznia” - by commissioner Anton Klotz, the quarry „Zagórze” was sequestered. Similar factories in Ślichowice, Piekoszów, Górno, Nowiny and Szydłówek were given to Franz Kny. Rechtsdeutsch Hary Kurt Bilski took over the Automatic Mill „Kłos”, the property of the Grauzes, Zylberings and Grünbergs; the factory of the Machtyngers producing barrels and wooden packages was given to Bolesław Petuch, of R. Rozenholc’s brickfield and Fritz Zimmerman «took care» of the Urbajtels’ marble factory. The photochemical factory „Orion” at 9 Focha Street, which belonged to I. Obarzański and L. and M. Gringras, was given to Commissioner Egon Schulz.<sup>142</sup> Into German hands got also the factory „Posadzka” of Sender Liebfeld as „Kielceparkiett”. Tree stamps were made into planks which were used to produce parquet-floors on orders of prominents. The Germans plundered also two significant factories processing feathers and fluff, which belonged to the Frieds and Urbachs. In 1940 those factories processed 290610 kg of feathers and fluff and the turnover reached 2393143 zloty.<sup>143</sup> The Bekermans’ tannery was taken over by Haim and Burkant. The action of plundering Jewish property was sometimes followed by the transportation of its owners to extermination camps:

„Great owners were sent to Dachau, Buchenwald and Auschwitz. Soon afterwards came announcements about their death. The family of transported to Buchenwald tanner Jakub Tenenbaum received some ash in a tin. It was all that was left. They had to pay a certain

<sup>141</sup> T. Brustin-Berenstein..., pp. 247-248.

<sup>142</sup> AP Kielce, AmK, call No. 2639; *ibidem*, SO Kielce, WRH, call No. 1012, p.1-6.

<sup>143</sup> A. Massalski, S. Meducki..., p.97.

amount for that tin (...) In similar way were treated other owners...”<sup>144</sup>

In extermination camps died also owners of bookshops Gustaw Goldwasser and Feliks Grostal.

In the course of time when the Germans had several successes on the front more and more Jewish property went to German hands. The coal supply before the war had been excellent, mainly thanks to Todorys, Izrael and Fiszel Herszkowicz, who had enormous storehouses and controlled about a half of the total turnover. When the war broke out the amount of coal was so great that the first winter during the occupation was supportable in Kielce and a ton of coal cost 40 zloty, which was identical as before the war. In 1940 the Herszkowicz's storehouses were seized by commissioner Waclaw Raclawski, the coal storehouses on Młynarska Street were taken over by Frantz Weiner and Stanisław Szuster, the timber storehouses on Składowa, Czarnowska and Wspólna Street - by commissioner Kazimierz Śliwa, Robert Wolgan and Henrych Golombek, the storehouses of iron at 16,25 Piotrowska Street and 5 Bodzentyńska Street, which belonged to the Eisenbergs, the Goldbergs, the Rewins and the Dajtelcwajgs were taken over by Czesław Sworowski. The storehouse of iron belonged to Nusym Szpigel was seized by Stanisław Warszlak, outfit shops at 3,10,11,13 Mała Street and at 16 and 22 Kolejowa (Sienkiewicza) Street, including the well known magazines of Etlia Rodal and Gitla Moszkowicz received commissar Ulrich Graze. Kurt Markwitz became an owner of the Shopping Mall at 36 Kolejowa Street, which had been taken from the Wilners and Sercerzes. The Jewish dye-house at 9 Piotrkowska Street was given to Gustaw Schör, M. Ellenchwajg's cinema on Staszica Street - to Wilhelm Vogt and was since then allowed only to Germans.<sup>145</sup> The German Gendarmerie took over the Hotel Polski - the property of the Zelingers.

M. Pelc, as chairman of the Judenrat, was more and more aware of the fact that the Germans were aiming at a total extermination of the Jews. His discussions with the German administration were generally unpleasant and involved a lot of humiliation. He had to beg the occu-

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<sup>144</sup> AŻIH, M. Bahn..., p.5.

<sup>145</sup> AP Kielce, AmK, call No. 2639; „Mitteilungsblatt der Industrie- u Handelskammer für den Distrikt Radom mit den emtlichen Bekanntmachungen der Abteilungen Wirtschaft und Preisüberwachung im Amt des Distriktchefs Radom” (Information Bulletin of the Chamber of Trade and Industry for the Radom District with official announcements of the Economic Department and the Department of Price Supervision at the Office of the Chief of the Radom District” - hereinafter „Mitteilungsblatt der Industrie- u Handelskammer...”) 1940, No.5, p.111.

pier for everything: for releasing the arrested, for food, provisions for welfare institutions and medicine for hospitals. When he got seriously ill in mid 1940 he decided to give up his function. In August 1940 new Judenrat elections were held and its structure was finally defined. The „Gazeta Żydowska” informed that the Jewish Council was comprised of the following departments:

I - Presidential. It received documents coming to the Judenrat, ordered them and sent to the appropriate branches.

IIa - Budget. It made budget plan and supervised its realization.

IIb - Tax. It kept a record of taxpayers and determined taxes.

III - Legal-administrative. It organized the supervision, regulated services, received applications to German authorities and was a mediator between the Jewish authorities and German administration.

IV - Executive. Executed different kinds of fees and fines paid to the Council of Jewish Elders and to collections entrusted to the Council by various institutions, both in cash and in kind.

V - Labor - Determined the place of labor for Jews able to work and carried out tasks commissioned by the German Labor Office.

VI - Social Care. Looked after and supervised soup-kitchen for the poor, old people's house, out-patients' department.

VII - Health. Supervised and looked after the Jewish hospital.

VIII - Purveyance. Provided the inhabitants with food and distributed food-coupons.

IX - Registration. It allocated living accommodation and flats, directed migration actions (organized lodging).

X - School. Registered school-age children and it was supposed to control schools in the future.<sup>146</sup>

The article also informs that the Jews were obliged, in spite of worsening financial situation, to pay several taxes, including personal, countervailing and hospital tax and contributions for the Jewish Council as well as for people working in labor camps. In the summer of 1940 the Judenrat was ordered by the Germans to start sending the youth to labor camps in the Lubelskie Voivodship, where they were used at building roads and drainage works. Those who were leaving received from the Judenrat money to buy additional rations of bread. It was excessive, ruthlessly rigorous work and they were given only

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<sup>146</sup> GŻ 1940, No.32.

subsistence food rations. Those who came back after a few months were ill, injured and battered. Fearing that they would bring contagious diseases to Kielce, staroste Hans Dreschel passed an ordinance providing that they should all be quarantined in an isolation house on Radomska Street. Ill, starved people had fewer opportunities to get a paid job therefore the number of people needing support was growing. At the end of 1940 3000 dinners and 500 food parcel a day were given to the Jewish population.<sup>147</sup> The Judenrat hoped to manage to solve the problem of purveyance. In the „Gazeta Żydowska”, in correspondence form Kielce concerning the supply of goods distributed for coupons it was stated: „The project includes also meat, which is to be distributed in great amounts.” Unfortunately, those hopes didn't come true. In mid December 1940 the soup-kitchen suspended giving free meals: „Due to a reorganization of the soup-kitchen for the poor inhabitants of Kielce the people receiving soup free of charge, deprived temporarily of hot meal, have to content themselves with raw products...”<sup>148</sup>

In 1940, according to Józef Bysiak, a system of barter developed between the Kielce Jews and the farmers from neighboring villages, such as: Białogon, Dąbrowa, Małocice, Masłów: „We used to provide them with food and they gave us tans.” Many Poles occupied themselves with illegal, but well-paid, tanning of animal skin. Tans and other necessary chemicals were taken from a stock hidden from the Germans.

In December 1940 doctor M. Pelc, despite insistent demands, resigned as the chairman of the Judenrat and took eventually the post of director of the hospital. In this situation the Germans appointed well known in Kielce Herman Lewi as the chairman. He was born in 1880. Since his youth he had been involved in timber industry. He served his apprenticeship in the saw mill of Henryk Nowak in Głębozka and then for many years directed the work of the Steam Saw Mill „Borków”. During the First World War he built on the outskirts „Głębozka” Fabryka Mebli Giętych (Factory of Bent-Wood Furniture) „Henryków” together with H. Nowak, H. Bruner, W. Moszkowski and his wife Helena. Lewi was also the owner of a big plot of ground on Młynarska Street, which he rented to different people for stocks and storehouses.

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<sup>147</sup> *ibidem*.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibidem*, 1940, No. 46.

He himself lived in a tenement house at 3 Głowackiego Street. He was active in the religious municipal department, the Board of the Jewish Commune, presided over the Union of Timber Merchants and was a board member of the Free of Interest Credit Society „Gemius Chesed”, a board member of the Jewish Rescue Committee during the great crisis, he represented the Kielce producers in the Voivodship Advisory Committee of Trade and Industry and the Chamber of Trade and Industry in Sosnowiec, he presided over the Association of Jewish Real Estates Owners in Kielce, he was also an activist of the LOPP and the National Health Service. He stressed many times his loyalty to the Polish state. He was, however, different from Pelc. He lacked the comprehension of the fact that the Germans aimed at exterminating the Jews. He sometimes behaved like megalomaniac, which spread on other members of the Judenrat.

On December 13, 1940 members of the Judenrat approached the Jews standing in a queue for food and took children by force, which immediately caused panic. The children were brought to the Department of Social Care, where they received clothes. This is how the „Gazeta Żydowska” reported this event:

„In stores of the Social Care in Kielce there are so called „American gifts” for the poor population (...) comprising mainly children’s clothes, warm dresses, coats, underwear, etc. The poorest and the most ragged children were taken from the queue and spontaneously given clothes. The kids, who at the beginning stood frightened in a flock, started stretching out their arms for the clothes. The cries of joy that accompanied giving out the gifts are beyond description. In this way on 13 December started an action of giving clothes to the poorest (...) In spite of temporal satisfaction of the needs, the poor population still lacks clothes. Taking it into consideration, the Department of Social Care has started a collection of old clothes among the people. Now it depends only on generosity of the society if the poor in Kielce will be provided with clothes.”<sup>149</sup>

The moment H. Lewi took up the post of chairman of the Judenrat another reorganization of this institution was carried out. Considering the new social situation, an equal representation of all societies in the Council was stressed. The professions, clerks and merchants had 5

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<sup>149</sup> *Ibidem.*



representatives each, the producers, craftsmen and workmen had 4 representatives each and 2 seats were reserved for the refugees. The Kielce Judenrat had 24 members. The idea of admitting refugees to the Council was quite significant because this group of Jews lives in the most difficult conditions, although it was attempted to provide them with everything they needed.

In the interwar period both the Kielce orphanage, which admitted children up to 14, and the old people's house, established by the Zagajskis, had their own buildings. In 1940 the Department of Social Care decided, due to an influx of displaced people, to move the orphanage and the old people's house to the building of closed by Germans Jewish Male High School on Poniatowskiego Street: „Thus, under one roof are housed two institutions that continue their activity thanks to the initiative of the management and the generosity of the society.”<sup>150</sup> Both institutions were financed by the Judenrat, small amounts for the sake of the old people's house gave also the „Joint” and the „Centos” (Central Society of Care about Orphans and Abandoned Children) supported the orphanage. The „Centos” led also, in cooperation with the Red Cross, the action of searching for families, coming into touch with Geneva.

Apart from the Judenrat and the Jewish Mutual Aid Society charitable actions were led, also by the Poviats Union of Jewish Craftsmen. Due to German ordinances, all Jewish craftsmen running their own workshops had to belong to this union. A monthly fee was of 2 zloty and 50 grosz for every employee. Generally, Jewish workshops had to produce what the Germans demanded, more of them worked therefore for the army. However, before the creation of the ghetto a lot had been produced for the Polish and the Jewish population. The union tried to provide its members with additional supplies of food and organized canteens for the workers and their families. Although the occupier was using the Jewish craftsmanship the situation was difficult. The Germans plundered Polish and Jewish property, limited trade and craftsmanship and tried in the same time to break up economic links between the Poles and the Jews. They were using very subtle methods. In the article: „Opieka nad rzemiosłem w okręgu radomskim” it was written: „... a Polish tailor or a Polish shoemaker was constantly in

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibidem*, 1940, No. 45.

danger of an invasion of Jewish invasion into the trade, although - as indicates the comparison with western territories - craftsmanship is foreign to the nature of this race of merchants.”<sup>151</sup>

In July 1940 the chief of the Radom District, doctor Karl Lasch, who participated in the opening of the Chamber of Trade and Industry in Radom, emphasized that the target he set himself was to create planned and strong economy because „the epoch of unbounded economy ended”.<sup>152</sup> In a bulletin of the abovementioned chamber it was written that the aim in craftsmanship would be to: „... eliminate, if possible, the unwelcome Jewish element, giving the Polish craftsman constantly all kind of help. The House of Craftsmanship expects and demands loyal cooperation of the craftsmanship.”<sup>153</sup> Because the „Information Bulletin of the Chamber of Trade and Industry for the Radom District” could be purchased in Eincher’s newsagent’s at 14 Leśna Street and the one of Lewkowicz on Starowarszawskie Przedmieście Street, such articles when read by a Jew caused some animosity, which was probably what the Germans expected. Anti-Jewish accents can be found also in the article „Instytucja Zarządu Powierniczego w Okręgu Radomskim” , where it was written:

„German administration met in the General Government economy almost completely dominated by the Jews with characteristic features for this kind of enterprise: lack of hygiene, disorder, negligence and decline. The pejoratively used term „Polish economy” means mainly rather „Jewish economy”. Within the frames of planned wartime economy the German administration faced the challenge to reanimate and to restore efficiency of Jewish companies which were additionally affected by military operations. In order to achieve this aim it was necessary to deprive the hitherto owners - Jews of the right to manage the companies and give this right to reliable trust managers. It has to be admitted that the appointed trustees, mainly citizens of the Reich and people of German nationality, did their best to lead the companies to a significant increase of production (...) To the Agency of Trust Administration at the Chief’s of the Radom District, directed by doctor Lang, are submitted 350 trust managers, who administer

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<sup>151</sup> „Mitteilungsblatt der Industrie-u Handelskammer...” 1940, No. 9, p. 199.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibidem*, 1940, No. 1-2.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibidem*, 1940, No. 9, pp. 199-200.

about 750 companies (...). Confiscated estates are administered by the board of the Department of Nutrition and Agriculture (...), estates with forest-administration together with companies that process timber and woodwork are administered by the Department of Forestry (...). Printing companies are under the General Manager, appointed by the Department of People's Education and Propaganda."<sup>154</sup>

Plundering Jewish property had different forms. Houses of owners absent from the General Government were confiscated on the basis of a confiscation ordinance of January 24, 1940.<sup>155</sup> The fate of the remaining houses depended on the commissioners' decisions. Confiscated were mainly the houses, the rent of which brought 500 zloty a month. In Kielce also the houses that brought an income of 200 zloty were considered attractive by the occupier. An example of another solution constitutes the case of the Factory of Industry and Timber „Henryków” which had been under the foundry „Ludwików” since the beginning of occupation. On September 3, 1940 the Germans from the Mortgage Office in Kielce ordered the following people to turn up before the notary Lucjan Jaxa Maleszewski: attorney Stanisław Styczeń, representing Maria Stefania Nowakowa, Henryk's widow and her son Stefan; a producer Henryk Bruner and Paul Steiner representing the company „Ludwigshütte A.G. in Kielce” as its manager appointed by the general governor on May 22, 1940. They met in order to sign a dictated by the Germans contract, due to which joint owners decided to rent real estates, machines, tools, offices and workshops of the „Henryków” to foundry „Ludwików” for 10 years dating from August 1, 1940. The rent was fixed at 250 zloty for every person monthly. P. Steiner reserved the right of pre-emption of the factory. Any disputed were to be solved by the German Public Court, excluding disputes between the owners. The agreement would be effective after its ratification by the Municipal Staroste in Kielce and the Trust Government in Radom.<sup>156</sup> In this way a factory that could employ 600 people was rented for 750 zloty, which means for 250 zloty per person. It was a monthly salary of a qualified worker.<sup>157</sup> The agreement had, however, an enormous psychological meaning. The Nowaks, the Bruners and the Lewis

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibidem*, 1940, No.10, pp 231-232.

<sup>155</sup> „GŻ” 1940, No.8

<sup>156</sup> AP Kielce, ZD PGR, call No. 3795.

<sup>157</sup> A. Massalski, S. Meducki..., p.144.

were convinced that „Henryków” continued to be their property, despite the disadvantageous agreement. Bearing this in mind H. Lewi, already as chairman of the Judenrat, would try to employ the best specialists because it was, after all, his factory, only temporarily rented. It also gave hopes that he would survive, because the agreement was to be valid for 10 years. However, they all forgot how perfidious the Germans were. Two years after signing the agreement the only surviving owner was Steiner.

Theoretically it was possible for the Jewish owners whose houses had been confiscated to receive 25% of the rent. Applications with documents certifying to their poverty were to be handed to the general trustee for Jewish and ownerless immobility - doctor Neumann in Radom. However, it was difficult to get the due money. The justification was that: „... the real estates were in state of horrible negligence. The houses were completely neglected and constituted objects of exploitation which were kept in good conditions only in exceptional cases.”<sup>158</sup> The first profit, according to the Germans, was spent on renovation. The poverty made it impossible for many people to pay rent, therefore the houses brought about 50-60% of expected income. In the prevailing situation, as the bulletin informed:

„Administration of houses in cooperation with the Accommodation Office or Lodging Office took energetic and decided measures against dilatory payers.”<sup>159</sup>

At the end of 1940 the occupation authorities and the Judenrat reminded the owners of shops and workshops about the necessity to purchase registration cards. It turned out that the number of commercial institutions owned by the Jews fell from 61,8% in 1939 to 32,3% in 1940.<sup>160</sup> Many shops with food, fabrics, and leather clothes ceased to exist. The storehouses were seized by German commissioners. The cards for keeping craftsmen's companies were bought by only 450 Jews.<sup>161</sup> It's remarkable that most cards were bought by Jews living on the streets that were later in the ghetto: Piotrkowska, Kozia, Orla, Starowarszawskie Przedmieście, Silniczna and Nowy Świat. From Plac Wolności (Liberty Square) only 14 people bought the cards, from Kiliń-

<sup>158</sup> „Mitteilungsblatt der Industrie-u Handelskammer...” 1940, No. 11, pp.259-256.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 260.

<sup>160</sup> *Bericht über Wirtschaftslage des Distrikts Radom im Jahre 1940, Radom 1941, p. 142.*

<sup>161</sup> AP Kielce, AmK, call No. 2639.

skiego Street - 18, from Sienkiewicza Street - 17, Wesola Street - 15, Leonarda Street - 7, Szeroka Street - 6, Ewangelicka Street - 3.<sup>162</sup> When the people noticed that the Germans were aiming at destroying the Jewish economic potential they didn't want to lose their, often last, savings. The Jews were poorer and poorer. This is a description of distribution of soup in one of the points at 4 Szeroka Street.

„In the street we are struck by a long line of waiting people. Everybody brings rags to keep the food warm. Then they rush home. Together with the soup they get 0,2 kg of bread for each person. The dinner costs 20 grosz. «Recently the soups have been tastier», says an old man, «They used to give soup with some potatoes and now they give also some fat.»<sup>163</sup>

The hunger made many people present themselves voluntarily for even the hardest work. A journalist of the „Gazeta Żydowska” informs in his report about the activity of the Department of Work that mainly the youth wanted to get this work: „A crowd of volunteers to work in quarries fills the room. These are mainly young people since they are the keenest to work.”<sup>164</sup>

According to the information concerning the creation of carpenter's workshops under the auspices of the Judenrat the men who were working there from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. earned 4 zloty a day and women 3 zloty: „It is absolutely notable that our workers come from the intelligentsia and are the former white-collar workers. These people have found employment here and are really satisfied with their job. Therefore we are called „carpenter's for the intelligentsia”.<sup>165</sup>

The situation of many craftsmen of the leather branch in Kielce was tragic:

„The moment the war broke out about 600 leather-stitchers and several thousand of small shoemakers became unemployed and this number was even increased by people displaced from other towns. Therefore the Council of Jewish Elders showed a plan to the local authorities, the realization of which would create employment for masses of unemployed leather-stitchers and shoemakers. Thus, on the initiative of the Council of Jewish Elders, with the approval of the au-

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<sup>162</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>164</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>165</sup> *Ibidem*, 1940, No. 24.

thorities, leather-stitcher's workshops have been opened, which have employed 600 specialists. The building specially given for this purpose is on Orla Street..."<sup>166</sup>

In this way it was managed to create place of work for only 10% of the unemployed. This is what one of the workers said about the organization of the workshops:

„We do piece-work, from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., including a lunch break from 1 to 2 p.m. and shorter breaks to have a rest and to eat something. The work is done according to a regulation made by the Council of Jewish Elders and we are doing our best to make the work as effective as possible. We are managed by a member of the Council of Jewish Elders, who is also a specialist leather-stitcher and an initiator of our workshop.”<sup>167</sup>

At the same time social stratification was becoming more and more apparent. While some people were starving the others were quite well-off, especially those who managed to get to the Judenrat and its branches. It's remarkable that in spite of quite a lot of information about the work of the Judenrat, which according to the report of the „Gazeta Żydowska” lasted „from morning till evening”, its members wouldn't give their names. Probably they were aware of the fact that the Jewish Council constituted to a lesser and lesser extent a representation of the Jewish society and was becoming a passive tool of the Germans.

The year 1941 brought other restrictions and impediments in the purchase of food:

„Thanks to an intense action of gendarmerie stations numerous cases of illegal slaughter and exceeding the price limits have recently been discovered in the district of Radom. In all those cases the authorities responsible for controlling the prices in the Office of the Chief of the Radom District in consultation with the Department of Nutrition and Agriculture submitted an application to the public prosecutor's office that they should be punished, taking into consideration the fact that such illegal machinations constituted a serious obstacle in the governmental action of supply and management.”<sup>168</sup>

The secret slaughter saved starving towns, including the Jewish population, from starvation. The justification for the action was that it „protected people's health”: „They would very often kill only ill cat-

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<sup>166</sup> *Ibidem*, 1940, No. 41.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>168</sup> „Mitteilungsblatt der Industrie-u Handelskammer...” 1941, No. 1, p.1.

tle in the secret slaughter. Therefore, as well as due to long and wrong storing of the meat, (...) meat unfit for mass consumption is accepted to trade, which constitutes a danger of an epidemic.”<sup>169</sup>

The Germans would always intervene when they thought that their business was endangered or ordinances were infringed. When on the Jewish New Year's Day some of the Jews didn't come to work, the German police immediately reacted: Sz. Zalberg wrote:

„In Rosz-Haszana some of the Jews didn't go to work and at night the Gestapo burst into Jewish houses (...). They were beating us till we lost consciousness and drove us onto a yard in front of the prison. There they checked the list and those who had been at work in Rosz-Haszana were sent back home, the guilty were severely kicked and put into prison, from where they were taken in the first transport to death.”<sup>170</sup>

A further attack on the remnants of the Jewish trade could be observed:

„The trade in the General Government is still characterized by specific features of the former Polish State's trade. It concerns mainly the structure of a trading company in general, to the dominance of one-man companies (...) and to strong participation (...) of the Jews. Because the wholesale has already been to a great extent freed from Jewish influence it may be presumed that the Jewish element has withdrawn to smaller trading companies and secret trade or smuggling. The removal of the Jewry from the trade ruled by the Jews combined with closing smaller and the smallest trading companies run by the Jews (...) would lead to liquidation of the hitherto existing excess.”<sup>171</sup>

The theoretical consideration was followed by practise. At the beginning of 1941 into the hands of the trustee Ulrich Graze in Kielce got the workshops and outfitter's shops that belonged to: Brandla Kaminer, Joel Kopel, Chaja Kaner, Samuel Kajzer, Nachemiasz Gabri-der, Hersz Goldfryd, Ruchla Świeczarczyk, Dawid Sylberman, Chaskiel Szmulewicz, Gołda Strosberg, Lejba Szydłowski, Rafał Zylberg, Regina Gertler, Szlama Grynspan, Josek Morgensztern, Chaja Rotenberg, Szaja Lebensztajn, Froim Włodomer, Bencjan Sztern, Dawid Zylberg, Hersz Szwaicar, Efroim Lewit, Majer Frajtag, Uszer Mordka,

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<sup>169</sup> *ibidem*, No.2, p.55.

<sup>170</sup> AŻIH, Sz. Zalberg, *Testimony*, call. No. 301/1705, p.3.

<sup>171</sup> „Mitteilungsblatt der Industrie-u Handelskammer...” 1941, No. 5, pp. 169-170.

Dwojra Rapoport, Adela Goldberg, Aria Tokowicz, Szmul Gerat, Maria Albirt, Moszek Tenenbaum, Jakub Balicki, Mojsze Elbaum, Jan-kiel Chmielnicki, Lejzor Tauman, Cyrla Balicka and Chaja Friedenson - together 41 companies.<sup>172</sup> Also the number of real estates confiscated by the Germans increased. In the Radom District they administered 1400 houses in the first quarter of 1941.<sup>173</sup>

Meanwhile, another wave of refugees reached Kielce. Only from the area of Ciecchanów came 7 huge transportations: „On March 3 to Kielce came a transport of Jews who were located in neighboring towns on the command of Kreishauptman (...). On March 6 and 12 two transports of Jews came: to Skarżysko Kamienna and to Kielce. It was already the third transport of Jews to Kielce.”<sup>174</sup> Because in Kielce there were no quarters the transports were directed to Nowa Słupia.

Each transport of Jews from the northern lands caused a shock in the Judenrat. The transported Jews were battered, hungry and ragged, without any money even for basic things. Only immediate help and the supply of food and clothes saved them from fast death of hunger and cold. To Kielce were coming also Jews from small towns of Ponidzie. In effect in 1941 the accommodating conditions deteriorated. In one room lived 5-6 people. Such density, combined with lack of running water and canalization, led to many diseases. Therefore the Judenrat ordered the sanitary service to see to regular baths of the people, giving clothes and bedding for delousing and vaccinations.

Till May 1941 the Municipality had been trying to keep, with a lot of difficulties, statistics concerning the Jewish population. According to the records 343 Jews died during 1940 and between April 1 and May 15 - 178 people.<sup>175</sup> So the number of deaths was increasing. The funerals were organized by the Funeral Brotherhood, which cooperated with the Judenrat because at each funeral the route of the procession had to be approved by the Germans. It wasn't easy because the Jewish cemetery was in a remote quarter of Pakosz and the shortest way led thorough Focha Street, where there were many houses and institutions occupied by the Germans. The statistics of deaths didn't include Jews killed in the Kielce prison, forced labor camps and concentration camps.

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<sup>172</sup> AP Kielce, AmK, call No. 2639, p. 47.

<sup>173</sup> „Mitteilungsblatt der Industrie-u Handelskammer...” 1941, No. 6-7, p. 195.

<sup>174</sup> M. Grynberg..., p. 102.

<sup>175</sup> AP Kielce, AmK, call No. 2651, p.1.



Despite the cruelty of war the basis of the Jewish life constituted home and family. In 1940 in the society of the Kielce Jews 127 marriages were recorded - 29 between April 1 and May 15.<sup>176</sup> It was, though, more and more difficult to provide for family. German patrols would stop Jewish women in the streets and search their bags. It was considered a crime to have food not coming from the food coupons. There were also revisions of Jewish houses and street roundups. A Kielce native Jechiele Alpert recollects:

„I was playing bridge at my friends' when we suddenly noticed tumult in the street. What's happening? They are catching Jews. The Germans were coming from one house to another, all street corners were occupied (...) They chose a few people and sent to concentration camps (...) to Dachau or Buchenwald and the rest were kept for 48 hours and then let go. My father and my sister Hela were also caught and kept in the synagogue; my father escaped through the window and after several hours he came back home (...). Another similar action took place before the creation of the ghetto (...). The Germans asked the Judenrat to organize a group of workers that was to be sent to the East. The Judenrat wasn't able to find workers because people were hiding and escaping so they organized an action themselves and sent the caught Jews to a forced labor camp near Hrubieszów. The conditions were very hard there, I heard it from a friend of mine who was caught and paid a lot of money to get out of there (...), each Jew had his own card and each profession its color...”<sup>177</sup>

There were different causes of arrests and putting into prison: secret trade, not obeying the curfew or appearing in the streets that the Jews weren't allowed to enter. In 1940 to prison on Zamkowa Street were put among others: Juda Wygańska, Icek, Jankiel and Blina Tarkieltaub, Mordka Zylberstein, Abram and Mojżesz Włoszczowski, Lejba Strawczyński, Chana and Saula Saubel, Bajla and Nuchym Zylbersztajn, Mordka Tajtelbaum, Szmul Zylberberg, Boruch Cytryn and Estera Wohl. Some of them were released after an investigation whereas the others got to concentration camps. To Aushwitz were sent: M. Włoszczowski, B. Cytryn and E. Wohl.<sup>178</sup> The former vice staroste of Radom

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<sup>176</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>177</sup> *Yad Vashem Jeruzalem, The Central Archives for the Disaszer and the Heroism (hereinafter Yad Vashem), J. Alpert, Testimony, call No. 03-295 (2725 - 197 C).*

<sup>178</sup> *AP Kielce, the Kielce prison, register of the inmates, call. No. 1155.*

and then a councillor of the Voivodship Government in Kielce, doctor of law at the Lvov University - Izaak Schützer had a horrible death. After a short investigation in the Kielce prison he was sent to Skarżysko Kamienna, where he was battered to death with sticks in a school building on the so called „Parcele”.<sup>179</sup>

The Jewish society had also to deal with different kinds of provocation. Since November 1939 Jewish barber surgeons and doctors hadn't been allowed to give advice to the Poles, not mentioning the Germans. H. Rotman-Kadera remembers that many suspicious people used to ask his father, S. Rotman a well known in Kielce barber surgeon, for house visits. Fortunately, Kielce was small enough to know all the inhabitants, so it was easy to guess that they were people sent by German police. The ban on treating the Poles significantly limited the income of Jewish doctors. However, the ban was ignored by the Poles, especially before the creation of the ghetto.

As early as in spring 1940 the German authorities held talks with the Judenrat about the creation of the Jewish police. After several weeks, though, that idea was abandoned. Only at the end of the year was this matter discussed again: „In December 1940 an announcement appeared in the Judenrat that the high school graduates or those who finished military colleges could apply for admission to the Jewish police. There were many candidates and even my close friends applied, not only applied but also used some protection to be admitted. But the Germans agreed to accept only a small group, so not everybody could be taken. (...) In February 1941 there was another action, people were caught to quarries and the Germans ordered the candidates for Jewish policemen to participate in the action.”<sup>180</sup>

Officially, the Jewish police service was created by the Germans in March 1941. Bruno Schindler - a Jew from Germany was appointed its commander. Initially, the police had 20 members and in May 1941 - 85, in 1942 this number increased to 127.<sup>181</sup> The Jewish police was provided with uniforms and with wooden batons. The Jews had been reluctant to that formation from the very beginning because they were aware

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<sup>179</sup> For many years he was also a Latin teacher in the Jewish Secondary School in Radom, he translated the works of Shakespeare into Yiddish - see S. Zieliński, *Gimnazjum Towarzystwa Przyjaciół w Radomiu 1917-1939*, „Radomir” 1987, No 11, pp. 33-44; W. Okoń, *Mój dwudziesty wiek*, Wrocław, Warszawa, Karków, 1990, p.201.

<sup>180</sup> *Yad Vashem, J. Alpert...*

<sup>181</sup> *GŻ 1942, No. 28.*

of the fact that it would be forced to fulfill all German orders and participate in the crimes of the occupier. And they were right.

The decisions of the Germans concerning the religious life were depressing for the Kielce Jews. As early as in October 1939 the ritual slaughter was prohibited and on January 26, 1940 - also public religious ceremonies. The Great Synagogue in Kielce was plundered and closed. It was used as temporary arrest during different anti-Jewish actions or as a storehouse of things stolen from the Jews. Prayer houses were closed, for example the greatest one on Słowackiego Street, which was also used as a storehouse. The Jews gathering in private houses for prayers were beaten and arrested, religious weddings were banned and people bathing in mikvehs were driven outside in winter. There were numerous reactions against such orders. To everyday prayers was added Caddish - a prayer for the dead, the synagogue silver was hidden, there were attempts to keep prayer books and despite persecutions the Jews didn't want to give up regular public prayers. Later on the rabbis cancelled some kosher regulations.

According to German ordinances the rabbi should be automatically a member of the Judenrat. However, both the head rabbi of the Kielce religious municipal department A. Rapoport and other rabbis tried to keep away from this institution. Also the majority of the Jewish intelligentsia in Kielce avoided any cooperation with the Judenrat, in spite of deteriorating material situation.



## Chapter III

# GHETTO

On March 19, 1941 appeared the „Ordinance concerning the regulation of accommodation and economic relations of Jews in the Radom District” based on the „Ordinance concerning restrictions of residence in the General Gouvenment” from September 13, 1940 and on the „Decree of the Department of Administration in the government of the General Governor” from November 21, 1940, where it was stated:

„In all cities there must be separate districts reserved for the Jewish population. In the choice of such districts the following factors must be considered: accommodation needs of the army and civil administration as well as the location of the offices of the military and civil authorities and German houses (...) The Jewish districts are not supposed to be ghettos or confined in any way but only to constitute a place to live for the whole Jewish population. The accommodation must also take into account Jewish doctors, dentists, pharmacists and midwives. The Council of Jewish Elders will submit a report about the localization of these people to the poviats staroste. The districts may be left (...) only under permission of the poviats staroste (municipal, town commissioner), who gives appropriate certificate (...) The entrance to all main transit roads of the district as well as main streets is forbidden for the Jews (...). It applies to the following streets: Krakau, Jędrzejów, Chęciny, Kielce (...) Kielce, Opatów, Sandomierz; Kielce, Chmielnik, Busko (...). All Jewish shops on the above mentioned streets outside the Jewish district must be closed, with the exception of the Jewish companies that are under the management of the trust government. The Jews are entitled to take the shop equipment and to open new shops in the Jewish district. Empty shop rooms should be given in the first place to people of German nationality for arranging German shops or to bigger companies for new branches (...) The Jewish districts will be administered by the Council of Jewish Elders in consultation with the commander of the SS, the Police and Jewish order service. The men of the order service are to be distinguishable and their task is to maintain peace and order in the Jewish district and not allow the Jews to leave the district without written permission. However, the supervision of Jewish districts by the German and Polish police is also possible.”<sup>182</sup>

A detailed ordinance concerning the creation of ghetto in Kielce was signed by Stadthauptmann H. Dreschel, the announcements by

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<sup>182</sup> „Amtsblatt des Chefs des Distrikts Radom in Generalgouvernement” 1941, No. 9.

the mayor of Kielce, M. Bogdanowicz. „The decree concerning the creation of a Jewish district in the city of Kielce” from March 31, 1941 provided:

1. The Jewish district of Kielce comprises the residential real estates named in the attachment of this decree.
2. All Jews domiciled in Kielce must live in the Jewish district. Permanent absence of the Jews from the residential district is forbidden.
3. The Poles living in the Jewish district must move out till Thursday, April 3, 12:00. New flats shall be given by the Municipal Accommodation Office. Non-Jews who have not left their flats by that time shall be displaced by force and shall not be allowed to take any equipment or any goods to their new flats.
4. The Jews living outside the Jewish district must move to the Jewish quarter till Saturday, April 5, 12:00. The flats shall be given by the Lodging Office at the Council of Jewish Elders. It is permitted to take equipment, personal belongings and legally purchased goods.
5. The Jews who have not moved to the Jewish quarter shall be displaced from Kielce by force and they shall not be allowed to take any equipment or goods, etc.
6. Commercial rooms, workshops and other Jewish companies outside the Jewish district must be also moved unless they are under the management of the trustees. The companies under the management of the trustees are exempted from this obligation. Non-Jewish companies in the Jewish district must be (...) moved.
7. Non-Jews are forbidden to give shelter to Jews. Not obeying this rule shall be punished by confiscation of flats.
8. All flats emptied in result of this action must be immediately reported - the Jews shall report to the Council of Jewish Elders and non-Jews to the Polish Accommodation Office.
9. The residential district created by the strength of this decree is to be regarded as an open residential district as the access of non-Jews is, as a rule, not forbidden.
10. The Jews are allowed to leave the Jewish district in commercial purposes as long as they have a permit with a photograph issued by my office. Applications for permits are to be tendered to my Office through the mediation of the Council of Jewish Elders with stating the motivation and attaching 2 photographs.

11. The Jews employed in non-Jewish companies outside the Jewish district shall receive permits for group march out from their district to the place of work.
12. The Jews are not allowed to enter Radomska, Piotrkowska and Bodzentyńska Street.
13. The Council of Jewish Elders in Kielce should supervise the proper arrangement of the Jewish district, maintain order and control sanitary and social facilities. It is responsible for orderly carrying out all necessary ordinances.
14. Not obeying this decree and other ordinances as well as executive decisions passed subsequently to this decree shall be severely punished and the property of the offenders shall be confiscated.”<sup>183</sup>

The ghetto comprised the area framed with the following streets: Orla, Piotrkowska, Nowowarszawska, Pocieszki, Radomska. That area was called the great ghetto. The small ghetto comprised St. Wojciecha Street and Bodzentyńska from St. Wojciecha Square inclusive. According to an attachment to the above quoted decree the ghetto comprised 50 buildings on Piotrkowska Street (numbers from 6 to 106), 30 buildings on Jasna Street (1-43, 2-6), 27 buildings on Stolarska Street (1-37, 2-14), 8 buildings on Wąska Street (1-14), 6 buildings on Krzywa Street (1-9), 37 buildings on Zagnańska Street (1-27, 2-44), 40 buildings on Okrzei Street (1-39, 2-4), 70 buildings on Nowy Świat Street (1-61, 2-72), 36 buildings on Starowarszawskie Przedmieście (1-37, 2-34), 8 buildings on Przechodnia Street (1-9, 2-4a), 4 buildings on Przechodnia Street (2-9), 48 buildings on Dąbrowska Street (1-37, 2-52), 28 buildings on Szydłowska Street (15-31, 2-38), 18 buildings on Targowa Street (1-23, 2-22), 25 buildings on Pocieszki Street (1-23, 4-22), 5 buildings on Nowowiejska Street (1-1), 24 buildings on Silniczna Street (1-15, 2-32), 8 buildings on Kozia Street (3-12), 43 buildings on Radomska Street (3-59, 6-26), 2 buildings on Orla Street (2-4), 10 buildings on Cicha Street (1-5, 2-12), 7 buildings on St. Wojciecha Street (2-14), 4 buildings on St. Wojciecha Square (1-4), 11 buildings on Bodzentyńska Street (3-23), 3 buildings on Marszałkowska Street (1-4), 1 building on Polna Street (2) and buildings between Szydłowska, Pocieszki and Targowa Street.<sup>184</sup> Generally, there were 500 buildings that

<sup>183</sup> „Anordnungsblatt für die Stadt Kielce” 1941, No 7, pp. 2-3.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibidem*.



could be inhabited by up to 15000 people,<sup>185</sup> while there were about 27000 Jews in Kielce.

An analysis of the decree shows that the occupation authorities feared passive resistance of both the Jews and the Poles, who were also evicted. There must have been some reasons for threatening the Poles who helped Jews.

On April 1, 1941 two announcements were hung on walls in Kielce. The first one concerned providing for carts for the time of displacing and the other - handing over the furniture and equipment from shops and institutions.

The first announcement informed the inhabitants, both the Poles and the Jews:

„In order to duly execute the decree concerning the creation of the Jewish district in Kielce and according to the order of Mr Stadthauptmann I call all owners of horses and carts to deliver their means of transport on April 2, 3, 4 and 5 from 6 a.m. in order to transport the luggage of displaced people. The assembly points have been fixed at: 1. Plac Wolności, 2. St. Wojciech Square, 3 Leśna Street, 4. Square at Starowarszawskie Przedmieście Street, 5. Square near the St. Cross Church (on the courtyard of priests Salesians), 6. Okrzei Street. The remuneration for the transport: by a one-horse cart - 5 zloty, by a two-horse cart - 7.50 zloty, by a platform cart - 20 zloty. The fare will be paid by people who this decree applies to.”<sup>186</sup>

In the second announcement it was stated:

„The furniture and other equipment, which in relation with the displacement to and from the Jewish district couldn't be fit in the new flats, should be handed over to the Council of Jewish Elders, as far as the Jews are concerned or the Municipal Board, as far as non-Jews are concerned (...) Who does not hand over the things defined by this decree and sells, hires, lends, destroys or locates at other people's houses will be severely punished, as well as the potential purchaser, and is responsible on pain of forfeiting his property.”<sup>187</sup>

The Germans gave only three days to carry out the complicated operation of moving to ghetto 27000 Jews<sup>188</sup> from the city. Although

<sup>185</sup> AP Kielce, AmK, call No. 2648, p. 80.

<sup>186</sup> Anordnungsblatt für die Stadt Kielce 1941, No. 7, p. 10.

<sup>187</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>188</sup> The Chief Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation in Warsaw (hereinafter GKBZpNP), Questionnaires of Town Courts, the Questionnaire of Town Court in Kielce, Kielce.72.

the action itself was quite thoroughly planned «on paper», there arose many problems which were rather difficult to solve within just three days. Apart from people also the equipment of flats, shops and workshops were to be moved. All that was left was lost. Similar problems had the Poles leaving the area intended for the Jewish population.

This is how J. Alpert recollects the creation of the ghetto in Kielce:

„There was a terrible mess with allocating flats, you had to bribe, and people with no money had difficulties with obtaining a flat. (...) We got a flat with another family: two rooms and a kitchen; we got a big room and the family a small room with the kitchen (...) Till the creation of the ghetto we had had a shop with building material, varnish; that all was left, we went to the ghetto without anything...”<sup>189</sup>

This is a recollection of the Pole Waclawa Zimolag-Szczepańska:

„We were woken up by aggressive knocking on the door. Through the window we could see that it was still deep night. Three or four men came in, civilians; they were speaking Polish (...).’You must move out within 2-3 days, swap flats with Jews because here there will be a ghetto’, they said. They noted the number of rooms and people. „God, how will I manage to pack it, I’m only with my daughter’, my mother tried to postpone the decision. «Don’t waste your time lamenting or going to the Municipality, it’s an irrevocable ordinance of German authorities. Not a single Pole is allowed to stay here’. They left. Fortunately, my mother was immune to reverses of fortune (...) When the day broke she drank only some coffee and went out to look for a flat. Almost on the doorstep she met the first guest - a young Jewess who asked if she could see out flat. My mom told me to write down the addresses of people whose flats were of similar size. She came back nearly in the evening (...) «I’ve walked whole Kielce and haven’t found anything: either too big or already occupied and people are running like crazy’. The following day she took the addresses and left (...). She came back at about midday and cried straight at the door that we had a flat - 2 small rooms on the ground floor (...) a Jewess from Piotrkowska Street was coming soon with a horse-cart with her things and we would load our things on it. We started packing. (...) We lived then on Nowy Świat Street, just by the station (...). The embankment of the railway constituted the northern border of the ghetto. I remember the move very

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<sup>189</sup> *Yad Vashem, J. Alpert...*

well. Horse carts were going along narrow Nowy Świat Street and it led to Starowarszawskie Przedmieście Street (...). It was difficult for two horse carts to pass without the chaotically loaded furniture catching on each other. Our table lost one leg in this way. I picked it up from dirty water of gutter before it was squeezed by iron wheels. I remember that nobody shouted, nobody was angry, nobody hurled abuse. Everybody was filled with dread (...). We were paralyzed by the fear of the future. We were gripped with fear. What will happen now? Why are they separating the Jews from us? Are they going to kill us? Or them? Nobody knew the truth, everybody felt something cruel looming, heading towards us and everybody was silent. Everything was happening in terrifying silence (...). When we were leaving our flat on Piorkowska Street the Jewess asked my mother if she could leave big linoleum on the floor and if we could clean it not with water but with white paste, like parquet floor. It was a normal care of a good, neat housewife who still held hope that she would return but never could tread on her favorite carpet in red flowery patterns.”<sup>190</sup>

Despite German threats, not only theoretical ones, which can be proved by the act of hanging Jan Nowak in Skarżysko for helping Jews<sup>191</sup>, many Poles decided to keep some things of the Jews so as the Germans couldn't get them. Janina Stein, the daughter of judge Witold Stein, writes:

„The couple Witold and Jadwiga Stein kept movables deposited from haberdashery shops of Warbrun, from R. Wallischowa's shop and the furniture of a Jewish attorney K. Wygnański. These goods were returned to the families of the murdered owners after the military operations stopped.”<sup>192</sup> A. Birnhak says:

„In 1941 the Kielce Jews were driven out of their homes and moved to the ghetto. Before we left our flat at 1 Plac Wolności, my dad deposited at Mr X a lot of valuables, jewelry, fur coats and even our piano «till the end of the war» (...) My poor parents thought that the war would soon end and that they would come back to their old flat with their belongings...” In 1942 the author found the above mentioned person and asked him to sell her things and give her the money:

<sup>190</sup> W. Zimoląg-Szczepeńska, *Groza sytuacji wisiła nad nami*, „Relaks Echo Dnia” 1991, No. 67, p.7.

<sup>191</sup> Z. Sadowski, *moja porażka, mój sukces*, p. 2 manuscript (collections of WBPk).

<sup>192</sup> J. Stein, *Życiorys Witolda Steina (1892-1960)*, p. 6, manuscript, National Museum in Kielce, Historical Section

„They gave me back absolutely everything. Thanks to Mr X I not only managed to survive but also some other people who I shared my food with.”<sup>193</sup> During a radio interview emitted by the Kielce Radio Janusz Pelc, the son of doctor M. Pelc, many times emphasized that Tadeusz Wroński helped the Jews a lot.<sup>194</sup>

Bookseller Feliks Grostal, when he realized that he wouldn't manage to save his well known bookshop, chose the best books and gave it by the mediation of Stanisława Massalska to the Public Library.<sup>195</sup>

Merchant Szaja Wajsman asked Teofil and Edmund Ząbek and Stanisław Urbański to keep his store of leather and tops of knee-boots. Later on they were sold and the money was sent to the ghetto with help of forester Franciszek Zajac and shoemaker Jan Muszyński.

On April 5, 1941 appeared „The decree about the creation of contagious area in Kielce”, where it was written:

1. The Jewish residential area is regarded as a contagious area with immediate effect.
2. Entering and leaving the isolated contagious area is forbidden.
3. Permits and certificates are invalid.
4. On the confined contagious area during the time of isolation the Jewish order service is under the Schutzpolizei Commander of the city of Kielce.
5. Not complying with the decree shall be punished every time in accordance with the provisions of the law, according to the strictest rules, irrespective of a person.<sup>196</sup>

The moment the decree was passed no intensified spread of contagious diseases was recorded. The conclusion is that the ordinance aimed at a complete isolation of the Jewish district from the rest of the city.

The Jewish district was enclosed partly with a fence and partly with barbed wire. Every several dozens of meters there were plates in Polish, German, Yiddish and Hebrew „Closed area. No entrance.” By the five gates there were plates with inscriptions: Jewish district”. In the former shop of Icek Kopel, on the corner of Radomska and Bodzntyńska Street there was later on a permit office, where it was also possible to get information about people who lived there. Some offices

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<sup>193</sup> A. Brinhak, *Cud ocalenia*, „Przemiany” 1988, No. 1, p.32.

<sup>194</sup> Collection of tape recordings of the Polish Radio in Kielce, *Saga Rodu Pelców*, call No. 3324.

<sup>195</sup> S. Król, *Memories...*, p.88.

<sup>196</sup> „Anordnungsblatt für die Stadt Kielce” 1941, No. 7, p.11.

of the Judenrat were moved from Orla to Okrzei Street, just like the seat of the order service.

On April 7, 1941 appeared an announcement about the necessity to report to the Accommodation Office all flats left by the Jews:

„In connection with the creation of a Jewish district in the city of Kielce I put all the house owners and administrators under the obligation to report immediately to the Accommodation Office, 5 Adolf Hitler Platz, 1st floor, free flats left by the Jews. Not obeying this order will be punished according to the binding law.”<sup>197</sup>

After concentrating the Jews in the poorest district of Kielce, where the buildings didn't have canalisation and running water and sewage was flowing in the gutters, the Germans finished the creation of their German district in the square of the streets: Sienkiewiczza, Żelazna, Żytnia and Szeroka. They occupied also Jewish flats, of course the best ones, in other places of the city.

Already during the isolation of the ghetto appeared an announcement to the Polish population ordering them to register their real estates in the Jewish district so that:

„...Arian owners of real estates could receive tenancy rent (...). They should submit a filled in and signed form. The forms can be obtained against a fee of 50 zloty in the Accommodation Office (...); the owners who do not report in the appointed time shall lose their rents for the benefit of the Municipal Government.”<sup>198</sup>

The opinions of Jews concerning the creation of the ghetto varied. Some people thought that the action aimed at separating the Jews from the Poles, which would automatically limit help given to the Jews, it would particularly impede getting food. According to others the ghetto gave a sense of security, the more that for some time the Germans were not allowed to enter that district. Because at the beginning the Jews cared for peace and order by themselves, some people joked that now it would be like in Tel Aviv.” M. Bahn recollects: „Hunger prevailed; we were closed like in prison. The only good thing was that we didn't see the Germans and weren't taken to labor. After 6 weeks the Poles started bringing food and we got into contact with the Arian part. The Jews who were coming from work used to bring food and

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<sup>197</sup> *ibidem*, No.8, p.15.

<sup>198</sup> *ibidem*, No.9, p.23.

other things.”<sup>199</sup> Marian Cecot recollects: At nights big groups of providers used to go around Kielce, mainly women and children, they used to buy some food and people would also give them something for free.”<sup>200</sup>

W. Zimoląg-Szczpańska: „...My mom knew that they were starving and when they appeared in the streets among the Poles it was possible to give them bread or other food, quickly, so that the gendarmes didn't notice. My mom had known the Wygnańskis before the war and she had seen their lovely little plump a few months old son. When she saw the Wygnańskis in a group of Jews going to labor she decided to help them. This is how it all started. She gave them food many times.”<sup>201</sup> Although after 6 weeks of isolation the Poles were allowed to enter the Jewish district, it still required some courage because the German gendarmerie regularly controlled the ghetto. Jan Taborowicz recollects: „I didn't go there; after all, people were afraid. The ghetto was fenced and the Germans were watching there.” M. Cecot: „The Poles rarely approached the ghetto. It was too dangerous.”<sup>202</sup>

The creation of the ghetto brought about great ruin of craftsmen workshops and shops. Out of 456 workshops and shops registered in January 1941 only 225 were left, which constituted almost 50%. The bookshop of Grostals ceased to exist as well as the Goldwassers' bookshop „Pocztówka”, known for selling post cards from Kielce in the inter-war period. Destroyed were the books from two typically Jewish bookshops located for a long time on Leonarda Street - of Aron Wolden and Moszek Mendel Walden. On Plac Wolności the following Jews had to close their shops; Estera Rozenblau, Fiszel Dajtelcwajg, Mordka Ke-steinberg, Jójne Listgarten, Henoch Strosberg, Mojżesz Goldberg, Jakub and Szaja Kohn, Henoch Glazer, Fajgla Wajcman; from Sienkiewicza Street were thrown out; Rywka Rutkowska, Abram Ber Ajzenberg, Dawid Sylberman, Judka Nawarski, Chana Kajzer, Cyrla and Moszek Mendrowski, Lejbuś Szydłowski, Bajla Chmielewska Wertel, Hersz Wolf Goldfarb, from Ewangelicka Street disappeared the shops of: Juda Gutman, Lejbuś Rozenwald, Szmul Moszek Lenczer; from Kilińskiego Street: of Dora Wajnberg, Chaim Barankiewicz, Szmul Hofman, Hersz Gestenfeld, Szlama Rottsztajn, Fajwel Borkowski; from Szeroka Street -

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<sup>199</sup> AŻIH, M. Bahn...p.6.

<sup>200</sup> P. Wroński, *Pamiętniki czasu umarłego*, „Gazeta Lokalna” 1992, No. 197.

<sup>201</sup> W. Zimoląg-Szczpańska, *Nikt nie znał prawdy*, „Słowo Ludu” 1991, No. 85, p. 5

<sup>202</sup> P. Wroński, *Pamiętniki...*

the shops of: Chaim Federman, Chaim Bugajer; from Wesola Street the shops of: Liba Cwajgiel, Naftula Gutman, Perla Goldberg, Szoel Garnfinkiel, Icek Cukierman, Rywka Kohen, Hilel Weltman, Abel Bramowicz, Jakub Apfelbaum, Icek Ber, Dwojra Rapoport and Jankiel Szykman. The situation was similar on other streets.

Also private doctors' and attorneys' practices were liquidated. From Hipoteczna Street the family of doctor M. Pelc and the family of barber-surgeon S. Rotman had to move out, from Wesola Street - the family of well known doctor Henryk Krauze and Leon Reitter, from Leonarda Street - doctor J. Szatz, from Sienkiewicza Street - Alter Fisztenberg, from Kilińskiego Street - dentist Anna Fiszer, from Focha Street - doctor G. Harkawi and dental technician Salomon Salomonowicz. From Kilińskiego Street had to move out attorney Izydor Zimmer, from Sienkiewicza Street - Jakub Wajnberg and Adolf Weisenfreund. Also well known producers were thrown out of their homes: Bernard Bugajer with his family (Józefa, Majer, Tauba), Maria Urbajtel with her daughter Regina, Henryk, Herszel, Chaja, Etl, Sara and Cypla Zagajski, Maks, Gabriel, Chaja, Samuel and Zofia Ellenchwajg.

Some factories couldn't be moved and therefore their owners had to give up the production. In this way the brick-field „Głęboczka” belonging to the Cukiermans, Marksons and Gołębiowski<sup>203</sup> as well the factory of candles on Czarnowska Street belonging to Jakub Szenfeld stopped the production. All kinds of social institutions had also to be moved. The old people's house and the orphanage on Poniatowskiego Street had to leave. The old people's house was moved to 24 Piotrkowska Street and the orphanage with 170 children to 2-4 Piotrkowska, on the corner of 30 Okrzei Street.<sup>204</sup>

According to the orders of the Judenrat in every building a House Committee was created and on every house were hung boards with names of all residents. The Judenrat had also to be informed, on pains of liquidation of a company, about the current address of the workshop or the shop. The Trust Government moved to the ghetto and took the house of Chana Holzkener at 17 Leszczyńska Street. For the purposes of the ghetto a post office was opened on its territory at 19 Radomska Street. One could phone all cities in Poland. It was possible to send

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<sup>203</sup> J. Skrzypek, *Przemysł obszaru zwanego Białym zagłębiem w okresie międzywojennym i latach okupacji*, „Informator Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Górnictwa, Hutnictwa i Przemysłu Staropolskiego w Kielcach”, Kielce 1976, p. 6.

<sup>204</sup> GZ 1942, No. 50.

parcels up to 2 kg on condition that one had a certificate of sanitary control.<sup>205</sup> There were no problems with sending and receiving money from outside the ghetto. After the creation of the Jewish district the Department of Work undertook a great action of verifying addresses, preparing to potential German orders concerning the employment because the obligation to work was still valid for the Jews.

The people were still looking for flats and rooms for their shops and workshops when the Judenrat was burdened with another serious problem connected with providing lodgings and food for about 1000 people. On April 12, 1941 a transport of Jews from Vienna reached Kielce. They were brought in solid Pullman cars with quite a lot of cash, clothes, food and medicine. They represented rich bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia. They were producers, merchants, musicians, doctors financiers for generations fully assimilated in their countries. They didn't speak Yiddish at all, which was widely spoken by the Polish Jews. They spoke mainly German or Czech, many of them knew French and English. The customs, clothes and behavior of the Kielce Jews evoked their surprise and reluctance. It soon turned out that they couldn't understand each other with the local people. The majority of them were unbelievers and tried to keep away from the representatives of Orthodox Judaism and Hassidism. They soon created their own compatriots' society and kept together. They were sure that they would return to Austria or Bohemia because on transporting them to the GG the Germans told them to buy return tickets.

At the beginning the occupier treated this transport in a different way from the local Jews. Those who had money could freely look for a flat in the ghetto. The poorer were put up in the former school Bejs Jakow on Aleksandra Street. They weren't forced to work in local factories unless somebody wanted to do the work voluntarily. The Germans didn't impede their correspondence with families scattered around the world. They were receiving numerous letters from Germany, Bohemia, Hungary, Switzerland and even the United States. There were also attempts to get into contact with a group of Vienna citizens transported to Lublin and Łódź. It proved to be more difficult than contact with Austria or Bohemia. After several weeks the majority of the Jews transported to Kielce were moved to smaller towns, which

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<sup>205</sup> *Ibidem*, 1941, No. 50.



even worsened the shock, especially among old, sick people. The death rate among them was enormous. Kazimierz Cichoń, a railway man working on the station Kielce Herby remembers trains going on this track with Jews from Western Europe: „...when I was a switch-man on the station Kielce I used to receive trains with Dutch Jews. There were several trains and they were all destined to Lublin and Majdanek.”<sup>206</sup>

Among the thousand people transported from Vienna to Kielce was Gertruda Zeisler. In her numerous letters to family living in different European countries she made interesting remarks about what was happening in Kielce. In August 1942 she died in gas chamber in Treblinka but her letters survived and were thoroughly collected by her family and printed.<sup>207</sup> When Zeisler got to the Kielce ghetto she was 53 years old, a widow of lawyer Maks Zeisler. Educated in Switzerland, speaking several foreign languages, she was an acute observer of life. She had been to Paris, London and Moscow. After the Wehrmacht had occupied Vienna she moved to Prague, where she had her family. From there she was transported to Kielce. She lived in hope that she would return to live on the Danube. She lived with her four compatriots at 45 Nowy Świat Street (later on 45 Arona Street). Relatively soon she managed to get into contact with her family, who helped her significantly sending money and parcels.

Her letters value more than the memories because she wrote down the events in the ghetto when they were still fresh. Being not from Kielce she could see some phenomena more clearly than the Jews living there for ages. Of course, the censorship was a significant impediment therefore she used many metaphors. Not being able to write about the death she was writing about passing time, etc. Her letters broke some stereotypes about the ghetto. The Jewish district wasn't so isolated to prevent the Kielce Jews from knowing what was happening in the world. It took the letters 7-8 days to get from Switzerland to Kielce, although it was war. It didn't take the parcels much longer. The Germans didn't limit their number. There were months when Zeisler received 5-7 parcels with such rarities as oranges, figs, currants and sweets. Beside food she was also receiving books. The source of information about the world constituted also the „Gazeta

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<sup>206</sup> K. Cichoń, *Zwrotnice życia*, p.44, manuscript (collections of WBPk)

<sup>207</sup> I did not survive... In March and April 1941 to the Radom district were transported 4000 Jews from Austria and Bohemia.

Żydowska”. It evoked great interest among the youth who often expressed their opinions there.

Generally, in mid 1941 there were about 27000 Jews in the Jewish district in Kielce, including about 2000 from Austria, Germany and Bohemia. This is how M. Bahn described the relations in the ghetto:

„There was created an administration with the following organs: the Judenrat, the police, the hospital, the accommodation office, the tax office, the post office, which gave the opportunity to phone different cities, department of work and many other commissions. I had some fears about the Jewish police already when it was created and my fears proved to be justified. You could wriggle out of a German policeman but from a Jewish one - it was impossible. I remember the following event: The Gestapo organized a round-up of Jews and a woman hid diamond earrings in her shoe. The Gestapo policeman couldn't find anything and went out to the neighbor; only a Jewish policeman stayed. The woman thought that she didn't have to be afraid of him and pushed the shoe further under the bed. He noticed it and called the Gestapo who found the earrings. She was sent to Auschwitz and her family soon received a certificate of her death. The Jewish police obeyed all orders of the Gestapo (...). Officially people were given 130 gram of bread every second day. The Jews were selling their last shirts; swelling of hunger (...) the children were looking for offal in rubbish dumps. The help was scarce. There was a Jewish Committee of Mutual Aid but its activity was too weak (...). There was also court of conciliation which dealt with disputes concerning flats and money (...). Special measures were taken when a member of the Judenrat or a policeman was offended. The accused person was taken to the side then and battered in the darkness. The privileged position of the Judenrat and the Jewish police caused bitterness among the Jewish masses. Hunger, coldness and forced labor led the Jewish population to despair (...). Severe sorrows and constant waiting for the death causes indifference. There were no schools. Very few children were learning privately. In orphanages were gathered children of the poor and orphans - together 288 children; there was also the old people's home for 70-80 people. There were some lectures and a few football matches. There were blackmailers and informers who swindled Jews out their money or told the Germans where goods were hidden. One was afraid of another. The golden thread of ethics and Jewish decency broke. Cor-

ruption started after doctor Pelc was removed and sent to Auschwitz. A certificate of his death was sent to Kielce. Newly appointed Lewi was a native of Kielce Jew and tried to fully please the Germans. There was still no religious life. The prayers were taking place in private houses. The religion had little influence on the masses and didn't protect them from extermination. The war with Russia and America even worsened our situation. They started beating communist Jews for who in their view should be wiped out (...). Usually after 9 p.m., when the ghetto was closed, there was some relief. People gathered for prayers or visited one another to relieve stress after a day of humiliation."<sup>208</sup>

There are two important statements in the memories of M. Bahn:

„The middle class (...) withdrew fearing to give help to others. Serious worries, constant waiting for the death caused indifference."<sup>209</sup> Indeed, although there were many people in the ghetto who had been socially active before the war, including teachers, musicians and even stage performers, no steps were undertaken to create an orchestra or a small band. Only as late as in February 1942 there was some information about artistic performances, though, prepared by amateurs. People were becoming listless. The main aim of most activities was getting food and fuel in winter, sometimes also medicine. Bread was the most important topic of every day, in the course of time even more important than human life.

And here are remarks about the Kielce ghetto in letters of G. Zeisler from June to December 1941.

„...there is almost nothing to buy and everything is very expensive (...). People who receive parcels help those who are less lucky ...) winter and high prices of wood make our life difficult..."<sup>210</sup>

In her letter written at the end of October 1941 Zeisler writes:

„The post day - our only pleasure and entertainment turned into a source of suffering and tears. We haven't still received parcels from the Protectorate (...). I'm not in that bad situation as I haven't had to sell any of my dresses yet (...) In the afternoons we look for shelter in an outbuilding shared by 4 emigrants and we find some warmth here and the opportunity for a friendly chat. Usually our discussions enter

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<sup>208</sup> AŽIH, M. Bahn..., p.6.

<sup>209</sup> *ibidem*.

<sup>210</sup> *I did not survive..., a letter from 10.10. 1941.*

around food and high prices, etc. From time to time we touch upon a really interesting subject or Mrs. Sachs reads in a loud voice...”<sup>211</sup>

On November 7 she wrote:

„...The Gutmans have the opportunity to leave for Cuba. Of course, I'm very glad but for me it means greater loneliness (...) and I'm beginning to doubt if I'll manage to go through it. The prices are still growing, I receive only a half of the parcels sent by friends and to make the matters worse, I'm still worrying how to get an allowance of solid fuel. If only I stood a chance of getting a job. But unfortunately, it's rather impossible for a woman. One of my friends tried to dig potatoes one day. Although she is a very diligent worker and younger than me she had to give up. She was exhausted in the evening and destroyed her last clothes and shoes (...). The world looks very gloomy.”

In one of her letters Zeisler characterized the attitude of the Vienna Jews to the local people: „...a constant company of noisy, dirty and unfriendly people isn't pleasant. At the beginning I used to take their part because they are very unhappy, just like us. But the longer I am here the less I understand them. Only the children are charming in spite of that all.”<sup>212</sup>

Meanwhile, to the Kielce ghetto were coming new people, from: Warsaw, Piaseczno, Garwolin, Chmielnik, Działoszyce, Szydłów, Lelów, Żarki, Chęciny, Bodzentyn. It caused constant problems with accommodation and food prices increase. Some people were looking for a job. The working brigades consisting of Jews worked in the quarries in Kielce, Sitkówka, and Chęciny, in mills, feather processing factories and in the following industrial plants: „Ludwików”, „Henryków” and „Hasag” that is the pre-war „Granat”. K. Cichoń recollects:

„Every morning young Jews and Jewesses were driven to work on the railway. They didn't get any money and were taken to the ghetto for night.”<sup>213</sup>

This is what he wrote about how the Germans treated them: „Battered and pushed, kicked, treated like animals”. We learn about the work at the „Henryków” from the memories of M. Sowiński ; „The director of the Holzwerk (timber works) was reichsdeutsch Nazi Fuss. He distinguished himself in brutal treating the workers, especially Jews.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibidem*, a letter from 31.10.1941.

<sup>212</sup> *ibidem*, a letter of 17.10.1941.

<sup>213</sup> K. Cichoń, *Zwrotnice...*, p. 39.

There were numerous cases of battering and even shooting at the workers..."<sup>214</sup> H. Opara wrote about Fuss" „He bullied and beat people with a wooden rod and particularly the Jews who were employed there."<sup>215</sup> About the situation of Jews in the „Ludwików” wrote also Czesław Król: „There were craftsmen, merchants, etc. They were doing auxiliary work, loading and unloading goods, cleaning rooms and the territory of the factory..."<sup>216</sup> H. Opara adds: „...in our electric workshop worked two Jews. One of them was an electric technician - Henryk Minc, a former radio-engineering shop owner on Sienkiewicza Street, the other was an electrician from Łódź."<sup>217</sup>

Some Jews were transported from Kielce to work in other towns, mainly to Skarżysko Kamienna, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski and Pionki. The information about the working conditions was falsified on purpose. This is an announcement in the „Gazeta Żydowska” from 1941 calling to work in the factory „Hassag” in Skarżysko Kamienna:

„The Department of Work at the Council of Jewish Elders in Kielce informs that the industrial plant „Hassag” in Skarżysko Kamienna has reported demand for 100 Jewish workers for different jobs. They provide full board and daily remuneration or piece-work. Transport to the place of work and return for Sunday by company cars. The Council of Jewish Elders in Kielce provides the volunteers with 1 kg of bread weekly. The registration will be done by Department V at 4 Orla Street in office hours."<sup>218</sup> The local Caring Committee of Jewish Mutual Aid joined in the agitation informing that: „...all family members of people who voluntarily left to work at the „Hassag” in Skarżysko Kamienna will be receiving dinner from the kitchen of the Jewish Mutual Aid until further orders. All interested should report to Department X of the Social Care at the Council of Jewish Elders."<sup>219</sup>

In fact in Skarżysko Kamienna the Jews were used to the hardest and the most dangerous work, among other to fill artillery missiles and mines with trotyl. For 12 hours people employed in the so called werk C were scooping hot trotyl with buckets and pouring it into the

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<sup>214</sup> M. Sowiński, *Memories*, p. 14, manuscript (collections of WBPK).

<sup>215</sup> H. Opara..., p.41.

<sup>216</sup> Cz. Król, *Moje życie, moja praca*, pp. 5-6 (collections of WBPK).

<sup>217</sup> H. Opara..., p.41.

<sup>218</sup> GŻ 1940, No.80.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibidem*.

missiles. The vapors of picric acid were destructive. The Jewess Róża Baumminger wrote that the picric hall was „dripping with blood”:

„...in trotyl dust, at cleaning the grenades they had to do enormous norm, which was constantly increased (...). At every table there were several controllers with whips who supervised fast work. It would be possible to sit while cleaning the grenades but so as to torture them more the Jews weren't allowed to use chairs, the number of which was sufficient in the hall. The legs were heavy and swollen hands couldn't keep up with the killing pace of work. Any rest was out of question, a product was passed on from hands to hands and they were hurried to carry out the norm.”<sup>220</sup> We can read in Dawid Rubinowicz's memories about the situation of the Jewish brigades in the „Hassag”: „... if somebody sings badly or marches in a wrong way - is battered (...) During 13 hours they are not allowed to sit down even for a moment...”<sup>221</sup> Small groups of Jews were also abused in waterworks companies, storerooms of things confiscated by the Sipo at 1-3 Mickiewicza Street and a car base located there.

In June 1941 the Jewish society was struck by another event. Doctor M. Pelc was arrested for conspiratorial activity, among other thing for falsifying Arian documents and organizing escapes of Jews from the town. Arrested were also Poles, for example the director of Municipal Hospital doctor Marian Gustek and Superintendent Marian Green. The day after the arrest of M. Pelc the Gestapo detained doctor Gerszon Harkawi, who during the defense war in 1939 had been a doctor of the 3. light artillery regiment and doctor Oskar Serwetnik. The daughter of the latter writes:

„The chief of the Gestapo offered my father work for the Gestapo because he was a well known doctor. In secret, my father was kept for three weeks in prison and then sent to Auschwitz, just like Pelc. Two days before the transport I saw doctor Pelc accompanied by two SS-men in the city, he was all in blood. After three weeks they received a telegramme from Auschwitz that my father and doctor Pelc died of pleurisy. They both had always enjoyed good health.”<sup>222</sup> According to files of the Auschwitz camp M. Pelc came to the camp with Radom

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<sup>220</sup> R. Baumminger, *Przy pikrynie i trotylu, Cracow 1946*, p.25.

<sup>221</sup> *Pamiętnik Dawida Rubinowicza, Warsaw 1960*, p. 107.

<sup>222</sup> *Yad Vashem, L. Serwetnik, Testimony, call No. P.III, n. (Kielce) 676*, p.1.

transport on July 30, 1941 together with doctor M. Gustek, Szloma Gotfryd, Arian Bester and Nikodem Rawicki.<sup>223</sup> Pelc was marked with number 19066 and as a political prisoner he was directed to the Stafkompanie that is to penal campaign. M. Pelc was laid on the floor and an SS-man put his foot on his throat crushing it. Jan Sikorski, who knew Pelc personally, writes: „In prison and later on in Auschwitz doctor Pelc enjoyed great sympathy among other prisoners as a Polish patriot and a good, kind friend.”<sup>224</sup> Similar confidence and sympathy of the prisoners won later on another Jew from Kielce - doctor Henryk Krauze, who treated patients in Auschwitz-Birkenau: „He worked disinterestedly and with devotion.”<sup>225</sup>

The ghetto was a site of both individual, common crimes and the ones specially prepared by the Gestapo. Bogumił Sędek was an eye-witness of a visit in the Jewish district of two well known in Kielce Nazi murders: Hans Gayer and Gerulf Mayer:

„Through Jewish policemen they ordered two Jewesses to go out to their cart: Lewi, a pretty 26-year old widow of Lewi, who had been shot by the Germans after entering Kielce and about 28-year old Goldberg’s wife. I think that both men were drunk and behaved in a very noisy manner. Both Jewesses went to them. The Nazis wanted to force them into the cart and take them in indecent purposes. The women opposed. Suddenly Lewi hit Gerulf Mayer in the face. Both Nazis began beating the Jewesses, kicking them with their shoes; the women fell on the ground. Finally Mayer shot Lewi and Gayer - Goldberg’s wife.”<sup>226</sup>

This is what M. Bahn wrote about the Sipo chief, Ernest Thomas:

„One evening he burst into the ghetto looking for some Zawadzki (..) He found his wife who said that her husband went to pray. He went with her to the flat where her husband was praying. He ordered everybody (...) not living in this house to undress (...). He told them to switch the light off and hitting them with horsewhip drove them out of the house”.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> *Auschwitz Museum, Archive, Personal card of M. Pelc, call No. D.An.I.-29139, p.2; Yad Vashem, L. Serwetnik..., k.2.*

<sup>224</sup> *J. Sikorski, Ten dumny..., p.20.*

<sup>225</sup> „*Przegląd Lekarski*” 1961, No.1, p.79.

<sup>226</sup> *Circuit Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation in Kielce (hereinafter OKBZpNP), S. Sędek Testimony, call No. Ds.21/68, v. 2, p. 97.*

<sup>227</sup> *AŻIH, M. Bahn..., p.8.*

Also H. Gayer enjoyed such excesses: "...once he went into the mi-keh and threw naked Jews out on the street. There was frost and snow outside. And they were standing there battered with a (...) baton..."<sup>228</sup> Because there were photos of those events, some copies are preserved thanks to Polish conspiratorial photographers.

Anna Mardeusz, who entered the ghetto with a friend, described what they saw there:

„...when the policeman wasn't watching I crossed the forbidden border of Okrzei Street (...). The streets we were going along smelled awfully because of the gutters, into which in those times all sewages were poured. We were passing terribly ragged people who were with serious faces moping about like shadows. From the distance we could hear hysterical screaming of a battered man and the bark of police dogs. It was becoming horrible; I was shivering (...) and started to look for a way-out from that labyrinth. Only after an hour of wandering around did an old Jewess show us a secret exit. When we got out of that hell, we had sweat on our foreheads.”<sup>229</sup>

The first „special” action was carried out against the Jews who came to Kielce from the lands behind the Bug after the outbreak of German-Russian war. S. Celer wrote about E. Thomas: „He was leading an action against the refugees from the USSR. One night he dragged them from their houses, ordered to go outside on the street and shot them with his people. Those were the following Jews: Tomala, Henisz, Weber and others”. Under the accusation of a communist activity the Gestapo shot in their flat Abram, Estera and Szloma Grynszpan on November 13, 1941.

On August 20, 1941 a round-up took place in the ghetto, due to which to prison were taken: Benjamin, Lejwa, Szajndla, Chandla and Estera Cukierman, Estera Prajs, Izrael and Estera Minberg. After a short investigation they were all sent to extermination camps. Some Jews were killed behind the walls of the Kielce prison, among them Estera Walden on October 15 and Alter Zylbersztajn on November 15.<sup>230</sup>

The situation of the Jewish population was worsened by the fact that the Germans managed to force the Jewish police to close cooperation in fighting illegal, according to the Germans, trade. Between May

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<sup>228</sup> *ibidem*, p.9.

<sup>229</sup> A. Mardeusz, *Wycinki z życia i pracy*, p.7 (collections of WBPk).

<sup>230</sup> AP Kielce, *The Kielce Prison, Register of prisoners*, call No. 1156, 1157



and December 1941 68 Jews were punished with fines of 25 to 2000 zloty for smuggling food to the ghetto. When it turned out to be not effective enough 4 policemen were shot because it was proved that they turned a blind eye to smuggling. After that event the Jewish police became exceptionally vigilant. However, the hunger forced people to risk contacts with the Poles. It can be proved by the fact that the authorities warned people from standing in groups near the gates and fences of the ghetto. Trade associations tried to improve the situation. The craftsmen opened a soup-kitchen for the poorest and at the end of June they were giving already about 1000 soups. The workers followed them and also decided to start their own soup-kitchen.<sup>231</sup> It was possible to carry out those aims because the Judenrat managed to win the assurance that „all fruits of fields and gardens belonging to the Council of Jewish Elders will be sold by the way of tender”.<sup>232</sup> People applying for the purchase of the products had to deliver their offers to the Department of Gardens and Agriculture of the Council of Jewish Elders, which had its seat on the territory of the former Forest Inspectorate at 32 Starowarszawskie Przedmieście. In July 1941, because the number of people who needed help increased due to the policy of the occupier aiming at starving the Jews to death, the Jewish Mutual Aid opened another soup-kitchen at 10 Cicha Street. An announcement put in the „Gazeta Żydowska” informed:

„All interested in using the soup-kitchen should register in the office of the Local Welfare Committee ŻSS at 10 Kozia Street. The right to use the kitchen number 3 have in the first place those people who haven't profited so far from the Social Care. People receiving dry products from the Social Care can exchange them for prepared meals.”<sup>233</sup>

On October 11, 1941 appeared the „Announcement concerning factories in the General Gouvenment”. According to the announcement, all industrial, commercial, craftsmanship plants, public institutions and facilities of private and cooperative character, factories and cooperative societies of farm production - dairies, drying rooms, mills and saw mills in Kielce should be registered.<sup>234</sup> According to existing regi-

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<sup>231</sup> GŻ 1941, No.51.

<sup>232</sup> *ibidem*, No.52.

<sup>233</sup> *ibidem*, No.60.

<sup>234</sup> „Anordnungsblatt für die Stadt und Kreishauptmannschaft Kielce” 1941, No. 1, p.3.

sters, at the end of 1941 to the most significant industrial plants working in the Kielce ghetto belonged: tin factory of Szmul Szydłowski (6 Piotrkowska Street) and of Jakub Kaner (10 Piotrkowska Street), upholsterer's workshop of Jakub König (20 Silniczna Street) and of Juda Eichenbaum (13 Silniczna Street), parquet workshop of Ajzyk Kaczyński and Juda Eichenbaum (13 Silniczna Street), locksmith's workshop of Lejba Hirszman (10 Okrzei Street), glazier's workshop of Jakub Wajnberg (6 Piotrkowska Street) and Jakub Zylberg (31 Okrzei Street), carpenter's workshop of Szaja Zunsztajn (28 Silniczna Street) and Judka Goldlust (6 Piotrkowska Street), painter's workshops of Szlama Bruk (13 Silniczna Street) leather workshop of Izrael Rotenberg (1 Kozia Street) and manufacture stores of: Aron Ickowicz (33 Piotrkowska Street), Bajla Rapoport (31 Okrzei Street), Dawid Zylberg (2 Bodzentyńska Street), and Jusek Nejman (35 Piotrkowska Street) Perla Srawczyńska, Sara Zunsztajn (28 Silniczna Street) storehouse of sea-grass and upholstery articles of Juda Eichenbaum (3 Silniczna Street). Those were small companies employing 1-2 people working mainly for the needs of the Jewish inhabitants. Commissioner Waław Raławski created on behalf of the German authorities „Shoe Center” at 62 Kolejowa Street for which worked 17 shoemaker workshops in the ghetto, such as the workshops of: Jusek Zilberman (12 Radomska Street), Jakub Wajcman (10 Kozia Street), Kalman Sołowski (72 Piotrkowska Street), Rafałowicz and Lewkowicz (11 Silniczna Street), Moszek Lubelski (36 Piotrkowska Street), Szmul Lewensztajn (17 Okrzei Street), Lewit and Krakowski (60 Nowy Świat Street), Laks Rotenberg (9 Silniczna Street), Jakub Ickowicz (6 Radomska Street), Abram Herszkowicz (10 Radomska Street), Aron Gottlieb and Icek Tenenbaum (14a Starowarszawskie Przedmieście Street), Nuchyn Gorlicki (12 Piotrkowska Street), Moszek Garnfinkiel (3 Targowa Street), Todorys Gebrider (3 Silniczna Street), Zelik Fajersztajn (60 Piotrkowska Street), Icek Czarny (10 Kozia Street) and Izaak Blank (34 Nowy Świat Street).<sup>235</sup>

For fear of starvation people were ready to take up every, event the most difficult work. The Germans and the Judenrat were using that. The „Gazeta Żydowska” from October 12, 1941 included an announcement:

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<sup>235</sup> AP Kielce, AmK, call No. 2639.

„Rachmil Rozenholc brick-field in Kielce needs 15 Jewish workers for piece-work or for daily remuneration. Full board, flat and piece-work or daily remuneration provided. Volunteers will be given additionally by the Council of Jewish Elders 1 kg of bread per person a week. Registering can be done at the Department of Work of the Council of Jewish Elders at 4 Orla Street in office hours.”

Another announcement in the same newspaper concerns quarries:

„The quarries Rykoszyn-Bukówka need 20 Jewish workers for breaking and transporting stone. Full board, flat and piece-work or daily remuneration provided. For Sundays Rykoszyn-Bukówka provides return to Kielce. Volunteers will be given by the Council of Jewish Elders in Kielce 1 kg of bread weekly.”<sup>236</sup>

If they attracted people offering them 3 slices of bread daily, it means that there was real hunger. On the other hand these advertisements mean that the Jewish society was conscious that the offered work was the worst, heaviest and the most dangerous one. Otherwise, there would have been more volunteers than places.

At the end of 1941 other restrictions were introduced for the Jewish population. On October 15 appeared the so called „Third decree concerning restrictions of residence in the General Government”. It was stated among other things:

„Jews who unauthorized leave their district are liable to death penalty. In the same way shall be punished people who give shelter to Jews. Inciters and assistants are liable to the same punishment as the perpetrator; any attempt shall be punished in the same way as a carried out deed. In minor offences severe imprisonment or prison will be adjudged. The verdicts are given by Special Courts.”<sup>237</sup>

„The decree concerning restrictions of residence of Jews in the Radom District” of December 11, 1941 prohibited the Jews from leaving their place of residence. Any leaving the ghetto could be done only on the base of a permit given by the poviats staroste or the municipal staroste. The Jews were not allowed to use any kinds of vehicles that constituted a private property, particularly horse carts on public roads out the place of residence: „Jews who illegally leave the determined by this decree districts will be punished

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<sup>236</sup> GŻ 1941, No.97.

<sup>237</sup> „Verordnungsblatt für Generalgouvernement” 1941, No.99, p.595.

with death. In the same way will be punished those who give them shelter.”<sup>238</sup>

„Tightening the ghetto” confirmed the Judenrat in the conviction that the Jewish districts were permanent. Therefore it was decided to keep order in the occupied area of Kielce. The Building-Agricultural Department was created at the Judenrat, which in the first place „...cleaned the Jewish district of sewage and litter. Having finished that task the Department started ordering the streets and doing, with a lot of effort, building works necessary in the newly created district in order to make possible foot and wheel traffic between different parts of the district.”<sup>239</sup> However, because keeping order was beyond the ability of the above mentioned Department licensed city cleaning plants were introduced in 1941, which had to pay fees to the department of 50 grosz monthly.

The Social Insurance was reactivated, which had now its seat at 17a Okrzei Street. Doctor J. Lewinson was appointed head doctor. The office hours were from 14:00 to 15:30 and from 18:30 to 20:00. People coming for consultation had to show an identity card of the Insurance and a certificate from the place of work. It didn't apply to the youth under 15. It wasn't very difficult to find a doctor in the ghetto. There were doctors, barber-surgeons, dentists, dental technicians. If someone had money it was easy to have all kinds of examination. It was much worse with medicine which had to be smuggled from the Polish side.

The Judenrat hoped that in the course of time it would manage to create Jewish education. Therefore they were registering the youth and keeping lists of teachers. Unfortunately, the talks with the Germans didn't bring any results. The only official courses were nurses' courses. There were no restrictions in this matter because those people were to protect the district from epidemics of contagious diseases, which the Germans were afraid of.

The only thing that could be done was self-education. After closing the ghetto it was more difficult because Jewish bookshops were destroyed. From the letters of G. Zeisler we know that the Kielce residents asked the Vienna residents for help, for sending children's books to the ghetto. She wrote on April 30, 1942:

„....On 26 of this month I received a parcel with books for children, which caused great joy among my friends.” In February 1942 the De-

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<sup>239</sup> GŻ 1941, No. 51.

<sup>238</sup> *ibidem*, No. 115, p. 696.

partment of Craftsmanship and Industry of the Judenrat organized a 3-month long course of cutting and sewing ladies' and children's clothes and underwear. It worked in the workshops at 2 Warszawska Street. People who had the so called Arian documents participated in secret courses covering the programme of high school, which allowed them to take part in secret university courses. In this way Icek Mincberg and Maria Machtynger studied medicine.<sup>240</sup>

The Kielce Jewish Council supervised unofficially the Judenrats in Bodzentyn, Daleszyce, Nowa Słupia, Bliżyn, Górnó, Krajno and Samsonów. On a common meeting it was decided that the Kielce Jewish hospital would admit ill Jews from towns and villages near Kielce and in return the Judenrats over there promised to provide for food. Because it was quite difficult, in practice people were directed to the Kielce hospital only during epidemics of contagious diseases.

The first satisfaction of the Jewish society, which cost them dearly, though, came in December 1941, when in Russian frost and snow ended the German dream about Blitzkrieg. On December 24 the commander of the security Police and Order Service in the GG, Eberhard Schögärth, on personal command of Heinrich Himmler, ordered the SS commanders and the police to confiscate immediately all leather clothes and fur coats of the Jewish inhabitants. They were to be sent to the front. Not handing over the fur coats would be punished with death. The Kielce Judenrat ordered to send the coats to its seat, from where they were transported to stores organized in the bishop's palace. The fur coats from Bliżyn, Daleszyce and Nowa Słupia were also stored there.

When talking about 1941 another German action, this time a spectacular one must be mentioned. That action aimed at ridiculing the Jews and constituted a sensation on the country's scale. In June 1941 names of 58 streets were changed in Kielce. Some new names were related to the 1000-year-old tradition of the Reich and weren't allowed to be translated into Polish. Thus, the pre-war Pierackiego Street was now named Strasse der Deutschen Wehrmacht, Wesoła Street - Kommandaturstrasse and Klińskiego Street - Gouvernementstrasse. They changed also some names of streets in the ghetto, trying to ridicule the Jewish society with the new names: These are the ghetto streets:

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<sup>240</sup> A. Massalski, *S. Maducki...*, p. 372.

Dąbrowska Street	– Figowego Liścia [Fig-leaf - E.W.] Street
Jasna Street	– Zaśniedziała [Verdigris] Street
Kozia Street	– Mojsze Street
Krzywa Street	– Abrahama Street
Nowy Świat Street	– Arona Street
Okrzei Street	– Jerozolimska Street
Pocieszka Street	– Trefna [Tref] Street
Przechodnia Street	– Sary Street
Przecznica Street	– Jojnego Street
Silniczna Street	– Srebrnego Kamienia [Silver Stone] Street
Stolarska Street	– Dawida Street
Szydłowska Street	– Czosnkowa [Garlic] Street
Targowa Street	– Izaaka Street
Wąska Street	– Rabinów [Rabbis'] Street
Starowarszawskie Przedmieście Street	– Szczęśliwa [Happy] Street <sup>241</sup>

The action was on everybody's lips so that even Emmanuel Ringelbaum noted it in his *Kronika*: „In Kielce the names of streets have been changed into: Jojnego, Abrahama, Czosnkowa, Figowego Liścia, Zaśniedziała, Treife, Gasse, Jerozolimska, Rabina. On the gate there is an inscription in four languages”.<sup>242</sup> The Germans required people to use those names. Letters and parcels with old addresses were sent back. Also the „Gazeta Żydowska” had to use those names.<sup>243</sup>

<sup>241</sup> „Anordnungsblatt für die Stadt Kielce” 1941, No.11, p.35; The author gives the street names of the interwar period.

<sup>242</sup> Ringelblum E., *Kronika getta warszawskiego*, Warszawa 1983, p.322.

<sup>243</sup> see: GŻ 1941, No. 38.

The winter of 1941-1942 worsened the food problems of the ghetto and more and more Jews, mainly the youth, risked their lives to smuggle at least some food from behind the wall. Witold Ceberski testified before the Circuit Commission of Investigating the Crimes against the Polish Nation:

„...I saw with my own eyes how the Germans bullied Jewish children caught in attempt of crossing the border of the ghetto to get some food. The children were collecting bread and other articles and coming back through cracks in the fence. Caught by the Germans they were tortured by them, kicked and battered over the whole body including the face and the food was seized from them. I saw children beaten with barrels of the guns and kicked in the face. The Germans stood often by the ghetto fence trying to catch the Jews waiting for coal thrown over the wall by railway men (...); after catching a Jew they took the coal (...) torturing, beating and kicking the Jew.”<sup>244</sup>

Kazimierz Fijałkowski witnessed an SS-man on Piotrkowska Street near the pharmacy catch a 8-10-year-old boy who went out of the ghetto and: „hit him against the wall like pendulum and then jumped on him when he was lying on the ground”.<sup>245</sup> Such accident must have been frequent as in January 1942 the „Gazeta Żydowska” put an order of the commander of the Jewish police:”... It is strictly forbidden to stand near the borders of the district or the fences and gates leading to the Arian district.”<sup>246</sup> The memories of A. Mardeusz confirm the fact that the Jews used to wait for help by the fences of the ghetto:

„...I met aunt Flora. She stood lurking next to a sack filled with bread. She was surprised seeing me and asked me to carry the sack to the other side of the street, which I didn't feel like doing at all. But on the other side there were people waiting behind the barbed wire fence with stretched out arms. I couldn't stand the expression of their eyes and hastily started giving bread to the arms. There was only one left when I heard a scream „run away!” At a bound I crossed the street and hid in a gate. A moment later I heard the steps of gendarmes patrolling the street.”<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> OKBZpNP, W. Ceberski, *Testimony*, call No. Ds. 21/68, v. 1, p.6-7.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibidem*, K. Fijałkowski, *Testimony*, call No. Ds. 21/68, v.1 p.19.

<sup>246</sup> „GŻ” 1942, No.12.

<sup>247</sup> A. Mardeusz..., p.6.

Apolonia Sowińska, née Rabinowicz distinguished herself with great courage; many times she got to the ghetto under a false name and helped her family:

„I was several times in the ghetto, bringing food for my parents (...) some Jews were taken from the ghetto to work in Kielce factories (...). In the ghetto they worked in tailor, shoemaker and carpenter's workshops (...). In one house lived 2 or 3 Jewish families. In one room lived even 10 people. The Poles were bringing them food in secret. There was hunger and epidemics (...). There were many cases of death of hunger.”<sup>248</sup>

The Kielce ghetto was a place of frequent robberies. On the pretext of controlling illegal trade the Germans stole the most valuable things. According to the testimony of Kazimierz Misiek, a Schutzpolizei functionary Mathias Rumpel was selling stolen jewelery and valuables on a mass scale.<sup>249</sup>

Apart from the food an increasing problem constituted getting warm clothes. It was particularly hard for the Jews transported to Kielce from Bohemia, Germany and Austria. For many of them the winter of 1941-1942 was tragic. Because there were more and more people in need the chairman of the Judenrat, at the same time the president of the Jewish Caring Committee, H. Lewi, appealed to the Jewish society for help and support to the action of collecting clothes.<sup>250</sup> Warm drinks began to be given free of charge in the streets:

„On January 1, 1942 an action of help to the poor population has been started in form of hot coffee given free of charge in provided for this purpose street kettles. Every cold and thirsty poor Jew can get a mug of hot coffee and warm his or her hands by the fire. The points are located in different places of the Jewish Residential Area and it is needless to say how popular they are. Crowds of people gather around these primitive stoves to drink something hot. The Council of Jewish Elders in Kielce plans to use portable field kitchens instead of the improvised stoves, which will allow an increase in the amount of coffee. For the time being the first point has been set up on the bridge between Jerozolimaska and Szczęśliwa Street.”<sup>251</sup> Special stamps put on eve-

<sup>248</sup> OKBZpNP, A. Sowińska, *Testimony, al. No. Ds.21/68, v.3, p.104.*

<sup>249</sup> *ibidem*, K. Misiek, *Testimony, call No. Ds.21/68, v.3, p.33.*

<sup>250</sup> *GŻ 1942, No.11.*

<sup>251</sup> *ibidem*, No.12.



ry application to the Judenrat were introduced to raise necessary funds. The price of the stamps varied between 10 grosz and 1 zloty.

At the end of January 1942 it was decided to create the Committee of Temporary Help to the Poorest. Its motto was: „Let’s give immediate help to the poorest.” The Jewish district was divided into 20 beats and each beat got a patron from among the Judenrat members. Each patron could choose 4 people to help them, who were to control the beat and give immediate help.<sup>252</sup> The next step was the creation other three points of distribution of hot coffee on Jerozolimaska, Srebrnego Kamienia and Bodzentyńska Street. 1200 liters of coffee were given away every day.<sup>253</sup> In February 1942 another slogan was spread:”Every hungry - sated”. At the same time richer families were reprimanded that it was their duty to support the poor. They were even threatened with sanctions, such as forced payments. The Judenrat allocated 25000 zloty or winter help and organized a collection of money. The threats didn’t bring, however, any results even when the number of the Jewish order service was demonstratively increased by 30 men.<sup>254</sup> The Jewish society was excessively burdened with various taxes. The Jews were obliged to pay the following taxes: personal, special, local, compensatory, hospital and of winter help. Most of them fell into arrears with the payments. The Judenrat wanted to collect at least a part of the due amount and therefore announced a 50% remission of arrears for 1941 and the rest could be paid in installments beginning in March 1942. At the same time dilatory inhabitants were threatened that: „After the above fixed deadline the whole sum of the due taxes would be collected by force.”<sup>255</sup> Those were only idle threats. The Germans didn’t pay the Jewish workers for their work preferring to remunerate them with a bowl of water-like soup. The majority of people had already sold everything they could. They didn’t pay for their flats, then, and didn’t have enough money for fuel. However, the Judenrat kept trying to force the Jews to give their last money. This is the announcement of March 1942 concerning the obligation to pay the rents:

„...the rent and the due amount for water must be paid till the 7th of every month. The whole amount for the rent and water must be

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<sup>252</sup> *ibidem*, No.13.

<sup>253</sup> *ibidem*, No. 26.

<sup>254</sup> *ibidem*, No. 17.

<sup>255</sup> *ibidem*, No.26.

paid within March this year. Not complying with these requirements shall be punished with executive measures, such as seizure of movables. The movables shall be sold within five days on a public auction...”<sup>256</sup>

At the beginning of January 1942 on commission of the occupation authorities the Judenrat carried out another registration of men between 12 and 60. Two officials of the Department of Building and Agriculture were ordered to carry out the registration. In March a detailed registration was made of people employed in factories outside the ghetto. After this action all craftsmen domiciled in the Jewish district were registered. The following professions had to report for registration: brewers, maltsters, millers, weavers, tanners, soap producers, saddlers, printers, stenotypists, dental technicians, glass-blowers, painters, glass-cleaners, pattern-makers. The following action concerned the militaries:

„The Manager of the Order Service at the Council of Jewish Elders in Kielce informs that according to an order of the authorities the former officers of the German, Austrian and Polish army, domiciled in the Jewish district must report for registration to the secretary of the Order Service in office hours.”<sup>257</sup>

It is probable that the latter action was later used to liquidate Jewish officers living in the ghetto. J. Alpert testified:

„... the first serious action had been carried out (...) before Hitler`s birthday.<sup>258</sup> It was an action directed against the reserve officers and communists. Many people were killed on the spot and the rest were sent to Auschwitz. We were woken up by shots at night - there were shots in flats. Very few Jews were officers, unless they were doctors, so many doctors were killed at that time. The following people died then: Schatz, Schmeterling; Marek Rozenberg died as a communist, dentist Heschel, who wasn`t from Kielce, was sent to Auschwitz. I don`t remember exactly who else died, but I`m sure that a lot of people. My cousin who was a reserve officer (but not a doctor) was also arrested. He had worked in the „Kadzielnia” in bookkeeping there and he was saved in the last minute by the superintendent of the „Kadzielnia”, Klotz. After the latter one no other serious action was carried out in Kielce till the displacement.”<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> *ibidem*, No.36.

<sup>257</sup> *ibidem*, No.42.

<sup>258</sup> A. Hitler was born on 20 April 1889; *Yad Vashem, J.Alpert...p.7.*

<sup>259</sup> *Yad Vashem, J. Alpert..., p.7.*

According to witnesses' testimonies M. Rozenberg was shot by M. Rumpel himself. Also L. Serwetnik wrote about that event: „One night (...) doctor Strumw was shot on Stolarska Street, (...) shot were: Szatz, Rozenberg or arrested: Chaim Krauze, doctor Kleinberg from Łódź, doctor Schmeterling”.<sup>260</sup> We know the details of doctor Oskar Strumw's death from the memories of A. Birnhak:

„One April evening in 1942 two Gestapo policemen came to the Judenrat and dragged president Lewi out of his bed. They took, as they always did during such actions, a few Jewish policemen who guided them to the given address. When they came to take my dad I was sure that it was a mistake and that they would take him to the headquarters to interrogate him and that he would be released. He was such a quiet man. He had never belonged to any organization (...) They came and started banging on the door. My mom opened them and reproached herself later on «Why did I open them, if only I hadn't opened the door? (...) They didn't take much trouble with my father. They didn't even send him to Auschwitz. They shot my daddy downstairs in the courtyard. A Jewish policeman who witnessed the execution told us afterwards that when my dad fell down shot in his head the Gestapo policeman who murdered him said: «du warst ein Arzt» («you were a doctor»). It wasn't enough to murder a man, he had to disrespect and humiliate him (...) He was buried in a common grave with other victims of that terrible night. He was 55.”<sup>261</sup>

The example of what happened to doctor O. Strumw indicates that in the ghetto people were murdered not for an anti-German activity but just because they were Jews. Also Sz. Celer writes about the above mentioned action: „...only doctor Reitter was saved, he was manager of the Jewish hospital. Afterwards he got to Auschwitz.” Celer witnessed also shooting of 18 people, mainly from the intelligentsia.

In memories of surviving Jews striking is the fact that those who survived have a lot of reservations about the behavior of the Jewish order service, which had been in good graces of the Germans till the liquidation of the Jewish district. In the „Gazeta Żydowska” of March 6, 1942 in the article titled Rok istnienia służby porządkowej w Kielcach it was written: „On the occasion of the first anniversary of the Jewish

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<sup>260</sup> *ibidem*, L. Serwetnik..., p.4.

<sup>261</sup> A. Birnhak, *Getto, „Przemiany” 1987, No. 12, p.34.*

Order Service in Kielce a celebration was organized. The ceremony was opened by the speech and report for the previous year held by commandant Bruno Schindler. After his speech president Lewi rose to speak wishing the Order Service good results at work. Next, by the order of the day 15 members of the Order Service were promoted. The number of members was increased from 85 to 127. The official part was followed by artistic performances of amateurs, mainly from the Order Service. The whole ceremony was impressive thanks to good organization of Herman, Kopel and Albirt. At the end superintendent Schindler arranged a collection of money for the President H. Lewi orphanage.”<sup>262</sup>

Many critical remarks were addressed to the Judenrat, which was criticized for its submission to the occupier. Indeed, some statements of its members as well as the orders it gave indicate that the Council agreed with all German orders. The following information about sanctions for avoiding work, it has to be admitted - killing work, may serve as an example:

„People who do not report at the call-up of the Department V of Work on the fixed date shall be brought to disposal of the Department V of Work and forced to work three days for each day that was determined in the call-up, irrespectively of other kind of punishment. Men aged 16-60 who have received an equivalent of work are obliged, apart from paying the equivalent, to serve work (...) at a nominal call of the Department of Work. The charges who do not report to work at the call of the Department V of Work will be deprived of the right to use the Social Welfare, irrespectively of eventual bringing them to work.”<sup>263</sup>

They didn't want to understand that many Jews didn't report to work only because of their poor health conditions. G. Zeisler wrote in her letter of March 13, 1942: „We had to bring to hospital a relatively young man, who belonged to our circle of friends. He suffers from complete physical and mental exhaustion and needs above all a lot of good food (..) it hurts when I see that somebody I used to spend a lot of time with is weakening and I can't help him.” In that hunger and coldness every work was difficult:

„The work with children has proved that it is too much for me. I couldn't break the language barrier. Not mentioning the fact that

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<sup>262</sup> GŻ 1942, No.28.

<sup>263</sup> *ibidem*, No. 42

I've lost 1,5 kg again. Work combined with malnutrition leads to fast passing of time. I'm becoming old and depressed (...) we are all beginning victims of depressing attacks caused by foreign and unnatural life. Our horizon is shrinking every day."<sup>264</sup>

The author couldn't write about death so she was writing about „passing time”, about slow dying in the atmosphere of closed ghetto. The atmosphere of fear, insecurity of coming days and depression was killing even the local people, after all more immune to life difficulties. On February 27 1942 took place the funeral of Etlá Zagajska, the wife of H. Zagajski, the owner of the quarry „Wietrznia”, who deceased in the interwar period. In the obituary notice about her in the „Gazeta Żydowska” it was written: „She belonged to the women of the old style, who are scarce nowadays (...) she supported poor fiancées, helped her relatives and strangers with a generous hand, etc.”<sup>265</sup> In the funeral participated the youth from the orphanage and the inmates of the old people's house that is from the institutions that the Zagajskis had supported. On February 18 died a well known zaddik from Radoszyce, Chaim Uszer Finkler. When the Jews learnt about his death an hour of mourn was proclaimed and the work was suspended in Jewish workshops. In the funeral participated „...thousands of Jewish inhabitants of Kielce and delegations from other towns and cities...”<sup>266</sup> Over the open grave the rabbi of Kielce A. Rapoport held a speech for the 1st time in public as well as the chairman of the Judenrat H. Lewi. A few days afterwards the son of the dead rabbi was elected his successor, who also lived in the ghetto with his family. In the same month died also one of the best known social activists in the Jewish society, 65-year-old Mordka Fiszel Kaminer:

„The deceased was from a well-known Hassid-aristocratic family and embodied the greatest virtues of humanity. His activity was always characterized by honesty and energy of spirit. He was the head of all institutions in the city and was particularly active in creating religious education. In 1938 thanks to his help started the building of a new school, the end of which he didn't live to see. In the deceased the Jewish society is losing an honest and irreplaceable man. Peace to his memory.”<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> | *did not survive..., a letter of 03.07.1942.*

<sup>265</sup> *GŻ 1942, No.28.*

<sup>266</sup> *ibidem, No.26.*

<sup>267</sup> *ibidem, No. 19.*

The next victim of the atmosphere of the ghetto was 56-year-old Talmudist Chaim Warszawiak. As a merchant he distinguished himself with his active philanthropic help.<sup>268</sup> In March died Fajgla Hirszman. In the obituary notice it was written: „The deceased was characterized by good and helpful heart and unusual modesty. No poor or needy could leave her house without help.”<sup>269</sup> Because F. Hirszman was the mother of a Judenrat member all its members participated in the funeral.

In 1942 the penalty for leaving the ghetto illegally was death. In February the occupation authorities sentenced to death the following for leaving the Jewish district in search for food: Szmul Zilberberg, Szprynca Tojta, Josek Zylbersztajn and Brandla Zajączkowska. They were executed in the prison area on Zamkowa Street. In the following months for similar „offences” were shot: Jankiel Wygodny, Majer Binem Zilbersztajn, Majer Wikiński and Szabsa Wolfowicz.<sup>270</sup> On April 1 Frymeta and Majer Żuchowski were shot in their flat for selling meat. For similar activity were put into prison and died due to battering the following people: Abram Barus, Moszek Strawczyński, Szaja Ehrlich and Josek Lewin.<sup>271</sup> I. Obarzański, a joint owner of the photo-chemical factory „Orion”, was murdered in an exceptionally bestial way. He was dragged on a rope behind a car on a stony road near the „Kadzielnia”. All that was left after him was a massacred piece of body. His «crime» was that he tried to send by post a parcel with food for his distant family in the Bohemia Protectorate. „Once - recalls J. Piękus two Jews tore off a board on Pociuszka Street wanting to get some potatoes. I saw with my own eyes the Germans shoot them.” After an interrogation by the Gestapo Frajdl and Lejzor Rajzman were transported to the extermination camp in Majdanek for trade with food. Blima Fryd and Maria Dajbog were shot on the spot.

In spring 1942 the Gestapo policeman M. Rumpel shot two girls on the courtyard of the Schutzpolizei because he caught them going by railway without a permit. A. Sowinska recalls: „In summer 1942 I saw on Stolarska Street a 4-year-old boy go out of the ghetto. A German gendarme was on duty there. He took the boy’s legs and killed

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<sup>268</sup> *ibidem*, No.26.

<sup>269</sup> *ibidem*, No.34.

<sup>270</sup> AP Kielce, *The Kielce Prison, Register of Prisoners, call No. 1155-1157.*

<sup>271</sup> *ibidem*.

him by hitting his head against the wall so heavily that the head burst."<sup>272</sup> „A 16-year-old Jewess only leaned her head out of the fence and was shot."<sup>273</sup>

Although in 1942 no epidemic was recorded in the Jewish hospital of typhus died: Moszek Lerer, Salomon Bunin, Sara and Abram Wodziński.

G. Zeisler noticed the tragic fate of Jewish children: „The situation of the children hurts me deeply but what can I do when I see the enormity of unhappiness? All we can do is to close our eyes and ears so as not to go mad."<sup>274</sup> This is how A. Birnhak remembers her younger brother:

„Heniusz couldn't understand what happened and what it meant that his father was murdered. For Jewish children in the ghetto the Gestapo and murders were normal phenomena and normal life was beyond their comprehension. The kid was becoming wild playing with other children in the dirty and smelly streets of the Kielce ghetto. He didn't know at all what was music, games, sports stadium, swimming in summer and skiing in winter, walks among pine trees surrounding Kielce. He didn't know at all what school was."<sup>275</sup>

Although the administration of the ghetto was quite competent, the post office functioned, we received newspapers, it was possible to get food for working people and social institutions (hospital, orphanage, old people's house), the atmosphere in the district was getting more and more difficult. People were becoming less afraid of death but were much more frightened by the perspective of coldness, diseases and hunger. Particularly hard was the situation of people parted from their families, the old and the lonely. The letters of G. Zeisler written between March and August 1942 reflect that situation. At the beginning of March she wrote: „Less and less information from Prague and Vienna and I'm beginning to feel lonely (...) sometimes we shouldn't feel sorry for those who died before us."<sup>276</sup> On May 7, 1942 she wrote; „...time is breaking my courage and now from time to time I am depressed. I'm happy that my husband isn't here. It's

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<sup>272</sup> OKBZpNP, A. Sowińska..., p 103.

<sup>273</sup> Ibidem, J. Piękusiova, call No. Ds.21/68, v.3, p.203.

<sup>274</sup> I did not survive..., a letter of 6.08.1942.

<sup>275</sup> A. Birnhak, Getto..., p. 34.

<sup>276</sup> I did not survive..., a letter of 13.03.1942.

easier to take care of yourself. Worrying about the happiness of other people is so hard..."<sup>277</sup> On June 5 she wrote: „In the last three parcels I found potatoes and flour instead of what had been sent”. A week later: „...we have received flour and potatoes (...) instead of food parcels..."<sup>278</sup> That means that the parcels from Europe to the Kielce ghetto were robbed on the way, instead of sweets, sardines and tins the recipients were receiving potatoes. On July 17, 1942 Zeisler wrote: „I've heard from doctor Fajgl's niece that Artur's old uncle died and that aunt Kamila is now completely alone in Łódź. It's not a reason to cry that an old man has been freed from the illness that we call life..."<sup>279</sup> On August 13: „I seem to have lost my common sense in this atmosphere of destiny and hopelessness."<sup>280</sup>

Was there anything that could bring joy at least for a moment? Unfortunately, there was not much. The Jews from Vienna were glad when they received letters and especially parcels. Their arrival meant food, clothes and books. A part of that was sold. However, the majority of the Jews were deprived of that, even though they try to keep wide correspondence. In January 1942 the Post Office at the Judenrat announced with help of the „Gazeta Żydowska” that 30 parcels from abroad should be collected.<sup>281</sup> In her letter of February 19 G. Zeisler informed her family: „I experienced something wonderful yesterday when I went to a charity concert. It was the first music I could hear after ages. It was rather amateur but what a wonderful change was it for me. The first staves of the music after such a long time brought me to tears.” The information is parallel to a press announcement in the „Gazeta Żydowska”, where we can read:

„Thanks to an effort of the Committee of Aid to the Poor Jews in Kielce (...) on Saturday 14th and Sunday 15th February there will be held two concerts for the benefit of the Winter Help to the poorest inhabitants of the city of Kielce. The two events are prepared thoroughly with a lot of work and effort. In the concerts perform very talented artists, amateurs of our city, such as R. Minc and A. Charin - canto, A. Ajnsztajn, J. Lewi - piano, A. Szmulewicz and H. Gertler - violin,

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<sup>277</sup> *ibidem*, a letter of 7.05.1942.

<sup>278</sup> *ibidem*, a letter of 25.06.1942.

<sup>279</sup> *ibidem*, a letter of 17.07.1942.

<sup>280</sup> *ibidem*, a letter of 13.08.1942.

<sup>281</sup> GŻ 1942, No.13.



D. Abramowicz - cello. The proceeds of the concerts will go to the Winter Help.”<sup>282</sup>

Although it was an amateur performance it attracted wide audience and was a great event. G. Zeisler wrote about that in her letter.

In the Kielce ghetto there were several dozens of professional musicians, among them: Majer Gurewicz, Henryk Lewek, Dawid Abramowicz, Boruch and Estera Szpilman, Ita Szymaszalewicz, Jakub Gollandziner, Bajla, Estera and Chaim Biderman, Icek and Lejba Laks, Jankiel Podstopnicki, Estera Prajs, Herman Szwarc. Almost all members of the Grostals and Gringrases played various instruments very well.<sup>283</sup> Most of those people thought, however, that it wasn't appropriate time to play.

People were looking for oblivion in books. G. Zeisler wrote: „I've finished a book of Hudson, it helped me to be away in a very pleasant way (...). His opinions are indeed right. Not only I but also my friends liked them.”<sup>284</sup>

Still others were looking for consolation in religion. Because the Great Synagogue in Kielce was devastated the Jews created illegal prayer house at 6 Okrzei Street where they used to meet in the evenings. They had to be very careful, though, because the occupier persecuted praying Jews.

In 1968 the Circuit Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation in Kielce was doing several investigations against the former functionaries of the German police. Some testimonies concerned also the ghetto. Here are the most important ones. Stefan Weber said: „...I was in a secret Polish organization - the Home Army and therefore I was interested in the behavior of the Germans in Kielce, among other things in their attitude to the Jewish population.”<sup>285</sup> Stanisław Gozdur said about M. Rumpel, a fierce Nazi: „Rumpel was said to be a sadist (...) he killed people for pleasure, both Poles and Jews, he used to beat passers-by without any reason (...). It was a common knowledge that the Schutzpolizei was responsible for the Jewish ghetto. They supervised the ghetto, entered the ghetto most often and murdered people there.”<sup>286</sup> Jan Kowalik: «The Schupo policemen su-

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<sup>282</sup> *ibidem*, 1942, No.19.

<sup>283</sup> S. Król..., p.82.

<sup>284</sup> I did not survive..., a letter of 13.08.1942.

<sup>285</sup> OKBZpNP, S. Weber, Testimony, call No Ds. 21/60, v. 1, p.67.

<sup>286</sup> *ibidem*, S. Gozdur, Testimony, call No. Ds.21/68, v. 2, p. 104.

pervised the ghetto and it was them who committed most murders there.”<sup>287</sup> Aleksander Sędek: „...many Jews had houses outside the ghetto, in the city and yet, they had to pay taxes and fire premium (...) beating Jews by German gendarmes and sometimes by the Jewish police were of frequent occurrence.”<sup>288</sup>

The place where most executions, both of the Poles and the Jews, were carried out in Kielce was the Jewish cemetery. The Nazis brought there the victims from the Gestapo, prison and the ghetto:

„A hole used to be prepared the day before by the son of undertaker Jankiel and Jewish workers. The victims were driven from the cars to a wooden building (the so called Jewish mangle) on the Jewish cemetery. From there the Jews were taken in pairs, usually a man and a woman. They were told to strip naked and put their clothes on a pile in one place. Next the victims were escorted by four Germans: two behind and two on the sides to the verge of the hole. Then the Germans killed them with a series from automatic gun. Quite often the victims that fell into the hole were only injured. When all Jews had gone through their last way the Germans carrying out the execution covered the killed ones with a thin layer of sand and called the Jewish workers to fill up the hole. Meanwhile, the Germans took the clothes left by the Jews (...) and looked for gold and other valuables. The Jews on the Jewish cemetery were shot by SS-men, among whom Rumpel (...) was known (...). The frequency of executions on the Jewish cemetery decreased when a cemetery was created in the ghetto. It was located on a slope between Nowy Świat Street and the river Silnica.”<sup>289</sup>

Together with physical destruction of Jews a propaganda action was organized which was to justify the murders. To this purpose served itinerant anti-Jewish exhibitions, such as „Die judische WELT-PEST” (Jewish World Pest), brochures, satiric drawings and posters. This phenomenon intensified after the first defeats on the eastern front. In February 1942 a poster was hung in Kielce in large amounts, on which next to a picture of three Jews there was the following poem:

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<sup>287</sup> *ibidem*, J. Kowalik, *Testimony*, call No. Ds.21/68, v. 2, p. 110.

<sup>288</sup> *ibidem*, A. Sędek..., p.79.

<sup>289</sup> A. Massalski, S. Meducki..., pp.62-63.

*„Look, dear spectator on your way  
The Jews have hunted us at bay  
Instead of meat a rat they chop  
The milk they sell is full of slop  
Full of warms is a Jewish cake  
Which with their dirty feet they make.”*

Very few but still some people found it funny. D. Rubinowicz from Krajno wrote in his diary: „...people were going in the snow and laughing so loud that I was getting headache from the humiliation that the Jews are experiencing today. Oh God, put an end to this shame!”<sup>290</sup> Krystyna Urbańska recollects:

„I often saw posters with a slogan «Jew is a swindler, your only enemy.» You could see them on the fence near the Śniadeckich High School, on fences on Wschodnia or Poniatowskiego Street. There were sometimes copies of the so called „Gazeta Ilustrowana dla Wsi Polskiej” [Illustrated Magazine for the Polish Village] with different slogans, such as «The Jews are carriers of lice and typhus». Later on brochures started appearing in masses, like for example: „Blasphemy against Holy Sacraments” or „Confessions of Jews”. Among the intelligentsia this kind of propaganda caused disgust, we were aware of the fact that the Germans hated both the Jews and us.”<sup>291</sup>

It results from the existing material that the Judenrat and a part of the Jewish intelligentsia knew quite well what was happening in the country and what was the direction of the German policy. The decree of the governor of the Radom district of February 1942 limiting the number of food coupons from 337000 to 200000 and decreasing the food rations by 50% testified to the fact that the Germans wanted to starve the Jewish society to death. And hunger weakened physical and mental endurance. This decree was explained by the fact that the Polish population wasn't fulfilling the contingent but knowing the hypocrisy of German propaganda it was hard to believe.

The youth protested against the passivity of the older generation. Rafał Blumenfeld, a native of Kielce, domiciled now in Israel wrote about the years 1939-1942 in Kielce: „...I got involved and worked as a

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290 *Pamiętnik Dawida Rubinowicza, Warsaw 1960, p.51.*

291 *An interview of 2.02.1944.*

volunteer in a Zionist youth organization Hanoar Hacyjoni, which was active in conspiracy till the first transport of Jews from Kielce...<sup>292</sup> To the Kielce ghetto were getting through also liaison girls from Jewish underground organizations, among them Chaja Grosman from „Haszomer Hacair” (Young Scout) and Froma Płotnicka from „Dror” (Liberty), Because both girls were getting through also to other ghettos, for example in Białystok, Tarnów, Będzin, the Jews in Kielce knew what was happening in Jewish districts in other cities.

In the course of time people knew what Treblinka means. A few people managed to escape from that extermination camp, including two Jews from Kielce - Władysław Zalberg and Nachman Diament.<sup>293</sup> Another Jew Sruł Rakowski fled from Treblinka and managed to get near Kielce -.<sup>294</sup>

In July 1942 a possibility of deporting the Kielce Jews to the east, near Lublin was often mentioned. The information came from different sources, also from the Germans. M. Bahn said: „...Wirtz from the Schupo told me that the Jews might expect deportation.”<sup>295</sup>

The information about deporting Jews from the capital of the district - from Radom - reached Kielce on the very same day that is on August 5, 1942. It was spread by railway men coming back from Radom. It was a shock for many people. The majority thought, though, that the situation would be different in Kielce. The Judenrat was maintaining these illusions convincing the Jews that they could prove with their effective work that the Germans needed them. Some, however, decided to risk an escape from the ghetto. It was unlikely that they could succeed. It was 1942. The Germans were ruling from the Pyrenees to Stalingrad and small partisans units couldn't accept greater numbers of refugees. However, an escape gave a chance of surviving whereas in the ghetto such possibility practically didn't exist.

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<sup>292</sup> A letter of R. Blumenfeld of 15.05.1994 (in the author's possession)

<sup>293</sup> AP Kielce, ZDPGRP, call No. 3534.

<sup>294</sup> B. Wierchowski, *Fragmety z życia w okresie okupacji*, p.6 manuscript (collections of WBPk)

<sup>295</sup> AŻIH, M. Bahn..., p.9.

## Chapter IV

# „OJSROTUNG” – HOLOCAUST

The German euphemism „Endlösung” - „the final solution” doesn't fully render the tragedy that took place in August 1942 in the Radom district, including Kielce. More appropriate would be the term „Ojsrotung”, which in Yiddish means „extermination” or the German word „Ausrottung”. Out of 27000 people in the Kielce ghetto only about 500 survived the war, including 200 natives of Kielce.

In December 1941 the Head Security Office of the Reich prepared a conference on the future of the Jews in Europe but because of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor it was postponed to January of the next year. On January 20, 1942 a conference took place on the outskirts of Berlin, in Wannsee, during which the range of the extermination of Jews and the coordination of necessary steps were finally determined. It was decided that to Treblinka would be directed the Jews from the Warsaw and Radom District and the district of Białystok. The camp in Treblinka was the fourth extermination camp after Chełm, Bełżec and Sobibór. Treblinka was the biggest camp; its crew consisted of SS-men and Ukrainian supporting formations. The Jews that were transported there had to get an impression that it was only a transit station. Therefore ticket-offices were built, a clock and a timetable installed. In order to cover up the murders the camp was divided into several isolated parts: „Only after depositing the documents, money and valuables, undressing, shaving the heads and going to a building with a sign „Bath” did the people realize that they were locked in a gas chamber. After 20-30 minutes nobody was alive.”<sup>296</sup> 10000-12000 people were killed daily. Depending on the size of the liquidated ghetto the trains bringing the Jews had from 40 to 80 cars and in each car there were from 80 to 120 people. According to the report of Dawid Nowakowski, who got to Treblinka, the majority of people transported there didn't believe in extermination: „nobody believed that they were driven here to die. They were sure that they would live (...). The old and children - would be exterminated but the adults would live.”<sup>297</sup>

On June 18 1942 on command of H. Frank a meeting of the GG authorities with the representatives of 5 districts took part in Cracow, at which the plan of total extermination of the Polish Jewry was finally determined. The commander of the SS and the police said that his

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<sup>296</sup> *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce w zarysie (do 1950 roku)*, edited by J. Tomaszewski, Warsaw 1993, p.325.

<sup>297</sup> R. Sakowska, *Archiwum Ringelbauma - ogniwem konspiracji warszawskiego getta*, „Biuletyn ŻIH 190, No. 3-4, p.155.

formations were ready to start the action on condition that necessary means of transport would be provided.<sup>298</sup> On July 19, 1942 at a conference at H. Himmler's it was decided that the Jewish problem should be solved till December 31 at latest. The liquidation of the Jews in the Radom District was directed by Wilhelm Blum, a member of the staff of „Akcja Reinhard”, which had its seat in Lublin. For the whole action was responsible Gruppenführer Odill Globocnik.

The plan and the time-table of the displacement were prepared with typical German precision. The time of deportation of people from different towns, train arrivals and departures, the size of SS units necessary for the action and escorting trains were planned with utmost accuracy.

On August 5, 1942 displaced were the Jews from the outskirts of Radom - Glinice, on August 16 and 17 - the Jews from the ghetto on Wałowa Street that is from the center of Radom. On August 19 to the station on Młynarska Street came a train with about 70 freight cars. The displacement of Jewish inhabitants of Kielce started on August 20, 1942. The action in Kielce was conducted like in other cities. The ghetto was surrounded by a strong cordon of German gendarmerie, SS-men and supporting Ukrainian units. Also the Jewish order service was participated in the action. At night a special group, comprised of the Gestapo policemen isolating the part of the district destined for evacuation entered the ghetto. At the same time a wide gate was cut out in the barbed wire fence so as to make possible for the column from Piotrkowska Street to pass to the embankment on Młynarska Street. The train windows were secured with barbed wire and inside there were no seats or toilets and lime was spread on the floors. The first and the last cars had platforms on the roofs, which made possible to install machine guns. At 2 a.m. the representatives of the Judenrat with president H. Lewi and the Jewish order service were called to the police station on Okrzei Street. They were informed that they would take part in preparing transport of a part of the ghetto residents to the east. At the same time they were assured that the families of the Judenrat and the Jewish police members were safe and wouldn't be transported. Beginning at 4 a.m. the Jewish police started bursting into houses ordering the inhabitants to pack their things and to go out. Everybody could take luggage up to 20 kg. Woken up in the middle of

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<sup>298</sup> A. Rutkowski...,p. 107

the night suddenly, hustled with shouts, pushed and beaten, people were taking whatever turned up, often useless things. Almost nobody took water, which after a few hours became the most precious thing. At about 5 a.m. a special group of Jewish workers started digging pits on the slope near Nowy Świat Street and the river Silnica. An hour later the first formed columns approached Okrzei Street, where they were selected into three groups. The first group was to be displaced; the second was to stay and to the third one belonged old, disabled people and children. The group destined for deportation was driven along Piotrkowska Street towards the railway platform located between Piotrkowska and Młynarska Street. At the beginning 60-80 people were put into one car. At the end 100-120 were crammed. Between 11 and 12 o'clock the doors of the cars began to be sealed. They were watched by the Germans and the Jewish police; in terrible August heat it was waiting for 7 hours before a signal to set off. Officially, the transports to Treblinka were called „Special trains for displaced people”. They had a very precise timetable. They departed from Kielce at about 6-7 p.m. and arrived at the site of murder at about 11-12 o'clock the next day.

In memories of the Jews and Poles who survived we can find a description of what was happening during the liquidation of the Kielce ghetto.

Adam Hefland: „It started at 4 a.m. The whole Jewish district had already been surrounded by a thick circle of the Schupo policemen, SS-men and SD since 2 a.m. The chief of the Gestapo in Kielce, Thomas, ordered the Jewish police to start waking people up and bringing the Jews from the first quarter onto a square prepared for this purpose (...). Great noise and tumult began. Everybody was in a hurry - they had only 30 minutes to leave - and in excitement they were packing their most valuable things into rucksacks or sacks. In our house the tumult and haste were reaching their peak. We were surprised and unprepared therefore we couldn't decide what to take with us (...) We went out or rather ran out. But our departure was preceded by a tragic accident. My uncle, who was living with us, was the first to pack his things and the first to hurry outside. It was late, about 5:50. Suddenly we heard a shot and a scream. It happened near our house. I noticed my uncle fall down (...). He was bleeding heavily from his left side. The injury was as big as a fist (...) the Gestapo policemen weren't interested at all in labor-cards; they only looked at the face and the appe-



arance. Those who seemed intelligent were sent to the group destined for displacement. They created terrible chaos; there were shouts and cries and very often also shots (...). The torturers were holding cowhides and beating people mercilessly causing painful injuries. They were doing it with characteristic for them cynicism and cold blood. But that was not enough. Again and again a Gestapo policeman or an SS-man dragged an old man or a cripple from the crowd and murdered him or her with cold blood shooting in the face of the frightened victim (...). Meanwhile, other groups of German thugs were searching through empty flats checking if anybody was still there either hiding or not being able to go out, which was mainly caused by physical disability. They were dragging the poor ones, battering them (...) only to put an end to their lives with a shot at the back of their heads. When all the formalities connected with the action were done our group - the chosen ones [to be left in Kielce - K.U.] were put in columns - 10 people in each and counted. The unhappy victims of course had to be battered (...) at last the column set off towards a barrack allocated for them in district that hadn't been displaced yet. The streets we were passing by looked horrible. On the pavements there were dead bodies of old people of both sexes and sometimes even young people. At the junction of Jasna and Okrzei Street a dead woman was lying in a wheelbarrow. Dead (...) and her wide open eyes expressed fear and her mouth had a terrible grimace of pain (...) Next to her was lying a young looking man who was facing the ground (...). Later on I found out that it was her son. He didn't want to leave his sick mother without help and paid for it with his life (...). News about the people who stayed on the square began to spread to us brought by the Jewish policemen who were escorting them to the railway platform and helping to load into the cars. The train comprised of freight cars and the windows were nailed up with barbed wire. Steps were attached to the cars through which the people were going inside. They were beaten. With the same mercilessness and brutality the Germans were hitting with whips men, women, old people and children (...). At the beginning they were putting 80 people into one car but later on it turned out that there were not enough cars so they started pushing 100-120 people into one car. Screams, laments and cries were mixing into a sort of a howl (...) A woman couldn't stand the stuffiness and the heat increased by crammed people in the car and, driven by the desire to get cool and moisten her

parched throat, almost naked jumped out onto the platform (the people were tearing off their clothes so as to become at least a little color). The SS-men jumped at her like a herd of rabid dogs with characteristic for them barbarity and finally threw her almost unconscious into a real whirling crowd in the car (...). Similar things happened very often. In the end, „tired” of beating the victims the murderers started shooting at them like at ducks, having a lot of fun (...). When everybody was loaded the cars were closed and sealed, watched by guards. Crammed in the cars, burnt with merciless heat, people were begging the guards for water. But they were deaf to their suffering (...). The poor people were standing in the cars on the station till the evening...<sup>299</sup>

Another witness of the liquidation of the ghetto, M. Bahn, testified: „On August 19, 1942 the day started somehow unusually. At the train station there were 60 cars with a board «Jude formichtung» [«destroy Jews»]. President Lewi went to the Gestapo but he didn't bring any positive answer. He told everybody to prepare luggage. At night between 0:00 and 1:00 Thomas and Gayer ordered them to report to the Jewish police in their office on Okrzei Street. They switched the light off; the Jewish police was surrounded by Ukrainian gendarmes who started beating them. Thomas and Gayer stood in front of them and said cynically: «You have been faithful and I think you»ll go on serving faithfully (...) You'll stay here, the fate of your children and wives is unknown. They will probably stay'. Later on they told the Jewish policemen to remove all Jews from their homes and concentrate them on Jasna Street. Those who didn't come would be shot. Such an order was given to the Jews in the quarter of Okrzei Street, where lived 6000 Jews. Not everyone left punctually, which resulted in the following scenes - a Jewish policeman didn't know what to do with an ill woman, the Gestapo told him to put her on the street, where she was shot. The wives and children of doctors and the workers of the foundry „Ludwików”, „Has-sag” and the quarries were told to step forward and stand aside. Each of them had to pass next to Thomas and Gayer and show them their labor-card. If they noticed that someone wanted to stay with their family they snatched the card from their hands and didn't let them stay. People destined for deportation line up in formations of 10 and if the 11th person was a child then it was parted from its parent. 100 people were put

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<sup>299</sup> AŽIH, A. Hefland, *Testimony, call No. 301/1309, p.2.*

into one car. In this way they escorted 6000 people along Młynarska Street (...) where there were a few carts. If an exhausted old man fell down or a weak person couldn't keep up with the pace then they gave a sign to a Jewish policeman who put the poor creature on the cart and an SS-man immediately shot him. They gave the signals to the Jewish policemen in such a way that the people thought that they were doing it at their own initiative. On Nowy Świat Street pits and lime had been prepared the day before. The murdered ones were immediately sent to Nowy Świat. Szarogreder - a disabled, a known in Kielce Jew, asked a policeman to let him stay in the line. The policeman quickly put him on the cart and he was immediately shot. Among the policemen there was a Zylbersztein, who had used to be a decent man before the war. They gave him a sign to put on the cart zaddik Icchak Finkler, a well known Mizrachists, who used to be his friend. The policeman approached him and said «Rebe, I order you to sit on the cart and say the prayer for the dead». The zaddik looked at him, called him by his name and said: „What are you doing? Do you want to kill me?” „I can't do anything”, replied Zylbersztein and put him violently on the cart. The zaddik cried (...) and was shot (...)”<sup>300</sup>

A. Mardeusz: „A day came when the gates of the ghetto were opened and from inside a fluid mass of people streamed out like a volcano. Looking at this human tragedy one had the impression that the end of the world had come. People were going slowly and musing. Next to senile old men were trotting little ragged children holding tight their stiff hands. The young and strong ones were carrying bundles and suitcases with their property that they were allowed to take. Other people were carrying wrapped babies who couldn't walk yet. Young women (...), young men with dead smiles and their heads sunk (...) were going (...) humble, obedient, for their last walk because such was the verdict of the masters of their life and death (...). The shivering, frightened crowds were inhaling white lime spread in the cars, which irritated their throats already from the distance. There were no seats; they had to stand (...)”<sup>301</sup>

W. Ceberski: „The liquidation of the ghetto started with making an exit in the fence separating the ghetto from the city, opposite the rail-

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<sup>300</sup> *ibidem*, *M. Bahn...*, pp. 9-11.

<sup>301</sup> *A. Mardeusz...*, p.7.

way station (...). The Nazis drove the ghetto residents towards that exit. The Jews were loaded on trains waiting at the station. Removing people from houses was accompanied by terrible screams, beating and pushing (...). People lagging behind were baited with dogs. Several dozens of people were loaded into one car rammed with rifles because there were problems with closing the doors. These were roofed freight cars. I saw women with little children loaded into the train, throwing valuables and begging the railway men for some water. However, the Germans supervising the displacement didn't allow that and kept the railway men away."<sup>302</sup>

S. Wójtowicz: „They bullied most women with little children in their arms who lagged behind the column (...). One Jewess, far gone with child, asked for some water. She was standing in the open door of a car. One of the Germans supervising the loading heard the request, approached her and stabbed her abdomen with a bayonet. She fell out of the car. Her corpse was dragged aside.”<sup>303</sup>

S. Weber: „The Jews were driven from the ghetto along Zagnańska Street towards the railway (...) They were escorted surrounded by the Schupo policemen who didn't let anybody approach them, they didn't even allow anybody to give them water. If someone approached the column they were shooting. With a cordon of Germans surrounded was also the place where the trains were waiting. The action was directed by Hans Gayer (...), the second most active was Mathias Rumpel. Also Gerulf Mayer participated in the liquidation of the ghetto (...) Because the Jews didn't want to go into the cars they were battered and shot so that during that action many Jews were killed.”<sup>304</sup>

Walery Bogdan: „Having loaded men, women and children into the cars I saw a young man jump out of the car when it set off and run away but he didn't run far.”<sup>305</sup>

Loaded trains were standing there for several hours watched by Jewish policemen: „Those young people were standing at attention with their heads slightly leaned forward. And the Jews from the car windows were shouting: «Thank you for your devoted help»”.<sup>306</sup>

<sup>302</sup> OKBZpNP, W. Ceberski, *Testimony*, call No. 21/68, v.1, pp. 6-7.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibidem*, S. Wójtowicz, *Testimony*, call No. Ds. 21/68, v.1, p.29; the Jewess's name was Sanderska.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibidem*, S. Weber..., p.67.

<sup>305</sup> OKBZpNP in Kielce, W. Bogdan, *Testimony*, call No. Ds.21/68, v.1, p. 21.

<sup>306</sup> T. Popiel, *Zagłada kieleckiego getta*, „Słowo Ludu” 1987, No.255.

On writing about the action of transporting the Jewish population railway man K. Cichoń mentions another detail: „Due to terrifying malice of the Germans, when the train was moving the lime dust was rising causing painful irritation of throats and eyes. The journey was (...) a horrible torture.”<sup>307</sup>

It took the train marked with symbol „PKr.”, according to the timetable determined by the General Direction of Eastern Railway, 16 hours of killing journey through Skarżysko Kamienna, Radom, Dęblin, Łuków and Siedlce.

On the first day of displacements to Treblinka were sent over 6000 Jews. In Kielce stayed about 100 people, mainly old, disabled and ill ones.

On August 21, 1942, when dusk was falling, the same set of cars appeared on the Kielce station shattering the illusions that there would be no other transports. The second phase of displacement began early in the morning on Saturday 22 August 1943. In the first phase people from the quadrangle framed with Piotrkowska, Starozagnańska, Krzywa and Okrzei Street were displaced and in the second phase they took people from the houses starting on Okrzei Street the to the so called small ghetto that is St. Wojciech Square and Bodzentyńska Street.

Sz. Zalcborg: „...the train that transported the victims returned and on Saturday at dawn another action started. The action cost the lives of 6000 people. They took me with my family (...) removed people from their homes and in the street we were surrounded by the German police that drove us to the main street of the ghetto, where we were put in lines of 10 people. At the end of the street there were several Gestapo policemen who ordered each line to approach the chief and watched carefully the old and disabled who couldn't keep up with the pace. They dragged them into a gate and each time we heard a shot. Apart from them the chief himself was selecting us. 500 people died that day (...). After the second action on Saturday the Germans burst into the orphanage where there were 70 orphans. They made a game (...) shooting the children like hares (...) The displaced people had to turn over all their valuables before they entered the cars. If someone refused they shot him on the spot.”<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> K. Cichoń, *Zwrotnice...*, p.44.

<sup>308</sup> AŻIH, Sz. Zalcborg, *Testimony*, call No. 301/1705, pp. 2-3.

Wide repercussions had the shooting of the Jewish police commandant B. Schindler. In connection with this murder Józef Zasada testified: „(...) one of the Jews mispronounced the name of the factory where he worked. The commandant corrected him. Then Gayer winked at Rumpel, who told Schindler to kneel down and shot him with a pistol.”<sup>309</sup> The murder was committed in the back room of the Jewish hospital on Radomska Street.

On August 22, 1942 the children from the orphanage were also murdered. A part of the children were shot in the gate of the building at 1 Okrzei Street and a part, together with their teacher Gucia, on the slope at the Silnica. M. Bahn testified:

„...the children with their teacher Gucia were taken from the orphanage to Nowy Świat Street where the pit had already been prepared. They told the children to strip naked but they didn't want to. Then they ordered Gucia to do it. She refused. The Ukrainians started beating her and the children. The children started crying „Mom, help us”. They undressed them violently. They told a Jewish policeman to put them on the verge of the pit and Rumpel started shooting them (...) 40 children were put on one layer and covered up with lime. When all the children were already murdered Gucia approached the pit (...) A bullet reached her and she fell into the pit.”<sup>310</sup>

And here is other information from M. Bahn concerning the second action: „When the SS-men noticed a pretty boy or girl they immediately shot them on the spot. Blood was streaming like water and people were treading on dead bodies. In the second transport went a rabbi from Kielce. Thomas was going about like real hangman on Jasna Street with his people. They really looked like hangmen with rolled up sleeves.”<sup>311</sup> Unsolved is the question of murdering a large group of children in a house on Piotrkowska Street opposite the St. Cross Church, where after the liquidation of the ghetto the Poles found children's corpses, thrown into a well.<sup>312</sup>

Among the driven to death Jews of the second transport was a rabbi from Kielce -A. Rapoport with his wife Sara, his sons Boruch, Bo-

<sup>309</sup> OKBZpNP in Kielce, J. Zasada, *Testimony*, call No. Ds. 21/68, v.1, p. 37.

<sup>310</sup> AŻIH, M. Bahn [...], p.11; Kielce ZDPGRP, call No. 47; also Jankiel Proszowski witnessed the murder.

<sup>311</sup> AŻIH, M. Bahn..., p.11.

<sup>312</sup> *Kulisy kieleckiego getta. Kto był świadkiem tej zbrodni?* „Echo Dnia” 1992, No. 134.

ruch Mordka, a student of rabbi's studies and his daughter Zysla. The rabbi was wearing tallith and saying prayers - the premortal Widduj and the prayer Szma Izrael.

Altogether from 6000 to 70000 Jews were sent to the extermination camp in Treblinka and 500 were murdered on the streets of Kielce on August 22, 1942. The Germans committed another murder. They killed about 70 Jews from the old people's house and ordered the Jewish health care to kill all severely ill in hospital on Radomska Street. M. Bahn:

„Before sending the third transport they liquidated the old people's house with 70 people. They were all shot in the courtyard and their bodies were taken to the pits on Nowy Świat Street. In order to liquidate the hospital with 88 patients came: Thomas, Gayer, Rumpel with mounted police. They ordered to carry the ill with their beds out of the building.”<sup>313</sup> At the beginning they wanted to shoot them in front of the building but gave up this idea because there was a German hospital near:

„They didn't want to trouble them. Then it was decided to carry the ill back to the hospital and the manager of the hospital doctor Reitter was ordered to liquidate all the ill within three hours. The doctor asked how he should kill them and then Thomas showed him the bayonet. The doctor gave them lethal injections but it wasn't enough for everybody. Then the hospital staff and the doctor started stabbing them with knives. A battle between the ill and the hospital staff started. They were all killed (...)”<sup>314</sup>

L. Serwetnik wrote about that crime: „There came the chief of the Gestapo Thomas (...) and announced that the next day all the patients had to die. About half an hour later Breiner from the SS came to doctor Reitter and gave him prescriptions for a poison of strong concentration. Doctor Reitter called the staff and showed them the prescriptions”<sup>315</sup> At risk to himself Reitter discharged a part of the patients from the hospital and the rest got the injections:

„The victims knew what was happening (...) At about 5 p.m. of the same day doctor Breiner appeared to make sure that everything was

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<sup>313</sup> AŻIH, M. Bahn...,p.12.

<sup>314</sup> *ibidem*.

<sup>315</sup> *Yad Vashem, L. Serwetnik, Testimony, call No. P.III,n, (Kielce) 676.*

done properly. There were still patients who received the injections an hour before and were still moving. Doctor Breiner took a scalpel and stabbed them in their hearts, he did it himself. At 6 p.m. came (...) Thomas and checked if all the patients, excluding the staff, were dead (...) The dead were loaded on horse carts and transported through the whole city to the field where they were buried. Doctor Reiner and Thomas were present all the time.”<sup>316</sup>

The third action started early in the morning on Monday of 24 August 1942.

J. Alpert recollects: „... It was our turn. It was organized in that way that the Jewish police was coming to the flats pulling the inhabitants out and then in groups of 6 we went towards Warszawskie Przedmieście Street,<sup>317</sup> or today’s Okrzei Street. Through about 100 meters we were escorted by the police till we got to a street where there were SS-men watching who was old and who young (...) Older people were dragged out of the crowd and told to sit down on the pavement. Why should you go on foot, we’ll give you autos that will take you. When we left they shot them. We reached Okrzei Street where they organized a selection; who had the Meldekarte had to step forward and show it (...) from our family only my brother stayed as a dentist because they left doctors. My mother told me: «Stay with us». I was afraid to step forward because I thought they would kill me but finally I moved forward and a young SS-man asked me where I worked. I answered «in state saw mill». «And have you got the Meldekarte?» «No, I haven’t’ I don’t know what came over him - instead of sending me back he said: «to Scharführer». I went to another SS-man with a gun, who looked like a murderer: «Wo arbeitest du?». «Im staatlichen Sägewerk». Gut. He sent me to the right side. In the third action they left about 1000 people. We were organized in groups of 100 and there were 9 hundreds. I was in the fifth one. We are standing and next to us are Jewish policemen. I asked Gienek Guttman: «Gienek, why are we standing here?» He said «I don’t know’. Then Gayer and Thomas came (...). The Germans started moving people to the other side and I thought that there were too many of us, impossible that they wanted to take so many people to work. What was happening? Gayer and Thomas have alre-

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<sup>316</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>317</sup> *Shoud be: Starowarszawskie Przedmieście.*



ady approached us, I can see that they are beating people who haven't taken off their caps or didn't say clearly where they work. I took my cap earlier off so as not to have to do it in front of them. When they came to me they didn't ask about my papers, but: «Wo arbeitest du?» I answered: «Im staatlichen Sägewerk». They left me. Then out of 1000 people left for selection only 200 were left. It turned out that it was another selection. My brother [Szmul Dawid Alpert, a dental technician], whom they took with us after the first selection was also sent then (...). We were taken to the square in front of the synagogue, still surrounded so that nobody could join us or escape. Later on Thomas chased away those who were closed in the synagogue and the barrack and ordered another selection (in the synagogue and the barrack were only people chosen in the first and the second action). We were then altogether 1000 people (...) Afterwards, when everybody went to the trains (...) we were closed in a barrack [on Targowa Street - K.U.] and the following day we were told to go to Stolarska Street.”<sup>318</sup>

This is how A. Birnhak remembers the day of 24 August 1942: „Two transports had already left Kielce in unknown direction and for unknown purpose. The doctors and their families stayed in the ghetto (...) we were standing on the square, thousands of people, in the heat of an August day, waiting. Next to us was the family of doctor Serwetnik, a well known dentist, who was sent to Auschwitz with uncle Pelc. Their older daughter Liliana, who had done a nursing course with me, was standing next to me (...). A man in uniform, who on the square played a role of the Almighty God pointed at us with his wand and ordered the hospital staff to step forward. The nurses started moving forward. Liliana violently pulled my sleeve: «Let's go with them' For a second I stood stiff. Then I understood that If I didn't leave the crowd of women and children and didn't join the group of young people able to work I wouldn't have any chance to survive (...) I whispered to my mother: «Shall I go?» She replied: „My daughter, it's your decision. «Those were the last words I heard from her. We stepped forward with Liliana to join the hospital staff (...) The man in uniform still had too many people of the hospital staff. All over 40 - RAUS! Still too many. Over 35 - RAUS (...) A small group of young people stayed. But there were still too many. The god of the Kielce square divided us into two

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<sup>318</sup> *Yad Vashem, J. Alpert, Testimony, call No. 2725/197-C, pp. 9-11.*

groups: boys separately and girls separately. He lifted his wand and touched the shoulders of ten girls and ten boys. The rest - RAUS. Back to the transport. Liliana and I were touched with his magic wand. We were surrounded by the Jewish police and taken to the barracks. From the distance I saw my mom for the last time. Very pale, she was holding Heniuś's hand and walking in the crowd of exhausted, thirsty and dried by the heat people. They were going surrounded by the Jewish police and the Ukrainians. Behind them were going a few Germans. The Germans had everything excellently organized so that other people, including the Jews, were doing the dirty work. They went to the railway station. They were packed to cattle cars. Displacement to the East. Another big German lie (...) My mother and my aunt were young women, aged 42 and 43. How much life was still ahead of them (...) Heniuś was only 10. They took all his life."<sup>319</sup>

Some people didn't want to leave their families and wanted to be transported. Attorney Friedman voluntarily went into the train wanting to assist his wife. Some others didn't want to leave their homes knowing that they were surely going to die. It meant an immediate death. In this way died Adolf Mauerberger, a well known social activist, year long chairman of the Society of Jewish Real Estates in Kielce: „A connoisseur of a pub life, an unforgettable speaker at a feast table - couldn't be made by the Nazis to participate in the humiliating wandering of a crowd convicted to extermination. He opposed in his flat attempting at a murder in a gendarme's uniform and was shot.”<sup>320</sup>

During the liquidation of the ghetto that is from 20 to 25 August 1942 the Nazis shot in Kielce about 1000 people, mainly children, old and ill people. According to court records shot were among other people: Mojżesz and Rywka Alpert, Izrael Bajbrot, Chil Barankiewicz, Estera and Mordka Bekerman, Samuel Bońko, Berek Chmielewski, Mordka Cymrot, Sara Feder, Estera, Małka and Uda Fisztenberg, Lejbuś Figa, Icchak Finkler, Aron Frajman, Icek Majer Fried, Icek Frydman, Szloma Frydman, Szaja Granek, Dawid Symeon, Jankiel and Hercyk Garnfinkiel, Cełel Goldgrób, Mindla and Jakub Gostyński, Estera Goldret, Abram and Carka Targownik, Aron and Chil Rutkowski, Hersz Ejzenberg, Jankiel Henoch, Chana Joskowicz, Kaner Ma-

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<sup>319</sup> A. Birnhak, *Getto...*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>320</sup> J. Jerzmanowski, *W starych Kielcach*, Cracow 1975, p.107.

nia, Chana and Icek Kanerzucker, Anna Fajgla, Gabriel and Godel Kurc, Cyrla Krajzman, Motel Leśniewski, Joachim Lawensztajn, Lejzor Mincberg, Perla Moszenberg, Zelman Przeworski, Herszel Preis, Lejzor Rozenberg vel Rozenwald, Zelik Rozenblat, Aron and Sara Rubinsztajn, Aron Trajman, Bruno Schindler, Adolf Mauerberger, Chaja Szpiro, Eliaz Wilner, Izrael Waksbaum, Szlama and Rywka Zajączkowski, Chana, Dwojra, Ruth Zagajski, Frymeta and Zelman Zielonedrzewo, Bajła Żółta, Josek Dębski, Róża Obarzańska, the Reismans and the Gryszpans couple<sup>321</sup>

According to the testimony of Józef Miernik the Nazis shot 30 pregnant women on the last day of the liquidation on Radomska Street.<sup>322</sup> Their bodies were transported and buried on the slope between Nowy Świat Street and the Silnica. According to Michał Biesaga another place of mass shooting of Jews was also in the courtyard at 2 Kozia Street, where there were different Jewish institutions. The Jews were murdered and robbed at the same time. Bernard Zelinger, who was made to bury the dead on the slope near the Silnica, writes:

„...two big square holes partly filled with bodies on a sand dune near the river bank. The bodies were put in layers and covered with sand and quick-lime. Between the holes, on a hill two high rang SS-men were sitting on kitchen chairs in front of a big piece of white cloth spread on the ground. On the cloth there were valuables, jewelry and money put separately.”

The liquidation of the ghetto caused great shock of some Poles: „People were whispering that the Jews were taken to death. Oh, God, how can you look at this! I couldn't stand that, I ran home, fell on my bed and cried for a long time.”<sup>323</sup>

During five days the Germans transported to extermination camps in Treblinka altogether 20000-21000 Jews living in Kielce. Among them natives of Kielce, Jews from other Polish cities transported here as well as Jews from Austria, Bohemia and Germany. The numbers don't reflect the enormity of the tragedy, only an analysis of the names of people transported to Treblinka evokes horror. In gas chambers died almost whole families. Here are some of them: the Leśniewski - Perla, Józef,

<sup>321</sup> AP Kielce, ZDPGRP, call No.:4, 42, 318, 336, 561, 797, 1131, 1234, 1518, 1544, 1569, 1584, 1671, 1965, 2187, 2670, 3354, 3486, 3930, 4419, 5096; OKBZpNP, W. Zimoląg-Szczepeńska, *Nikt nie znał prawdy...*

<sup>322</sup> OKBZpNP, J. Miernik, *Testimony*, call No. Ds.21/68, v.2, p.28.

<sup>323</sup> W. Zimoląg-Szczepeńska, *Nikt nie znał prawdy...*

Tobiasz, Chuna, Josek, the Białobrodas - Chaja, Etlá, Nusyn, Sandla, Josek, Małka, Kajdla, Estera and Chaim, the Aronowiczés - Hercyk, Liba, Moszek, Mechel, Icek, Bajla, Małka, the Goldblums - Aron, Chana, Dawid, Josek, Zelik, Pinkus, the Finkelsztajns - Cyrła, Szapsia, Josek, Abram, Helena, the Gryszpans - Hersz, Szulim, Bajla, the Gertlers - Idesa, Gitla, Kalman, Hersz, Abram, Bajla, the Königsbergs - Moszek, Nuchym, Fiszel, Mordka, Boruch, Tauba, Bajla, the Kaners - Icek, Fajgła, Izrael, Sender, Sara, Alter, Nuchim, the Mały - Fajgła, Becelel, Hersz, Josek, Moszek, Jankiel, Mendel, the Sedrowiczés - Menes, Froim, Abram, Jankiel, Majer, the Wajnsztoks - Hersz, Estera, Uryś, Baniamin, Sara, the Bugajers - Rachel, Chaja, Icchak, Chana, Alona, the Ledermans - Szłoma, Gitla, Debora, Balcia, Ela, Zajwel, Nissan, Abraham, Rajchel Fajgła Tomasz, Chaim, Helena, Rutmans-Jonasz, the Zajączkowskis - Jozef, Idesa, Mina, Towa, Rywka, Róża, the Hochbergs - Alter, Kajdla, Jechel, Raja, Icchak, Becelel, Jakub, Izrael, the Gotliebs - Liba, Lea, Chaim, Bajla, Jakub, Michał, Sara, Hendel, the Wakszlaks - Chaim, Mordechaj, Rachela, Lea, Natan, Icchak, the Urbachs - Estera, Jakub, Sara, Lea, the Zilbersztajns - Abram, Mosze, Mordechaj, Józef, Cirla, Chana, Mojzesz.<sup>324</sup> Of the Leśniewskis, a family which in 1939 had 24 members, 21 people died! Out of 3000 Jewish families in Kielce each one lost a relative and some, such as the Rozenholc, Morgensztern and Ellencweig, ceased to exist. Natalia Balicka said: «All in all, 20000 Jews were transported. In Kielce stayed 1500, including 250 women and 50 children. Stayed (...) the workers of the factory „Ludwików”, quarries and a large group of women working on the farm of Czarnów. Apart from them stayed policemen with their families (...) all doctors and dentists with their families.»<sup>325</sup>

A. Birnhak: „They left mechanics and different technicians who worked in important for the German war industry factories as well as doctors and the whole Jewish police.»<sup>326</sup>

The liquidation of the Kielce ghetto went together with plundering of the murdered Jews' properties. The Germans were taking from their homes all that had any value. A special group of Jews was created which collected and selected stolen things. The feathers were stored in

<sup>324</sup> *About our house...*, p.213-346; AP Kielce, ZDPGRP, call No.: 5-5100.

<sup>325</sup> AŻIH, N. Balicka, *Testimony*, call No. 301/3012, p.1.

<sup>326</sup> A. Birnhak, *Getto...*, 35.

the industrial plant „Plumapol” at 35 Okrzei Street, machines, tools, clocks, sewing machines and the equipment of shoe top, shoemaker and purse makers’ workshops were stored in the south wing of the former bishop’s palace, furniture, paintings, house equipment, books, works of art - in Władysław Koterski’s house on Adolf Hitler Platz. Jan Nosek, a cart driver from Bilcza, arrested by the Germans on August 22 1942 and directed to the ghetto testified: „We had to load on our carts the Jewish property: bedding, carpets, clothes, utensils and different house equipment and transport them to the square near the synagogue or to the building of the former Voivodship Government (...).”<sup>327</sup> Jan Bandrowski: „Jewish working groups emptied the Jewish houses (...) We were transporting them where we were told by the policemen.”<sup>328</sup> The plundering lasted for the whole week. The Germans tried to sell some things to the Poles: „...the Nazis organized sale of Jewish things near the synagogue (...) on a square that doesn’t exist now, on the back of the synagogue, next to the mikveh I saw chairs and kitchen utensils, etc. spread on a dozen or so meters and the German policemen were acting as salesmen.”<sup>329</sup>

A. Hefland: „... we were used to clean the houses (...) Of course «Herenvolk» was looking in these flats for gold, jewelry and (...) money. They were collecting great amounts of feather beds and for this purpose they mobilized everybody who survived the action. They were storing them in the feather factory in the Jewish district (...) According to the order(...) we thoroughly cleared the blocks of flats on Piotrkowska, Jasna and Stolarska Street.”<sup>330</sup>

During the liquidation of the ghetto the Germans killed in that area seven Poles, including Franciszek Nosek, Stanisław Jarosz, Jan Pyszczyński from Bilcza and Szczęśniak from Domaszewice, who had been used to transport plundered things. On the day of the Jewish tragedy Jews many Germans were taking pictures, a part of which were developed in photographer’s studio of Tadeusz Rylski. In 1967 he submitted 7 saved prints to the OKBZH in Kielce. He gave a few photos also to Zdzisław Jędrzejewicz.<sup>331</sup>

<sup>327</sup> OKBZpNP, J. Nosek, *Testimony*, call No. Ds 21/68, v. 2, p.10.

<sup>328</sup> *ibidem*, J. Brandowski, call No. Ds. 21/68, v. 2, p. 130.

<sup>329</sup> *ibidem*, S. Białek, *Testimony*, call No. Ds.21/68, v.2, p.131.

<sup>330</sup> AZIH, A. Hefland...,p.4.

<sup>331</sup> OKBZpNP, Z. Jędrzejewicz, *Testimony*, call No. Ds.21/68, v. 2, p.117.

We know more about the last transport of the Jews thanks to Abraham Krzepicki from Warsaw, who got to Treblinka a few hours after their arrival. This is an extract from his memories, including a description of a long journey in a cattle car.

„It was worse and worse in the car. Water! We were begging the railway men. We wanted to give them a lot of money (...) We were lying almost on one another in stench and fug. If someone managed to get some water couldn't, however, use it all. Someone was crying that his father fainted, another that his mother lost consciousness and someone else's child was swooning. Although a human being becomes an egoist in such situations they had to share the water (...) After the station Treblinka the train went a few hundred meters further towards the camp (...) The door of the cars were opened by the Ukrainians. Around stood SS men with whips. Many people were lying on the floor. Many of them were dead (...) When I calmed down a little I went with others to a barrack. I intended to break a plank out of the wall and escape. When we entered the barrack we were stunned - there were a lot of dead bodies inside. Those were corpses of shot people (...) Later on I found out that they were Jews from the Kielce transport brought to Treblinka that morning. There was a mother with a son. When they wanted to separate them the son wished to say good bye to his mother for the last time. He wasn't allowed to. Then he produced a pocket knife and stabbed a Ukrainian. As a punishment all present in the camp Kielce Jews were shot on that day.<sup>332</sup>

After the liquidation of the ghetto the Polish inhabitants were allowed to go back to their flats, which they had had to leave in 1941.

W. Zimoląg-Szczeptańska recollects:

„The district between Warszawska, Piotrkowska, and Zagnańska Street as far as the railway looked like a battle field (...) broken plaster statues, colorful plates, pots, rests of furniture, piles of thick, lather bound books (...) were lying everywhere, the wind was blowing the pages (...) Apart from rubble, broken glass, furniture and utensils - the pieces of human existence a very depressing impression evoked the Jewish synagogue. Out of the broken windows I could see red as blood pillows, feather beds (...) in great amounts, from the floor up to the

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<sup>332</sup> A. Krzepicki, *Treblinka*, „Biuletyn PIH” 1962, No.43-44, pp.87-90.

high ceiling (...) Those signs of somebody's life, house and intimacy grieved my heart as if they had been calling for vengeance with that redness."<sup>333</sup>

Particular responsibility for the crimes committed on the Jewish inhabitants of Kielce during the first years of occupation, especially at the liquidation of the ghetto, should bear Captain Hans Gayer, the chief of the Kielce Schupo, Lieutenant Erich Wohlschuluger from the same formation, the chief of the Gestapo Ernst Thomas and Mathias Rumpel. The work of the Judenrat directed by H. Lewi, wasn't praiseworthy, either, as well as the Jewish order service, which was often too officious in executing the murderous orders of the occupier.

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<sup>333</sup> W. Zimoląg-Szczepeńska, *Nikt nie znał prawdy...*





## Chapter V

# LABOR CAMPS FOR JEWISH POPULATION

After the so called great displacement in Kielce there were about 1500-2000 Jews. Unfortunately, these are not exact numbers because nobody kept records then and besides, to Kielce were constantly coming people transported by the Germans from the towns of Ponidzie. The people left in Kielce were kept by the Germans in barracks on Targowa Street, in the synagogue and neighboring houses. A part, organized in brigades, was cleaning the ghetto. In the first place were cleaned the houses on Piotrkowska, Jasna and Stolarska Street. That area was to belong to be „the seat of «chosen» Jewish workers”. We were moved to the new district eight days after the liquidation of the ghetto had begun.”<sup>334</sup>

Officially, on August 30, 1942 in 50 houses on the above mentioned streets the Nazis opened „Arbeitslager”, which means a labor camp, unjustly named small ghetto. It was a camp with a clear aim to use the Jews to work for the needs of the occupier.

M. Bahn: „I was among those 1500 Jews. A small ghetto was created on Jasna Street. Our first task was to rob the dead bodies, taking off their golden teeth and rings or cutting off the fingers with rings. I was myself employed at such jobs. Nobody knew where those people were transported, nobody suspected that they were transported to death, the more nobody suspected that they were burned. From among the Judenrat members president Lewi stayed with his family, doctors of the hospital with their families, policemen and some servants of the hospital. The small ghetto became a camp where the Nazis stored the things belonging to the dead. Even after such great national tragedy the Jewish police and Lewi tried to confiscate the prettiest flats, robbed from the dead and take their parcels from the workers. The surviving people were broken down but the „highnesses” were drinking and partying more than before (...). From among the 1500 people that were left only 300 were women (...) everybody understood that a full liquidation of the rest could start any time. All started looking for Arian documents, even the president and the Jewish police.”<sup>335</sup>

A. Birnhak: „They left skilled mechanics and different technicians who worked in important for the German war industry factories. Doctors and the Jewish police were left too. Why did the Germans need so

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<sup>334</sup> AŻIH, A.Hefland...p.4.

<sup>335</sup> *ibidem*, M. Bahn..., pp.13-14.

many doctors for so few people who stayed? Two days before the transport the Nazis told them to liquidate all the patients. If they had refused- they would have been shot. The prize: they could stay in the ghetto (...) The doctors survived. For the time being.”<sup>336</sup>

Sz.Zalcberg: „The ghetto had now only three streets and a lager was created. But before that we were driven to a barrack where we spent three days on the ground without any food. There was cry and lament in the barrack. I wished I had been displaced with my family. I was ordered to (...) tidy the ghetto. We were searched after each day of work. Once a young woman was taken to death for taking a dress and the Gestapo chief preached that for «similar» offences all of us would be punished in the same way. We didn't have any food or clothes so we tried to get some food. We got into the storehouse of the chairman of the Judenrat, Lewi. There was a lot of fusty flour, rotten potatoes sugar and fat whereas before the displacement there had been a dozen or so new dead bodies every day because of hunger.”<sup>337</sup>

J.Alpert: „We were ordered to go to clean Stolarska Street; they had warned us not to take anything because they would shoot us on the spot if they found something. We went there (...) they gave us a post-Jewish street. Then we came back later and one man, a soap producer, was late - maybe he wanted to find a flat for himself - he came a few minutes after us. Then Lieutenant Wohlschulüger asked him: «where have you been? Why didn't you come on time? You must have been stealing.» And shot him in our presence (...) Then they counted us and registered (...) there were very few of us.. Herman Lewi was still there. They didn't send him (...) they Judenrat didn't work (...) Gottlieb, Treiger and Cytryn had already died. Hirszman survived (...) Mostly those stayed who had worked in different institutions and came back to their places. We got very little food (...) But the majority of those who stayed had money and if not, they tried to get it. It wasn't difficult. I must say something unflattering - many people tried to get the job at cleaning the ghetto and ordering things. They could always get something, steal some clothes or other things and then sell to the Poles, which was what they lived on. I worked in a saw mill (...) After the first day I came back with bleeding hands (...) And then I met a Polish girl

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<sup>336</sup> A. Birnhak, *Getto...*,p.35.

<sup>337</sup> AŽIH, Sz. Zalcberg...,p.14.

whose fiancé was an engineer in the hall where I was working and she probably told him about me because he took me from that work and hired to make different calculations.”<sup>338</sup>

A. Birnhak: „A late as six months after the transports we were still in the «small ghetto»; the workers of the „holzwerk” - „Henryków” and „Ludwigshütte” - „Ludwików”, a few mechanics and other specialists who the Germans needed (...) In the course of time the number of the ghetto inhabitants was decreasing. In the first place chronically ill people were taken to the Jewish cemetery and shot there. Then pregnant women went the same way.”<sup>339</sup> Some of them were sent to other camps. R. Blumenfeld remembers that it was that camp from which he got to Pionki.

The OKBZpNP in Kielce has ascertained that in the labor camp on Jasna and Stolarska Street an average number of Jews was 1360. The camp was surrounded with barbed wire and a fence. The Poles weren't allowed to go there. In the camp were Jews born in Kielce, Jews from other Polish cities as well as some Jews from Austria, Bohemia and Germany. The area was watched by the Gestapo. The Jews were employed in quarries, factories and storehouses on Zagórska Street, the Waterworks Company, garages at 1-3 Mickiewicza Street and craftsmen, mainly tailors, shoe top and shoemakers' workshops. Several dozen people were selecting not only the things taken from the Kielce ghetto but also great transports of clothes from Treblinka sent to Kielce by railway. After sorting them, a part of the things was sent to Radom on the Gestapo order, where there was a collective storehouse located in the tannery „Korona”. There they were selected once again and the most precious things were transported to Lublin to storehouses created the moment the „Aktion Reinhard” started.<sup>340</sup> The Gestapo from Skarżysko Kamienna called many times for the post-Jewish property.

There are some reports concerning the life of Jews in the above mentioned camp. Edward Szcześniak, who worked with the Jews in the Kielce waterworks testified that the Jews: „... complained sometimes about bad food they were receiving and that they had o get food by

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<sup>338</sup> *Yad Vashem, J. Alpert...,p.11.*

<sup>339</sup> *A. Birnhak, Getto..., pp. 34-35.*

<sup>340</sup> *A. Rutkowski..., p. 115.*

themselves (...).<sup>341</sup> „...all workers”<sup>342</sup> were helping them. After several weeks a common kitchen was organized in one of the houses, which improved the possibilities to feed the people. An outpatients’ clinic was opened. There was no problem with finding a doctor. There were 15 of them in Kielce; it was more difficult to get medicine. Some people were taken by force on the Gestapo order to labor camps in Skarżysko Kamienna, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski and Pionki. The Gestapo reactivated for their own needs the remnants of the Jewish police. The head of the dozen or so policemen was a German Jew Gustaw Szpiegel.

The camp was a site of German murders, the way the ghetto used to be. A few people were shot for an attempt to sell stolen weapon. Natalia Balicka testified: „If the Germans took someone red-handed they shot him on the spot. I remember the execution of a young Jewess who took some clothes.”<sup>343</sup>

According to the report of Stefan Głowacki in September 1942 H. Gayer and two other German gendarmes shot a Polish boy and two Jews near the embankment of the railway. Otto Voss was passing by on his motorbike when he shot a Polish woman bringing bread to the camp.<sup>344</sup> In summer 1943 a Jewish child going along the fence was shot. At the same time O. Voss shot a boy who was standing on the so called Arian side and pouring potatoes into a sack hanging on a rope from a window on the Jewish side.<sup>345</sup>

The Germans invigilated also the houses near the camp that were inhabited by Poles. In December 1942 Róża Skrzyniarz, the wife of Zygmunt Skrzyniarz was arrested. After long lasting tortures in the Kielce prison she was shot on the Jewish cemetery.<sup>346</sup> Her husband was sent to Auschwitz for helping Jews.

After ordering the ghetto and giving some of the houses to the Poles there was another reorganization of the employment. The Jewish teams were directed to saw mills and the factories: „Ludwików”, „Henryków”, „Granat” and quarries in Kielce, Chęciny and Słowik. Some women were hired at farm work in Czarnów. For 10-12 hours of work

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<sup>341</sup> OKBZpNP, S. Głowacki, *Testimony*, call No. Ds21/68, v.3, p.81.

<sup>342</sup> *ibidem*.

<sup>343</sup> AŻIH, Balicka..., p.2

<sup>344</sup> OKBZpNP, S. Głowacki, *Testimony*, vall. No. Ds.21/68, v.3, p.81.

<sup>345</sup> *ibidem*, Z. Śliwiński, *Testimony*, call No. Ds. 21/68, v.3, p.58.

<sup>346</sup> *ibidem*, F. Redliński, *Testimony*, call No. Ds. 21/68, v.3, p. 73.

a day the Jews were getting 250 gram of bread a spoonful of marmalade and once a week 100 gram of sugar.

Simultaneously with liquidating the Jews the Jewish real estates were confiscated: houses, factories and different bank deposits. They were confiscated under the justification that they were ownerless! In this way were confiscated: the shares of Maurycy and Leopold Gringras in the company „Orion”, the tannery of Judka and Kalma Bekerman in Białogon, saw mill of Kochen and Weinstadt in district Herby, glue factory of Nusyn Tenenbaum in Białogon, fabrics shop of Dwojra Rapoport on Wesoła Street, stocks of wood belonging to Josek, Chaim and Icek Dębski, the sawmill of Herman Lewi, Majer Machtynger and Stefan Nowak on Młynarska Street, the goods yard of Ita Rotenberg on the same street, yards of Feliks Zuch, Izrael Rozenberg and Bernard Bugajer on Zagnańska Street, parquet factory of Lejzor and Leja Reisman on Okrzei Street, sawmill of Josek Chaim Gołębiowski on Zagnańska Street, real estates of the natives of Kielce Mordka and Estera Bekerman in Daleszyce, factory of barrels of Mordka and Szmalka Machtynger on Młynarska Street, sawmill of Szmalka Laks and factory of plywood of Jankiel Maliniak, Alter Wolf, Mendel Szilberg and Dawid Eisenberg in Białogon, the quarry „Wietrznia” belonging to Chaim, Mieczysław, Henryk, Elias Zagajski, Sara Ehrlich, Cyrla Wilner and Abram Tauman. Confiscated was the property of the Cooperative Loan Bank and the money deposed in the Commissionary Board of the Department of Forestry belonging to the following Jews: Chaim Preis, Szymon Zylbering, Ruchla Grinberg, Gitla and Izrael Albirt, Stefan Maliniak and Kazimierz Ornuch.<sup>347</sup> All that property was confiscated by SS company „Osti” working in the Radom District.

A few months after the creation of the labor camp on Stolarska and Jasna Street the Nazis decided to create three separate camps located at the biggest industrial plants in Kielce working mainly for the Wehrmacht. In relation to that the Germans started decreasing the number of Jews in Kielce. In order to carry out that plan three big actions took place: the so called action „Palestine”, an action against doctors and against Jewish children.

In November 1942 the occupation authorities announced that the people who had Polish passports and an appropriate amount of money

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<sup>347</sup> „Anordnungsblatt fr Stadt Kielce und Kreishauptmanschaft Kielce” 1942, No. 9-12.

could go to Palestine by a special transport through Bulgaria and Turkey. The news caused great commotion and evoked many hopes. People willing to leave were registered on special lists. It soon turned out that there were more candidates than it was expected: „... people bought bright clothes, packed their things and were in good mood. At the same time they were preparing their Polish passports. The Gestapo and the gendarmerie came and took them all to the cemetery and shot.”<sup>348</sup>

It caused another shock among the Kielce Jews. Many of them tried to get Arian documents faster but the effect was tragic, too. N. Balicka testified: „One group that already had Arian documents was about to leave the camp when due to a denunciation by a clerk who was acquainted with the matter the Gestapo caught them all - they shot about 30 people then.”<sup>349</sup> Among the shot Jews was H. Lewi with his wife Helena and their two sons.

Sz.Zalcberg: „One day the chief of the Gestapo burst into the camp. They found Arian documents on a few Jewish policemen and on the son of the chairman of the Judenrat. The guilty were taken to cemetery, striped naked and shot.”<sup>350</sup> The intelligence service of the Home Army informed:

„In January 1943 in one of the presumably last executions the last chairman of the Judenrat Herman Lewi with his family were murdered on the cemetery. He died like a hero, crying before the death „Poland has always existed and will go on” The information about his patriotic behavior got to the central conspiratorial authorities of the London government in Warsaw.”<sup>351</sup>

In the Jewish society some people questioned that version of his death saying that he begged the Germans to save his life.

On April 23 the Nazis ordered undertaker Jankiel Bakalarski to dig another hole in the Jewish cemetery. The next day all surviving doctors were murdered. At the beginning people had wondered why the Germans had kept them alive for so long.

J. Alpert said: „All the doctors with their families were left in the ghetto. I had a friend, doctor Goldstein, who I used to meet almost every

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<sup>348</sup> AŻIH, M. Bahn, p.14.

<sup>349</sup> *ibidem*, N. Balicka..., p.2

<sup>350</sup> *ibidem*, Sz. Zalcberg... , p.4.

<sup>351</sup> AAN, Branch VI, *Representation of the Government, Department of Information and Propaganda, call No. 202/III/8, v.2, p.162; J. Jerzmanowski..., p.108.*

day and we often wondered why the Germans did so. I think that there were 15 doctors for 1000 people in the ghetto. And I remember Goldstein say that when he had been in a camp during the war against the Bolsheviks there was only one doctor for 15000 war prisoners. We were wondering what it was caused by and we reached no conclusion...”<sup>352</sup>

It was remarkable that the Germans were aware of those fears and were reassuring the doctors’ milieu maintaining that as specialists, they would be necessary either in Kielce or somewhere else. On April 24 at noon all the doctors were ordered to get ready for a long trip. It was announced they would be taken to Germany, where the camps had not enough doctors.

N. Balicka testified: „... Schupo policemen came to the camp and announced that all the doctors with their families would be taken to labor camps in Germany, where there were not enough doctors. They told them to take necessary tools and clothes.”<sup>353</sup>

The people took then their best clothes, food and money. When T. Rotman’s wife was a little late and he didn’t want to go without her the Nazis said calmly that they would wait. The doctors and their luggage were packed on two trucks. The cars set off along Szeroka Street and near the junction with Żytnia Street they were joined by a car with Schupo policemen. When they entered district Pakosz the doctors realized that they had been deceived. It was, however, too late to escape. On the Jewish cemetery they were undressed and shot. After throwing the dead and sometimes only injured people into the holes the Nazis threw grenades at them: „On the cemetery doctor Fitel broke off a part of a tomb stone during the action and jumped at Gayer.”<sup>354</sup> In that action died: barber surgeon S. Rotman, doctors J. and T. Rotman (with their wives), their sister Wanda with her 5-year- old son Romek, J. Lewinson, Jakub Goldstein, Elizer Polak, Uszer Tuch, Mojżesz Fitel, Jakub Szatz, Uda Ajzenberg, Henryk Stabholz, Abram Eizenberg, Straus, Kleinberger, Herlik, Kuperminc.<sup>355</sup> Only doctor L. Reitter survived.

The Germans didn’t try to cover up their crimes any more. The next day they brought to the camp some things that belonged to the

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<sup>352</sup> *Yad Vashem, J. Alpert...p.13.*

<sup>353</sup> *AŻIH, N. Balicka...,p. 1*

<sup>354</sup> *„Dos Naje Lebn” 1945, No.4.*

<sup>355</sup> *A. Massalski, S. Meducki..., p. 180.*



doctors; stethoscopes, dressings, medicine. It was a clear sign that the victims had been murdered: „The Poles living near the cemetery talked later about incredible screams and shots...”<sup>356</sup>

On May 23, 1943 it came to the most terrible murder in the Kielce labor camp. The Germans decided to murder all living children, about 50, as useless in the creation of factory camps. They ordered to gather them on a square near Jasna Street, which caused great fear. Sara Kerbel, the mother of murdered 15-month-old Gizela remembers that day: „On May 23, 1943 Jewish policemen came at dusk, knocked on my window and cried: „All to the assembly point’. We understood what it meant.”

M. Bahn testified; „The policemen’s children were killed. Mothers brought their children and were saved themselves. The children were crying: «Murders, you aren’t our parents!’ Doctor Reitter himself brought his only daughter, stroke her head and left to the murders. Out of 40 mothers only 4 didn’t give their children. These were: Lado, Ajzenberg, Elkind and another one. The 4 women were taken with their children into one house and the door was boarded over (...) all day were the mothers and they children dancing their final dance of death (...) in the afternoon they were shot with their children. One 11-year-old boy, Zabłocki, hid during the action and when all finished he came back to the camp (...) where his parents were. He told them: «I don’t regard you as my parents’ and he kept his word. He wasn’t with them all the time.”<sup>357</sup>

The action of murdering children was directed by Mathias Rumpel. Altogether 45 children from 18 months to 13 years old were murdered. Here are the names of the victims of that terrible murder: Gizela Kerbel, Karol Waldiferent, Frymusz Zoberman, Aron Goldblum, Luisa Elkes, Felicja Wajnberg, Mieczysław Cherszon, Zulia Goldberg, Izrael Chmielnicki, Zygmunt Gurewicz, Herszel Szafir, Rachela Chmielnicka, Zewusz Grynberg, Sara Lederman, Nina Zylbesztajn, Ewa Mendelbojm, Sara Graubart, Dawid Klajberg, Gedzia Bugajer, Sara Laks, Janusz Rozencwajg, Irena Proszowska, Lila Minc, Menes Berkowicz, Zofia Reitter, Józef Grynberg, Bronisław Gyfrys, Józio Goldblum, Anna Hofman, Ryszrda Kasrilewicz, Mindla Lander, Chana Jarzwicka, Pola

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<sup>356</sup> AŻIH, N. Balicka...,p.2.

<sup>357</sup> AŻIH, M. Bahn..., pp.14-15, *Sefer Kielts Toldot Kehilat Kielts, Tel Aviv 1957, pp. 243-245.*

Grosberg, Chana Borensztajn, Renata Klajnberg, Dora Zylbersztajn, Mendel Borensztajn, Estera Jarzwicka, Gizela Rozencwajg, Icek Frydman, Lolek Ajzenberg, Becelel Fajnmesser, Maria Kaner and two children whose names are unknown.<sup>358</sup> The majority of the children were aware of what was going to happen. A girl brought to death tried to convince a German: „Ich kann doch arbeiten! Warum wollen Sie mich erschiessen?“<sup>359</sup>

In spring 1943 the situation in the camp was exceptionally tense.

Sz. Zalberg writes: „The life in the camp was a constant horror. There were executions all the time. They shot people for nothing: if someone was caught trading with Poles or if someone was late for a call.”<sup>360</sup> They were murdering also outside the camp. When the Germans discovered by accident that Sas was a Polish Jew married to a German Jewess and weren't Germans, as they had maintained, all their family living at 1 Mickiewicza Street was shot. After the execution their house was completely plundered by the Gestapo.

N. Balicka adds: „...there were many cases of shooting for different and also without any reasons. They shot someone for having 2000 zloty, another for one day absence from work (...) the camp inmates seeing that the Germans were systematically liquidating them tried to get weapons and become partisans. About 15-20 people managed to get out of the camp (...) Any resistance inside the camp was out of question because of the number of the inmates. On May 31, 1943 the Germans finally liquidated the camp. About 600 people were transported to Skarżysko and Pionki and the rest put in barracks near bigger factories.”<sup>361</sup>

Several dozen Jews used chaos caused by the creation of the camps and escaped to find shelter in neighboring villages.<sup>362</sup> Emanuel Złoto got as far as to Warsaw.

The Germans were aware of the fact that some Jews managed to escape from ghettos and camps. They decided to find them using another ruse. They announced that there were separated towns where wandering about Jews could find accommodation and employment. In the Radom District these were: Sandomierz, Radomsko and Ujazd.

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<sup>358</sup> *Eighty anniversary Kielce, New York 1985, p. 22; Sefer Kielts..., p.245.*

<sup>359</sup> A. Kubiak, *Dzieciobójstwo podczas okupacji hitlerowskiej*, „*Biuletyn ŻIH*” 19156, No. 17-18, p.86.

<sup>360</sup> AŻIH, SZ. Zalberg...,p.4

<sup>361</sup> *ibidem*, N. Balicka..., p.2.; OKBZpNP, *Investigation files*, call No. Ds. 1/67, v.1, p.20.

<sup>362</sup> *The letter of B. Zelinger of 2.02.1994 (in the possession of the author)*

Those who believed the Germans once again got to gas chambers in Treblinka, among them was Mojżesz Gutman from Kielce.

An escape from a ghetto or a camp didn't guarantee survival. Necessary was not only Arian appearance, quite a lot of money, fluent Polish, one had to have a stroke of luck. Rozalia Goździńska, who escaped from Kielce and found shelter in Byczew, was shot with her 6-year-old son by gendarmes from Chroberz.<sup>363</sup> The same gendarmes murdered Jew Naftulewicz from Piekoszów. In Zagnańsk the Germans shot hiding there teachers: Anna Jodłowska and Feliks Glikzman. Bajla Fryd found death during the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. In unknown circumstances were murdered: Chana Flint, Herman Ostrowicz, Ojzer Hoffman, Józef and Hudesza Fajnkopf.

After the liquidation of the camps on Stolarska and Jasna Street the Germans created three labor camps at the Kielce factories: „Hasag Werke in Kielce”, „Ludwigshütte” and „Henryków”.

The first labor camp at „Hasag”, i.e. „Granat” was organized on the territory of the industrial plant. A piece of soil was allocated for five wooden barracks. Three of them were occupied by men and two by women. According to the recollection of Daniel Fiszgarten in the barracks there were: „... bunk beds, straw mattresses and no blankets (...) They slept in pairs in order to have something to cover themselves with”<sup>364</sup> The Jews, in number from 300 to 400, were working in two shifts at the production of ammunition, unloading and cleaning works. Everyday at 4:30 was an appeal and the inmates were counted. The work lasted from 6 a.m. till 6 p.m. with a 1,5-hour lunch break. At 6 p.m. the other shift was coming. Daily rations consisted of 200 gram of bread and a bowl of soup.<sup>365</sup> The Jews weren't allowed to leave the camp. If somebody did any work outside the factory, it was always done with the participation of a German convoy, which made any escape impossible and impeded contacts with Poles. The latter ones weren't allowed to enter the barracks occupied by the Jews. In the camp worked Jews from: Kielce, Busko, Chmielnik, Chęciny, there were also a few Jews from Charków. The camp was managed by Chaim Rozen-cwajg, who tried to provide for equal conditions for everybody. This is a description of life in the camp by D. Fiszgarten:

<sup>363</sup> OKBZpNP, J. Piekusiowa, *Testimony*, all No. Ds.21/68, v.3, p.169.

<sup>364</sup> AŻIH, D. Fiszgarten, *Testimony*, call No. 301/254, p.2.

<sup>365</sup> *ibidem*, p.3.

„In the factory was Wachführer SS-man Milke - he tortured people without mercy (...). On the night shift a few people were brought to his office on his order, men and women. He told them to strip and kiss (...) Another game that he liked was to order people to lie down on a barrel covered with tar and hit them with an iron baton or an iron rubber (with wires). He would hit twice, three times and take the next one and then begin again so that everybody got their due 10-20 blows. They all had black bodies from those blows (...) German masters hit people at work so that people were coming with broken heads. In the camp watchmen and volksdeutsches would burst into the barracks, order revisions, seize things and beat...:”<sup>366</sup> The Pole Zygfryd Lamcha, during the war a manager of the technical office of the factory, confirms that the Jews were beaten: „The Germans beat the Poles and the Jews. They used for that purpose whips and other things. Schliecht had a wolf-hound, which he often set on the workers.”<sup>367</sup> Henryk Cymer, who worked in the tool-house, recollects: „The head manager was a Gestapo policeman Schliecht. Technical directors were: Mansfeld and Steleck. Mansfeld spoke very good Polish. Jews who were passing by our window every day to work in the factory said that Schliecht personally seized different valuable things from them, which they had sewn in their clothes or in ladies’ underware (...) Another torturer was helping him, the commander of the werkschutzes - Berger...”<sup>368</sup>

The camp was a site of constant crimes. In spring 1944 the Gestapo came to the camp so as to organize a transport of the Jews to labor in Skarżysko-Kamienna. Nobody wanted to go there, people started hiding in different places of the factory. Furious Germans began a chase to catch them:

„A German went up to the attic to look for Jews there. He was wearing a werkschutz’s uniform and I think he had a machine gun. He had hardly got there when we heard shots (...) After shooting several Jews, probably three, he threw them from the attic onto the floor of the factory hall. On Berger’s order we had to carry the murdered Jews onto a square behind the hall. There were already lying several shot Jews - men and women. From the attic in our department was

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<sup>366</sup> *ibidem*, pp.2-3..

<sup>367</sup> OKBZpNP, Z. Lamcha, *Testimony*, call No. Ds. 22/68, pp.72-73.

<sup>368</sup> E. Fąfara, *Gehenna ludności żydowskiej*, Warsaw 1983, p.229

thrown also a young, 18-year-old Jewess. She worked there with her father. The German shot her in her leg. Limping she was asking the Nazi not to shoot her. However, the German took her to the square where the murdered Jews were lying. He seized her arm, twisted it and shot her in the back of her head. She died on the spot (...) The Germans shot then 8 Jews. Their bodies were loaded on a horse cart by other Jews and taken outside the factory.”<sup>369</sup>

Altogether 25 people were murdered in that factory. In the camp there were the following Jews from Kielce: Boruch Płótno, Nachman Diament, Szlama, Leon and Gienia Kirsz, and others.

In summer 1944, because a Russian offensive was expected, the Germans started dismantling the machines in the factory halls. It was carried out in the atmosphere of fear and nervousness. German masters were beating and torturing Jewish workers: „The people tried to escape, about 6-7 managed it. One of them was caught by an SS-man and shot. Their clothes were painted then.”<sup>370</sup> On August 20, 1944 a column of prisoners of about 400 people was taken to the platform on Młynarska Street and transported from Kielce. A part of the Jews got to war industrial plants in Częstochowa and some were transported to Buchenwald. On the way they also took Jews working in the quarries in Słowik and Bialogon: «They were transporting them for 16 days. Every day 4-5 people suffocated in the cars, on the way 200 Jews out of 500 died of hunger and suffocation...”<sup>371</sup>

Another labor camp for the Jews was created at 125 Młynarska Street on the ground belonging to the foundry „Ludwików”. In that camp were Jews from Kielce and other Polish, Bohemian, Austrian and German cities. They worked at the production of iron petrol barrels, one-horse carts, such as „Pleskau” and „Fuhrman” and at car repairing. The number of Jewish inmates in that camp reached 300, 1/3 of who constituted specialists of the iron branch: turners, fraisers (frezer) and mechanics.<sup>372</sup> Jewish barracks were fenced with barbed wire although the whole area was surrounded with a fence. The Jews weren't allowed to leave the camp, the Poles were forbidden to enter the area occupied by the Jews. In a report of the Aid to Jews Council -

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<sup>369</sup> *ibidem*, pp. 233-234.

<sup>370</sup> *AŻIH, D. Fiszgarten...*, p.4.

<sup>371</sup> *ibidem*.

<sup>372</sup> *AAN, Branch VI, Home Army Works, call No. 203/III-10, p.349.*

„Żegota”, which was interested in the Kielce labor camps for the Jews, the situation in the camp at the foundry was characterized as follows:

„...’Ludwików” employs about 40 Jewish qualified workers and 200 normal workers, porters and train car unloaders. We have contact with them through an engineer and Polish workers. The working conditions are very hard, any trade and selling clothes impossible. The foundry is situated on the outskirts of Kielce. The Jews live there (...) From the train we can see Jewish workers and their policemen at work in the open.”<sup>373</sup>

A many years’ worker of the foundry Stanisław Batorski estimates that the Germans were keeping there on average 300 Jews: „They were quartered in special barracks on the factory premises (...) They had their board. In the „Ludwików” the senior of the camp was Jew Biały-stok (...) The food they received was very modest, they lived in appalling conditions...”<sup>374</sup> Later on a small kitchen was opened. In 1943 near the Jewish camp the Nazis hanged 10 Poles transported from prison by the Gestapo. All workers of the foundry had to be present at the hanging. A Jew from Kielce, a cab driver Lejba Sławewski was forced to carry out the execution.<sup>375</sup> At the end of July 1944 the Germans started dismantling and transporting parts of the machines. They also started an evacuation of the Jews. Therefore some decided to escape. Józef Wenus, working as a molder, testified:

„In summer 1944 the Germans were transporting Jews to a concentration camp in Auschwitz. Four Jews wanted to avoid the transportation and hid in an empty stove in the enamel room. They were hiding in an empty chimney channel for six weeks. The Poles who knew that were bringing them food. Among the hiding Jews were two brothers and a son of a doctor, a gynecologist from Kielce. His name was Szatz. He came across a werkschutz when he went out to bring some water from the department where they were hiding. I saw 3 Gestapo policemen and 3 or 4 local werkschutzes, among whom was Mach, taking the Jews to shot them.”<sup>376</sup>

Also Edward Kluzek witnessed that murder: „The Nazis (...) bound their hands and took through the back gate of the factory and shot next

<sup>373</sup> M. Arczyński, W. Balcerek, *Kryptonim „Żegota”*, Warsaw 1979, p.222.

<sup>374</sup> OKBZpNP, S. Batorski, *Testimony*, call No. Ds. 23/62, pp. 14-15.

<sup>375</sup> K. Cichoń, *Memories of a Kielce resident*, p. 37, manuscript (collections of WNPk)

<sup>376</sup> E. Fąfara..., pp.229-230.

to an old brick-field. They were buried over there (...) Three Gestapo policemen shot the Jews. One of the victims begged before the execution to save him but a Nazi shot him directly in his face.”<sup>377</sup> In the same camp Gucia Borensztajn from Kielce was shot during a revision.

The worst conditions were in a camp set up at the factory „Henryków”, where specialized timber workers and a large group of people transported the wood from railway platforms to different sections of the factory „The work lasted from 6 a.m. till 5 p.m. with an hour-long lunch break. The work was done mainly on the railway under the supervision of a Jewish policeman and a worker of the saw mill of Jewish nationality (a civilian).”<sup>378</sup> The living conditions were as difficult as in other camps: „On a small area they put several barracks where they cramped the prisoners sleeping on bunk beds without bedding. Lack of sanitary facilities and poor food rations made the prisoners ill all the time.” On average there were from 300 to 400 people in that camp.<sup>379</sup> That camp also constituted a site of murder. According to Wiktor Tomiczek the Nazis murdered there, among other people, a Jewish storekeeper because: „...during disinfection of the camp he wasn’t careful enough and caused fire which burnt the store with the products of the factory.”<sup>380</sup> In relation to that fire, which took place in March 1944 and which was treated by the Germans as sabotage, a Jew Jankiel Graber was hanged. They didn’t allow anybody, in order to frighten people, to take the body off the provisional gallows for three days. Karl Essig, who was also responsible for murdering Jankiel Zylberberg, personally directed the execution. A Jewess was also shot when the Nazis found out that she was pregnant. The manager of the „Henryków” was reichsdeutsch Fuss, exceptionally aggressive towards the Jews; he could beat people and shot them with his pistol. He calmed down a little only after he was battered by a group from the Polish underground. Just like from other camps the Nazis took from this camp, if necessary, people to Skarżysko Kamienna, Pionki, Częstochowa and Ostrowiec. To that place were transported also the Mendlewiczses from Kielce: Mojżesz, Chana, Władysław and Chaim. They often took a few of

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<sup>377</sup> *Ibidem*, pp.231-232.

<sup>378</sup> *M. Arczyński, W. Balcerek...*,p.222.

<sup>379</sup> *GKNZpNP, Files of the Town Courts, Town Court in Kielce, Kielce. 47, p.70.*

<sup>380</sup> *OKBZpNP, W. Tomiczek, Testimony, call No. Ds. 21/68, v.3, p.88.*

about a dozen Jews for cleaning works in German institutions, including to the Gestapo building on Szeroka Street, where they were ordering furniture and equipment confiscated from the Polish population.

It results from the correspondence with doctor Bernard Zelinger, domiciled in the United States, that the youth formed a group in the camp that aimed at escaping from the camp to the forest surrounding Kielce. They assessed that the Russians would get to the region of Kielce in mid 1944. The leading members of the group were: B. Zelinger, Zelik Wasser and nurse Natalia Kopel. The group had three pistols and maintained contacts with a cell of the Polish underground in villages Sieje and Dąbrowa. B. Zelinger wrote about their organized escape: „Because the barrack was surrounded with barbed wire fence I decided to escape when I would be taken to the night shift. I was convinced that the Russians would start an attack on June 22 because historic dates were important for them (...) I escaped through the latrine because it was situated near outer wires quite far from the Ukrainian guards.”<sup>381</sup> On May 12 altogether 48 people escaped: B. Zelinger, Z. Wasser, Aron Joskowicz with his wife, Izaak Feldman, Samuel Gerszonowicz, Eli Rubinsztejn, Abram Szpiro, Bluma, Henryk and Jakub Joskowicz, Mojżesz Żyto, Izaak Garnfinkiel, Szloma Strawczyński, Wolf Bojgen and others. The Germans managed to stop N. Kopel, who after a few months in prison got to Auschwitz. The fugitives found help that is shelter and food at Jan and Aniela Kozubek’s as well as at Franciszek Czerwiec’s. Zofia Kozubek and her son Marian helped the Jews a lot.<sup>382</sup> Another group, consisting of 10 people, who tried to escape in the first decade of June, was less lucky: 6 people were shot, including two brothers Zajączkowski and Stefan Szwarcbard was hanged. Franciszek Wiatrak witnessed another execution - the hanging of three Jews who tried to escape, among whom was Śpiewak from Kielce.<sup>383</sup>

In July 1944 the Germans started transporting machines to the Reich. On August 1 the Jewish camp at the „Henryków” was liquidated. Most of the inmates got to Auschwitz and some to Częstochowa.

The camps at factories existed for only one year. During that time the Germans murdered there about 200 Jews, several dozen died of

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<sup>381</sup> A letter of B. Zelinger of 20.02. 1944 (in the possession of the author).

<sup>382</sup> An interview with S. Kozubek of 21.06.1994

<sup>383</sup> OKBZpNP, F. Wiatrak, Testimony, call No. Ds.22/68, p.116.



hunger, exhaustion and diseases. Their bodies were buried on the slope of the Silnica. Very few, 40-60 people, managed to escape in the final phase of the liquidation of the camps and found shelter in neighboring villages. Some of them survived and some didn't live to see the end of the war.

We should turn our attention to another important moment in the history of the Kielce Jews. In the memories of A. Birnhak there is a following extract: „Jewish policemen and president Lewi were also German spies in the ghetto (...) The Jews in the ghetto were left without any leader and that is why they didn't manage to organize resistance. If doctor Pelc had stayed in the ghetto it would have surely lead to an active resistance, like in Warsaw.”<sup>384</sup> Unfortunately, A. Birnhak can't often remain objective in judging both the Poles<sup>385</sup> and her compatriots. Undoubtedly, H. Lewi yielded to her uncle M. Pelc in many respects, especially when it was necessary to express opposition to the Germans. It was clear that he wanted to survive and that he wasn't always honest to other Jews but the suspicion that he was a spy is exaggerated. Wasn't the resignation of M. Pelc from the function of chairman of the Judenrat a form of escape from problems and the sorrows of life under occupation? It's controversial. As far as military struggle is concerned, it was actually impossible in Kielce, contrary to what A. Birnhak suggests. The city and the Polish partisan units were too small, they lacked weapons, there were no military trainings and above all the western front was in the Pyrenees and the eastern - near Stalingrad. The situation was worsened by political divisions and the attitude of orthodox Jews thinking that fulfilling all orders of the occupier would give them a chance to survive. The only possible thing was a small military demonstration, which could be liquidated by the Germans very quickly.

At the end of 1944, according to a Łódź newspaper „*Dos Naje Lebn*”, in Kielce appeared a special group of Germans which started exhumation of Jewish bodies buried in accidental places. They were taken outside the city and burnt. At the same time they started searching different offices, like for example the Municipal Government in Kielce so as to find documents concerning the liquidation of the Jews.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> A. Birnhak, *Getto ...*, p.34.

<sup>385</sup> Poles often helped A. Birnhak in the ghetto and even though she often mentioned Polish anti-Semitism.

<sup>386</sup> „*Dos Naje Lebn*” 1945, No.4.

When talking about the extermination of the Kielce Jews it had to be underlined that they were dying also on the territories occupied by the USSR in 1939. In the graves of Katyń were found bodies of Jews from Kielce, doctor Captain of the Polish Army Jerzy vel Juda Fleszler, lieutenant Alter Fürstenberg and Lieutenant Antoni Eiger.

In the protocol made after the first exhumation it was written: „Fleszler Jerzy, doctor domiciled in Kielce at 73 Sienkiewicza Street, identity card of a reserve officer, visiting-card, identity card of a civil officer, foreign passport, identity card and badges of the 3rd regiment of light artillery of the Legions, 2 letters, post card and wooden cigarette holder.”<sup>387</sup>

Civil officer Artur Alland from the Revenue Office, arrested in Łuck, found death in the basement of NKWD in Kiev. A group of 11 communists (4 Poles and 7 Jews) got under the accusation of spying to the camp in Kołyń, where they were building railway. When they were there the Sikorski-Majski agreement was signed. Released, they tried to get to the army of General Władysław Anders, they weren't, however, accepted because of their communist past. They returned with General Zygmunt Berling.

To labor camps got also those Jews from Kielce who, according to Szarlota Kahane and Henryk Gringras, didn't want to receive Russian citizenship. This is what H. Gringras wrote:

„My parents refused the Soviet citizenship (...) In June 1949 we were transported from Russia (from Lvov - K.U.). For seven weeks we were carried by a crowded cattle car to the Far East. But all lagres were full so we were brought back to the European part to a site of exile „Nowaja strojka”, which wasn't ready yet, 41 km from Jozskar Oła (now probably Carjewo Kokszańsk), in the middle of nowhere. We were kept in that penal colony until general Sikorski signed an agreement with Stalin concerning the release of imprisoned Poles after the Nazi invasion on Russia. After the release we went at random to Barnauł (...) We got there completely exhausted. Fortunately, a lady from Leningrad, the wife of a former car's dignitary found us in front of the railway station and took care of us because she had good memories from her stay in the Kingdom of Poland. She found a closet or a wood-shed where we put our unconscious father [Maurycy Gringras - K.U.], suffering from pneumo-

<sup>387</sup> *Katyń, Lista ofiar i zaginionych jeńców obozów Kozielsk, Ostaszków, Starobielsk*, edited by A. Szcześniak, Warsaw 1989, p.51; P. Żaroń, *Obozy jeńców polskich w ZSSR w latach 1939-1941*, Warsaw, Londyn 1994, p. 317; the autor enumerates among the war prisoners in Kozielsk also doctor Zylberstein from Kielce.

nia. We had luck because a Polish barber surgeon, a former exile, saved his life. We were advised to go to Samarkanda. They said that it was warmer, there was fruit and it was rumored that a Polish army was being created there. We got to Samarkanda swollen of hunger and with hepatitis (...) At that time the majority of Polish inhabitants had already died of hunger and diseases. Only few were shot. First were dying men and children. My father consistently refused to accept soviet citizenship; he was in prison, waging his private war with the regime.”<sup>388</sup>

Due to hunger, adversity and diseases many Kielce citizens never returned home. In Russia died: Jozek Urbajtel, Idel Rotenberg, J. Lubochiński, J. Zajączkowski, and others. Jerzy Pelc, died of exhaustion in Alma-Ata struggling through the steppes of Asia. His body was found by the Gringras near the railway:

„The body of Jerzy Pelc - wrote H. Gringras - found my father together with another native of Kielce Seweryn Piasecki, near the railway in Alma-Ata in Kazachstan. Our cattle car stopped and their went out to find some water. Next to the corpse they found the body of another man from Kielc, Idel Rotenberg, I guess, Mojżesz’ brother. He was in agony and my mother saved him (not only him). Unfortunately, he died after two years, like the majority of the Polish exiles.”<sup>389</sup>

S. Piasecki, who lives in the United States, says: „... the soviet occupiers on the Polish territory behind the river Bug sent up-country not only the Kielce Jews but also all Polish refugees, irrespectively of their confession: both Catholics and the Jews. There was no discrimination in that respect. In Lvov, where I got in December 1939, after an unpleasant confrontation with the Gestapo, there were only few Poles from Kielce, who I had no contact with, excluding my cousin Adam Piasecki, who lived there permanently and two Gringras families (of Maurycy and Leopold). I was transported from Lvov together with the family of Maurycy Gringras (his wife Lola and son Henryk) and we were kept together in a confined forced labor camp in Central Russia guarded by the NKWD, till September 1941.”<sup>390</sup>

Those who survived came back to Poland in 1945-1946. Many of them omitted Kielce and went to the Western lands, where it was easier

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<sup>388</sup> A letter of H. Gringras of 12.12.1993 (in the possession of the author)

<sup>389</sup> *ibidem*

<sup>390</sup> A letter of S. Piasecki of 18.01. 1994 (in the possession of the author).

to find a flat and a job. Some people stayed in the lagers for many years after the war. Abram Biedny was from a numerous shoemaker's family. Since 1929 he had belonged to KPP. Accused of communism he spent 6 years in prison in Kielce, Sieradz and Wronki. In 1938 due to an administrative decision he was transported from Kielce to Bereza. In 1939 he fled to Soviet Russia. His fascination with the new system didn't last long. Already in 1941, accused of criticizing the USSR, he was sentenced to 10 years of forced labor.<sup>391</sup> In 1951 he received a decision about 10 years of forced settlement in Boguszczyany in Krasnojarski Kraj. In 1956 he received permission to apply for the right to come back to Poland. According to a letter of Dawid Szczekociński he returned to Poland in 1957.<sup>392</sup>

On writing about the history of the Kielce Jews the attitude of the Poles towards the Jews living there should be mentioned. Some were afraid of entering the ghetto although it wasn't prohibited for the Poles, while others were risking their lives to help the Jews. A. Birnhak, who in her memories criticizes many times the Polish anti-Semitism, admits that she was saved thanks to a Pole, Tadeusz Wroński, who sold things left by the Strumwys at the Poles' and gave large amounts of money to the author of the memories.<sup>393</sup> Before the Jews were forbidden to leave Kielce doctor O. Strumw had very often gone to neighboring villages to buy from his former patients food for his family and friends. Judge W. Stein was keeping during the occupation things left by wealthy Jewish families and gave them back to the survivors after the war. Cz. Król, a worker of the foundry „Ludwików” during the occupation said: „Jews were asking me to contact them with their debtors to give them back their due, which partially succeeded.”<sup>394</sup> M. Pelc was receiving medicine from the Poles and Jewish children were hidden and treated in W. Buszkowski hospital. Prison doctor Wojciech Ruszkowki saved the life of Natan Bałanowski.<sup>395</sup> Polish railway men were smuggling to the ghetto coal in sacks, driving the trains along the western wall of the ghetto, which was parallel to the railway Kiel-

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<sup>391</sup> AAN Warsaw, Branch VI, personal file of A. Biedny, call No. 6861.

<sup>392</sup> After his return to Poland he testified that Bruno Jasieński (Artur Zysman), the author of a well known novel *Pałę Paryż* died on his hands in the camp.

<sup>393</sup> A. Birnhak, *Cud ocalenia...*, p.32.

<sup>394</sup> Cz. Król... , pp.6-7.

<sup>395</sup> S. Stradowska, *Moje życie, moja praca*, p.7, manuscript (collections of WBPK).

ce-Skarżysko. Farmers from neighboring villages very often sold flour and bread to the Jews on transporting goods to storehouses in the school on Radomska Street. Polish workers of waterworks and factories tried to help the Jews, mainly bringing them food: „...almost all workers from storehouses and workshops” helped to get food in the waterworks - testified E. Szczęśniak.<sup>396</sup> D. Fiszgarten, employed in the „Hasag” confirms that the Poles: „Were bringing food products that we could buy from them, thanks to which our people didn’t starve.”<sup>397</sup> S. Polut adds: „The Jews had a kitchen but were badly nourished and lived in great misery. The Poles very often brought them food from their homes, although they were hungering themselves.”<sup>398</sup> Z. Lamcha: „Polish workers (...) although they were hungered themselves, they very often gave food to the Jews.”<sup>399</sup> Jan Muszyński states: „One form of help was employing Jewish craftsmen to do some work, such as sewing clothes, mending shoes, etc. They received food for such services. As long as it was possible we used to have our clothes sewn at tailor Sokołowski’s or the Gerbers” In the same way the Kozubeks from Dąbrowa supported the Machtyngers living on Radomska Street. J. Henl: „Poor little Szlomek (...) he came several times to eat a plate of soup. We used with my mother to pack into his bundle potatoes, pork fat, groats and all that was at home.” Antoni Kundera organized Arian papers for a Jew who had to sew uniforms for German aviators stationed in Masłów.<sup>400</sup>

At the end of the occupation even some German supervisors and overseers turned blind eye to the trade between the Poles and the Jews, for example in industrial plants managed by Sliwa or in the waterworks. N. Balicka, who used to work for Śliwa, writes: „...I wanted to take food bought from the guard of the factory but he told me not to go to the camp because they were transporting the Jews.”<sup>401</sup> E. Szczęśniak, who worked in municipal waterworks, mentions: „... the director of the waterworks, German Bischof was gentle to Jewish workers...”<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> OKBZpNP, E. Szczęśniak..., p.42.

<sup>397</sup> AŻIH, D. Fiszgarten...,p.2.

<sup>398</sup> OKBZpNP, S. Polut, *Testimony*, call No. 22/68, pp.19-20.

<sup>399</sup> *Ibidem*, Z. Lamcha..., pp.72-73; E. Fąfara..., p.224.

<sup>400</sup> Interview with S. Kozubek of 21.06.1994.

<sup>401</sup> AŻIH, N. Balicka...,p.2

<sup>402</sup> OKBZpNP, E. Szczęśniak..., p.42.

Many Jews who in summer 1944 escaped from factory camps found shelter in villages surrounding Kielce. In Białogon stayed: Mojżesz and Judel Bahn, Mojżesz Różycki, Dawid and Judka Bekerman and Mojżesz Kochen. M. Bahn recollects: „...I escaped from the camp to farmer Zawadzki from Białogon (...) I hid in his cellar. Then I went with M. Różycki, who also escaped from the camp to Sobkowice [actually Sobków - K.U.] to farmer Wolczyński, who had used to work in our factory. He received us kindly and said; «What happens to you will also happen to me.»”<sup>403</sup> B. Zelinger admits that he survived only thanks to Polish families from Dąbrowa and Sieje - the Kozubeks and Czerwiec: „We had a brotherly attitude to Kozubek and Czerwiec, they helped us...”<sup>404</sup>

To the fact that the Jews were receiving help testifies the information related to the medals granted by the Institute of National Remembrance Yad Vashem in Israel - „The Righteous among the Nations”. In edited by Michał Grynberg *Księga Sprawiedliwych* (Book of the Righteous) we can find examples from Kielce. It is not a complete record. Anna Bogdanowicz, nee Wrońska, domiciled in Kielce before the war, moved to Jasło during military operations. In 1942 she hid Jewess Sara in a forester’s lodge using the help of her friends in Kielce. Thanks to her help Sara survived the war. A. Bogdanowicz died in Auschwitz for helping the Jews. Bolśław Idzikowski, a citizen of Kielce, was at the beginning helping Jews bringing them food to the ghetto. When the ghetto was liquidated he took to the Arian side Estera Jurkowska and her two brothers (one was Izaak), Lapa with his wife and 4-year-old daughter, couple Ksawerowie and Maciej Rusinek (he used this name during the occupation) with his wife and 6-year-old daughter. Kazimierz Opel from Białogon, at the request of Józef Rymarz from Warsaw, hid 6-member-family of Górski: Marian and Mosze Górski with 3-year-old daughter, Leon Górski and Henryk Cynamon. When it became „loud” because of some too curious neighbors he helped some of them to escape to the forest and the rest - to get to Warsaw. Bolesław and Leonia Śliwiński from Kielce hid Dawid Frydman in their home. In 1943 he was transported to Niwki Daleszyckie by narrow-gauged railway. They also got for him a certificate on Zygmunt Śliwiński. Also Władysław Sikora from Pakosz helped Jews bringing them food. He also helped a Jewess who

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<sup>403</sup> AŻIH, M. Bahn..., p.15; E. Fąfara..., p.42.

<sup>404</sup> A letter of B. Zelinger of 20.02.1944 (in the possession of the autor).

had escaped from the Kielce ghetto and got to the forest on Stadion. Helena Fiszer, the daughter of a dentist from Busko Zdrój, who was saved by Leontyna Tarabuła from Mirów near Wiślica spent some days in Kielce, before she got to an orphanage in Częstochowa. After the war the Poles who had helped the Jews in other regions of the country moved to Kielce. Stanisława and Paweł Charmuszko saved Jews in Warsaw and Edward Fajks - in the vicinity of Chełm Lubelski.<sup>405</sup> On June 29, 1994 the ambassador of Israel in Poland gave other two medals to the inhabitants of Kielce - to Teofil Nowak and Helena Senderska.

An escape from the ghetto or the camp didn't guarantee surviving. In 1944 due to mass supplies of weapons and the concentration of AK troops suspiciousness against people hiding in forests intensified.<sup>406</sup> Such atmosphere led to some deaths. B. Zelinger informs that the partisans killed: Andrzej Joskowicz, Izaak Garnfinkiel and Szlama Strawczyński: „... only I managed to escape when they were taking us to death. I know the name of the patrol commander; I know that he is alive in Gdynia.”<sup>407</sup> Some didn't live to see the end of the war. Izaak Feldman was shot by the Germans after escaping from the „Henryków”. Eli Rubinsztein and Adam Szapiro had frostbitten legs and died of gangrene.

On August 13, 1993 journalist Jadwiga Karolczak published in the „Magazyn Słowa Ludu” article *Duchy i upiory*, where she described the greatest tragedy of the Kielce Jews in the village of Zagórze in February 1944. Salomon Zelinger, an active member of the ZAZ and then an AK soldier in Warsaw managed to put a part of his family and some acquaintances escaped from the ghetto in Zagórze in a house suggested by a Court clerk Stefan Sawa. Sawa also supplied food for the Jews hiding there. Under the pressure of the AK intelligence from Daleszyce suspecting Sawa of collaboration with the Kripo the Special Martial Court of Underground Poland passed a verdict ordering liquidation of all residents of that house. The verdict was carried out by the AK soldiers of the „Wybraniecki” troops”.<sup>408</sup> First Sawa and some

<sup>405</sup> M. Grynberg, *Księga Sprawiedliwych*, Warsaw 1993, pp. 52, 191, 464; *Sprawiedliwi z Kielc* - „Echo Dnia” 1993, No. 81; P. Wroński, *Sprawiedliwi Kielczanie*, „Gazeta Lokalna” 1993, No. 99; S. Olejarczyk, M. Fudala, *Nasza lista Schindlera* „Echo Dnia” 1994, No. 73; M. Maciągowski, *Pamięć, która zostanie*, „Magazyn Słowa Ludu” 1985, No. 1366; J. Pisiewicz, *Uratowana*, „Słowo Powszechnie” 1985, No. 266.

<sup>406</sup> Z. Firley, *W „Kedywie” i w „Burzy”*, Warsaw 1987, pp. 241-242.

<sup>407</sup> B. Zelinger..., a letter of 11.01.1994 (in the possession of the author)

<sup>408</sup> J. Karolczak, *Duchy i upiory*, „Magazyn Słowa Ludu” of 1993, No. 1774, pp 1, 6; S. Sawa was after his death awarded the medal „Righteous among the nations” - see: „Echo Dnia” 1993, No. 81.

other Jews, including 12-year-old Danuta Zelinger were killed, then all valuable things were taken from the house and shared among the troop and finally they set fire to the house. The Jews who were hiding in the attic were burnt. According to H. Zelinger at that time died: Mojżesz Rotenberg, Halina Cukierman, Danuta and Zofia Zelinger, Lidia Sadowska, Icek Proszowski and 6-year-old Frynusia Frydman. It's remarkable that that drastic article didn't cause any significant reaction. None of the former soldiers who had executed those people answered the question who were the judges and why they acted according to the rule of collective responsibility, why they sentenced those people to death although according to the law informers could be punished in many different ways. On H. Zelinger's motion Sawa was awarded posthumously with the medal „The Righteous among the nations.”

It could seem that during the war people with life experience stood better chances of surviving than for example women and children. However, in the enormous machine of German genocides nobody could be sure. It can be proved by the history of the Voluntary Fire-Department in Kielce, where there was a strong link between its members. Among its 28 members who died in 1939-1945 there were also Jews: Herszel Ickowicz, Dawid Lerer, Kiwa Mydlarz, Aron Uszerowicz, Ottokar Utschik, Majer Zajdner, Motek Zajderman and Natan Lederman.<sup>409</sup>

In January 1945 those who survived could at last come to light. According to the Łódź newspaper „Dos Naje Lebn” in February 1945 there were 201 Jews in Kielce, including 120 women and 16 children. Those were, however, mainly Jews not from Kielce, who had temporarily hidden there. Because the front line was moving, some of them returned to their towns and villages; in May 1945 there were 79 Jews in Kielce.<sup>410</sup> In July 1945 the first group of 40 people directed by Józef Halperin left for Palestine. The way led through Czechoslovakia and Romania. The leaving people were constantly replaced by new comers. At the beginning of February 1946 the number of Jews in Kielce increased to 306 people.

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<sup>409</sup>75th anniversary of the Voluntary Fire-Department in Kielce, Kielce 1948, p.21; *Rejestr miejsc i faktów zbrodni popełnionych przez okupanta hitlerowskiego na ziemiach polskich w latach 1939-1945. Województwo kieleckie*, Warszawa 1980.

<sup>410</sup>„Dos Naje LEbn” 1945, No.4.



Not until 1946 was it possible to estimate how many people lost their lives. It turned out that out of 20942 Jews inhabiting Kielce the moment the war started, 25400 registered there in 1940 and 27000 herded in the ghetto - not more than 500 survived, including natives of Kielce.

The Great Synagogue on Radomska Street was devastated. It was changed into a storehouse and burnt in the last phase of military operations. Jewish prayer houses and schools, including the High School on Poniatowskiego Street, as well as the old people's house and the orphanage were destroyed. Jewish bookshops, libraries and printing houses ceased to exist. Enormous was also the devastation of real estates. The Germans confiscated household goods and things of personal use, as well as goods, raw material, machines and tools necessary for craftsmanship works or running a company. Also the money deposited in credit institutions - banks, banking houses, cooperatives and loan-societies,<sup>411</sup> jewelry, valuables and collections.<sup>412</sup>

A part of the Kielce Jews returned to the city after 1945 and some decided to go to Western Lands, where it was easier to get a job and a flat. The Municipal Government allocated two big tenement houses for those who returned, wanted to stay and waited for their own houses. The first tenement house was at 18-20 Focha Street and the other at 7-9 Planty Street. A hotel, a kosher kitchen, kibbutz „Ichud” and the Voivodship and Municipal Committee of Jews in Poland were located in the latter house.

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<sup>411</sup> It applied also to the Polish population

<sup>412</sup> B. Zelinger writes that he was robbed of a precious stamp collection.



# CONCLUSION

The extermination of 20000 Kielce Jews, who had owned before the war 20,7% properties, 56,7% craftsmen's workshops and 61,8 % shops was done within only 5 days of August 1942. The time of annihilation came at a very inopportune moment, when the murderous Nazi machine was ruling from the Pyrenees to Stalingrad and when the Polish military resistance was taking its first steps. In Poland, like nowhere in Europe, the punishment for helping Jews was death. It required a lot of civil courage to stretch out a helping hand to a Jew. From the several dozen memories and letters we learn that the help had mainly an individual character and only in a few cases we could talk about an interest of Polish institutions and the underground in the fate of the Jews. The Jews of Kielce found death not only by the Nazi hands but also in the lagers of the USSR. Under German occupation they were dying of gas and bullets and under Russian occupation they were killed by hunger, coldness and slavery labor. The most faithful description of the experience of deportees in the USSR was written by Gustaw Herling Grudziński (*Inny Świat*, Warsaw 1989). The forests of the Świętokrzyskie Voivodship weren't secure hiding places for Jewish fugitives from ghettos and camps, either.

A. Birnhak titled one of the extracts of her memories „the miracle of surviving”. One had to have luck, luck on the verge of a miracle, to survive. And only a handful of people survived, 1% of the population inhabiting Kielce before the outbreak of the war. The Jews from Kielce were dying in Treblinka, Auschwitz, Majdanek, Gliwice (a branch of Auschwitz), in the Kielce ghetto, in labor camps in Kielce, Skarżysko Kamiena, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, Pionki and Częstochowa, they were dying of typhus and dysentery, in gas chambers, hanged and shot. The Jewish property, their culture: libraries, cinemas, schools, prayer houses and the synagogue were destroyed.

About 200 Kielce Jews survived the war and the occupation. On the basis of the files of the Polish General State Attorney and the memories of the surviving people we can, however, give the names of the people who were lucky. Of the Zagajskis and the Wilners, the owners of the quarries „Wietrznia” survived: Henryk, Mieczysław and Eliaż Zagajski and Abraham Wilner. The last director of the „Kadzielnia”, Jerzy Ehrlich survived in a war prisoners' camp in Germany. His brother Julian survived in England. They couldn't return to Poland, though, because as officers of the „sanacja” regime [introduced by Józef

Piłsudski in 1926-1939, E.W.] they were deprived of the citizenship by communist authorities. Of the Nowaks, who owned among other things, grange Głębozka, survived Jerzy, Stefan's wife Irena and their minor son Piotr. The Zelingers were less lucky - Salomon's wife, Róża, survived and their son Henryk. From the side line only Bernard Zelinger survived. Of the well known doctor family of Rotmans survived only Henryk, hiding as Kadera. Of the Pelces survived Janusz, who had left Poland before the war, of the Strumws - only Oskar's daughter Alicja. Survived Alfred and Szymon, the sons of doctor O. Fleszler, shot in Katyń. From among the Lipszyces and Goldmans, who owned the quarries „Międzygórze”, survived Mieczysław Lipszyc and Smycha Goldman. The families of Maurycy and Leopold Gringras had been in camps in the USSR but survived. Of the Kahans, who had traded with cars on a large scale before the war, survived Icek, Mojżesz and Szarlota Kahane. Not wanting to lose their citizenship they were exiled. Only Icek Dębski survived of the family that before the war produced wooden packages in Kielce. Of the „Plumapol” owners Pesla and Perla Fried survived. From among the Machtyngers who owned a saw mill in Kielce, only Maria survived, out of the Bekermans, who had a tannery - Judka, out of the Rabinowicz, owners of the brick-field „Wietrznia” - Rywka Rabinowicz. After 16 years of lagers to Kielce returned A. Biedny. Other survivors were: Wigdor Abramowicz, Pikus Ajzenberg, Elias and Leon Albirt, Chil Alpert, Abram, Natalia and Rywka Balicki, Mojżesz Bahn, Perla Barankiewicz, Icek and Mojżesz Baum, Alter, Chaja, Icek Białobroda, Izrael Bimka, Mordka Birenbaum, Chaim and Rafał Blumenfeld, Szloma Bońko, Józef Borensztajn, Uszer Braun, Hudes Bromer, Szmul Brukier, Mojżesz Brykman, Szmul Bursztyn, Ignacy Celer, Szmul Charendorf, Chana Chmielewska, Izrael Cieśla, Berek Cukier, Perla and Brandla Cymrot, Chawa Dizenhaus, Chawa Drukarz, Mendel Dutkiewicz, Izrael Działowski, Pinkus and Abram Ejzenberg, Mendel Elbirt, Chaim Eliasiewicz, Abram Ellenberg, Gitla Englerd, Szapsia Englender, Chaim Erpalbaum, Henryk Fajner, Gołda Fajgenblat, Dawid Fajnkuchen, Jankiel Feldsztajn, Salomon Fester, Fiszel Figa, Machel, Dora and Sara Finkielsztajn, Mojżesz Fisz, Alter Frajtag, Berek, Chaim and Lejba Frydman, Szloma Fuks, Sara Garnfinkel, Alter German, Mordka Gertler, Samuel Gerszonowicz, Rachela Goldbach, Cael, Lola and Mordka Goldman, Lejbuś Goldgrób, Saul Goldman, Aba Goldszajd, Sara Goldszajd, Izrael Goldsztajn, Julian

Goldwasser, Icek Gotfryd, Chaim Granek, Chaja Graubart, Rachela Grosfeld, Nuta Grynberg, Aron Grynblat, Rywka Grynspan, Aszer and Hersz Gutman, Mindla Helfgot, Zyzla Herling, Aba Herman, Lejzor Herszkowicz, Lejb Herszman, Abram Hoffman, Dwojra and Jakub Holcman, Chaim and Natalia Horberg, Lejb Horowicz, Mirla Jaskiel, Bluma Joskowicz, Mendel Kajner, Mosze and Henoach Kaminer, Henryk Kamrat, Alter, Mordka and Rywka Kaner, Chaja, Sara and Szmul Karp, Dwojra Katz, Szloma Kersz, Izer Kirsz, Mendel Kiersz, Łaja Kirszbaum, Chaskiel Klajman, Maria Klajnerowicz, Eliasz Knobel, Chil Kochen, Mordka Kochen, Chaskiel Korenwasser, Fajwel Korona, Mojżesz Königstein, Herszel Kotlicki, Łaja Krajzman, Estera Krawczyk, Abram Kryształ, Icek and Wolf Kuperberg, Jenta Kuźmierska, Małka Kurc, Alter Laks, Chaim, Estera, Izer Lamberg, Hersz Lederman, Chaim and Cyna Leichter, Szaja Lejwa, Abram Leśniewski, Lejb Lewi, Gerszon Lewkowicz, Nuchym Lewenstein, Chaja Lieberman, Herszel and Szmul Lipszyc, Idel Luksenburg, Dawid Liebertowski, Lejzor Łajewski, Nuchim Mały, Szmul Manela, Regina Manela, Józef Majerson, Chana and Władysław Mendlewicz, Chawa Meppen, Mendel Mikułowski, Maria Miller, Estera Minberg, Icek and Izaak Minberg, Mojżesz Mintz, Barbara Morawiec, Lejzor Morawiec, Chil Moszenberg, Hilel Moszkowicz, Barbara and Izrael Najman, Chaskiel Nissengarten, Pesla Nuchim, Nysel Manela, Blima Orzechowska, Gitla Osia, Szloma Ostrowicz, Josek Paciorkowski, Aba Passyrman, Mindla Perl, Lejzor Perl, Ruta Płockower, Naftula Płótno, Icek, Lejzor and Wolf Pomerancblum, Chaim Posłuszny, Izaak Preis, Hendla Proszowska, Mordka Rajzman, Szlama Rajzman, Lejb Recht, Abram Richter, Lejb Rozenblum, Mindla Rozenberg, Estera and Smycha Rozenblum, Chil Rozenwajg, Mosze Rozenfeld, Jechiel Rosenkranz, Łaja Rozenek, Józef Rozenwald, Cejwa Różycka, Bajla, Mindla and Pesla Rubinstein, Joachim Rubinstein, Mojżesz Rutkowski, Frymeta Siniarowska, Chil Sokołowski, Rywen Sokołowski, Moszek Solarz, Hersz Sonczow, Wolf Sosnowski, Moszek Spiro, Zelman Spiro, Chaim Sternfeld, Perla Strawczyńska, Chana Szajndla, Mojżesz Szała, Majer Szapsiewicz, Henryk Szarogreder, Juma Sztarkman, Aba Szeftel, Chil Szlezynger, Izrael, Cyrla Szmulewicz, Ruchla Szafir, Mosiej Szlafman, Zew Szperling, Zyzla Szpiegelglas, Hudesa Szwer, Jakub Szykman, Dawid Szczekociński, Cesia Światło, Abram Świeczarczyk, Menesa Tajtelbaum, Józef Targownik, Abram Tauman, Brandla and Chaim Tenenbaum,

Mordka Tenenblat, Pesla Tepfer, Josek Tuchwurcel, Josek and Rafał Urbach, Sara Urbajtel, Chaja Wajsbrod, Chaim Weisbrod, Moszek Wajsmann, Frymeta Waksman, Hindla Wall, Jakub Wargoń, Zeldia Wasser, Lejwa Wiśniewska, Wolf Włoszczowski, Gołda Wodzisławska, Szanjdla Wolfsztat, Mindla Wygańska, Fiszel, Majer, Perla and Ruchla Zajac, Leon and Tobiasz Zajczkowski, Blima Zajdenwasser, Fajgla Zalberg, Perla Zelmanowicz, Mojżesz Zielonedrzewo, Czarka Zilberszpic, Emanuel Złoto, Szmul, Wolf, Perla, Icek, Rafał Zylberberg, Wolf Zylberung, Dawid, Josek, Sara Zylbersztajn, Etlia Zyscholz, Mojżesz Zwinkler, Izidor Zimnicki and Abram Żarnecki.

Survived doesn't mean returned to Kielce. Some of them settled where they were at the moment the war ended. Many people from Kielce lived in Lower Silesia, sometimes they moved to big municipal agglomerations, such as Warsaw, Łódź, Cracow, Stettin. Some others couldn't for different reasons return to Poland and decided to stay in Great Britain, Sweden and Denmark.

Most of those who got to Kielce decided later on to emigrate. Their families were dead, their property was plundered, the political atmosphere was tense and, which is important, they had a perspective of life in their homeland. The most important factor constituted, however, the total destruction of economic, cultural and family life of the Jews by the occupier. The events that occurred in Kielce in 1946 were only, according to the Committee of Productiveness of Jewish Population: „... oil on the flames of the emigrational atmosphere.” The Jews who left Kielce in 1945-1946 usually settled in Argentine, the United States, Canada, France, Great Britain and Palestine. Today about 4000 Kielce Jews or their descendants acknowledge their links to Kielce.





## Annexe 1

More significant Jewish associations in Kielce in the years 1918-1939

### CHARITIES

- The Society of Aid to the Poor of the Jewish Faith, the seat at 6 Nowowarszawska Street, the leading activists: Mordka Fiszel Kaminer, Herszel Zagajski, Moszek Ferster
- The Society of Aid to Poor Ill Jews „Linias Hacedek”, the seat at 1 Duża Street, the leading activists: Mojżesz Pelc, Jerzy Fleszler, Mar-  
kus Rawicki, Mojżesz Kaufman.
- The Society of Aid to the Poor „Tomchaj Enyim”, the seat at 4 War-  
szawska Street, the leading activists: Alter Hochberg, Chaim Krau-  
ze, Beniamin Lew, Moszek Złoto.
- The Society of Aid to Poor Women in Childbirth, the seat at 1 Duża  
Street, the leading activists: Tekla Mauerberger, Lea Tauman, Stefa-  
nia Zimnowoda, Ida Fleszler.
- The Society of Aid to the Poor „Achi Ezer”, the seat at 4 Warszawska  
Street, the leading activists: A. Rapoport, Fajgla Rozenkranc, Rache-  
la Cukierman, Sara Rapoport.
- The Society of Aid at Getting Married, the seat at 3 Silniczna Street,  
the leading activists: Dora Rapoport, Fajgla Rozenkranc, Rachela  
Cukierman, Sara Rapoport.
- The Society of Care of the Jewish Orphans’ Home, the seat at 3 Alek-  
sandra Street, the leading activists: T. Mauerberger, M. Pelc, J. Flesz-  
ler, S. Rapoport.

- The Kielce Branch of Central Organization of Care of the Jewish Children, the seat at 5 Duża Street, the leading activists: Izrael Herszkowicz, Szmul Strawczyński, Jochweta Ginsberg, Abram Kirszenbaum.
- The Association „Old People’s House of Brothers Zagajski’s Foundation”, the seat on Seminaryjska Street, the leading activists: Abram Mincberg, Izaak Tauman, Herszel and Chaja Zagajski, M. Pelc, J. Lewinson.
- The Charity „Rabman”, the seat at 4 Warszawska Street, the leading activists: A. Rapoport, Idel Preis, Judka Cukierman, Aron Moszkowicz

### **SOCIETIES SUPPORTING THE JEWISH HEALTHCARE**

- Society of Health Protection of the Jewish Population, the seat of the Kielce branch at 40 Nowowarszawska Street, the chairman of the board doctor J. Lewinson.
- Anti-tuberculosis Society „Marpe”, the seat at 15 Leonarda Street, the chairman of the board doctor J. Fleszler.

### **SOCIETIES SUPPORTING THE JEWISH EDUCATION**

- Society „Talmud Tora”, the seat on Planty Street, the chairman of the board H. Zagajski.
- Society „Jesode Hatora” - the seat on Rynek, the chairman of the board Chaim Szenfeld
- Society „Jeszybot”, the seat on Rynek, the chairman of the board J. Fiszman.
- Society of Jewish Public and Secondary Schools „Przyjściół Wiedzy” („Friends of Knowledge”) , the seat on Poniatowskiego Street, the leading activists of the board: Abram Kohn, Aron Moszkowicz, Salomon, Feuer.
- Committee of Aid to Jewish Students „Auxilium Academicum Judaicum”, the seat at 2 Mała Street, the leading activists of the board: J. Lewinson, J. Fleszler, Herman Frejzynger, Stanisław Zylberszlak
- Circle of Friends of the Jewish Male Secondary School, the seat on Poniatowskiego Street.
- Circle of Friends of Zimnowodas’ High School, the seat at 1 Słowackiego Street.
- Association of „Evening Courses”, the seat at 44 Bodzentyńska Street.

## **SOCIETIES OF DIFFERENT TRADE GROUPS**

- Association of Jewish Craftsmen, the seat of the board at 2 Kozia Street
- Association of Jewish Merchants, the seat of the board at 22 Wesola Street
- Association of Producers and Timber Merchants, the seat of the board at 18 Leśna Street
- Society of Jewish Masters Craftsmen, the seat of the board at 3 Mała Street
- Union of Jewish Home Aid, the seat of the board at 4 Orla Street
- Union of Tailor Workers „Igly” , the seat of the board at 4 Orla Street
- Union of Jewish Doctors
- Union of Jewish Barber-surgeons, the seat of the board at 50 Kolejowa Street
- Circuit Union of Merchants, the seat of the board at 19 Śniadeckich Street
- Union of Office Workers, the seat of the board at 4 Czysta Street
- Jewish Union of War Invalids, the seat of the board at 1 Leonarda Street
- Union of the Participants in the Independence War, the seat of the board at 36 Sienkiewicza Street
- Association of Jewish Real Estates Owners, the seat at 4 Bazarowa Street (Śniadeckich)



## Annexe 2

# A LIST OF JEWISH HOSTAGES IN KIELCE IN 1939

Uszer Ajchler, Izrael Albirt, Jakub Apfelbaum, Emanuel Balwim, Jakub Balicki, Szlama Barankiewicz, Alter Barankiewicz, Icek Blank, Lejbuś Bruk, Henryk Bruner, Rafał Charendorf, Edward Charin, Jakub Chmielnicki, Alter Cymerman, Szmul Cymerman, Szlama Cymrot, Moszek Cytryn, Icek Czarny, Josek Dębski, Moszek Elbirt, Maks, Ellencweig, Henoch Fajgenblat, Lejzor Finkielstein, Henryk Fruks, Dawid Frydman, Joel Frydman, Nuchim Garlicki, Elias Goldblum, Wolf, Garnfinkiel, Fiszel Garnfinkiel, Abram Gotlieb, Icek Hefler, Abram Lejb Herszkowicz, Fiszel Herszkowicz, Izrael Herszkowicz, Todorys Herszkowicz, Izrael Hannelsman, Jakub Ickowicz, Majer Jasnny, Kalman Kluska, Dawid Knobel, Fiszel Kochen, Jakub Kuperberg, Majloch Laks, Szymon Leśnicki, Dawid Leśniewski, Bernard Lew, Szmul Lewartowski, Dawid Lis, Moszek Lubecki, Szmul Markiewicz, Abram Maćarz, Lejzor Mendlewicz, Abram Minberg, Lejzor Minberg, Izaak Mundsztuk, Chaim Passyrman, Nuchym Passyrman, Herszel Piasiecki, Moszek Pleszewski, Dawid Prajs, Herszel Prajs, Elisz Szmul Przednówek, Herszel Ocal, Chaim Orzech, Herman Ostrowicz, Dawid Rosenblum, Szloma Rotman, Szlama Rottsztajn, Abram Rozenblum, Izrael Rozenblum, Szymon Rozenberg, Josek Rozenholc, Moszek Rozenholc, Chil Rutman, Szlama Rutman, Oskar Serwetnik, Kalman Sokołowski, Szmul Strawczyński, Szlama Strosberg, Oskar Strumw,

Moszek Szajnfeld, Leon Szarogreder, Berek Szlamowicz, Szulim Sztajner, Lejzor Tauman, Szeftel Tauman, Chaim Tenenbaum, Moszek Tenenbaum, Lejb Twerski, jakub Wajnberg, Alter Wasser, Eliaz Wilner, Jakub Wittlin, Hersz Zalberg, Eliaz Zylberberg, Josek Zylberberg, Izrael Zylberman, Lejb Zylbermagiel, Szlama Zylberstein and Majer Zylberszpic.

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*Source: AP Kielce, Records of the city of Kielce, call No. 2652.*

*THE LIST OF HOSTAGES IN KIELCE IN 1939*

*Uszer Ajcher..... (p.171)*

*Source: AP Kielce, Records of the city of Kielce, call No. 2652.*

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