

EHRI Online Course in Holocaust Studies

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Ghettos under Nazi Rule –Dissolution and Resistance

Translation: E03 Izrael Lichtensztajn describes the first phase of the “Große Aktion” in Warsaw, Juli 1942

Ten Days of the "Relocation Aktion" [Tran-settlement] of Warsaw Jewry

Beginning on the eve of Tisha B'Av, 1942

We have been betrayed!!!

For ten days the terrible process of exterminating Warsaw's Jews has been underway. Every day, between 5 and 10 thousand Jews are caught and sent away from Warsaw. Old people and small children are shot. The remainder is being sent away, certainly to be shot or gassed. The Jewish police, who think that they will be saved, has been mobilized for this Aktion. As it seems, they too will not be able to avoid death. The SS want to annihilate all of Jewish Warsaw. They proceed very cleverly. They have promised that the workers in the shops manufacturing for the military, Community Council employees and the employees of the J.H.K. will remain in Warsaw.

Now it appears that the certificates of the J.H.K. will not be honored. Dozens of its employees have already been caught and sent away, the same will probably occur to the Community Council workers and perhaps also to the tens of thousands of shop-workers. This is the German system of "Divide and Conquer". They employ one part of the population to extradite the second part, later they employ a third part of the population to extradite the second part. This is very evident and this is the mistake and betrayal of our leaders, the Community people together with the heretics commanding the Jewish Police.

On the first day when the decree was published by the authorities, the Jewish laboring masses understood that a wave of destruction is coming upon them, no one will remain. People clenched their fists against the policemen who had undertaken this disgusting task. Voices were heard saying that the Community Council should not have accepted the job, but it should have been left to the SS men. Let them destroy all of us. They, the Jewish workers and toiling masses understood what awaited them. But the Community officials wanted to save themselves at the price of destroying up to 100 thousand Jews. They made a mistake. Now we see to where this German process of annihilation is leading. They all made a mistake, the community officials together with the members of the command, the Lejkins, Yosel Kopetes (Ehrlichs) and the arch-heretic, the hater of Israel and enemy of the Jews, the Police. The system used in this action is as follows: Units of (Jewish) police march through the Jewish streets and at a certain moment they throw themselves at a door and blockade the entire house. All the people must leave their homes and go down to the courtyard. The police conduct thorough checks of the homes and woe to whoever does not obey. They break into the locked homes using axes, the doors hacked off and left abandoned. When all the people, the inhabitants of the building, are standing under the open sky, every entrance to the building

is blocked, the homes are checked once again and only then do they begin to check the individuals. Each person must approach with his documents. Each one that has good certificate showing] that he works in a shop, is an employee of the Community Council or the J.H.K. is placed apart. If the document is not adequate he is led out into the street as he is, where wagons are waiting, ordered to get in into a "[--] wagon, all the rest who do not have certificate are led out and transported in a ?? wagon to the [Umschlag Platz] which is transformed into an island of tears of Jewish pain, sorrow, suffering and death.... Empty freight wagons are already standing there, into which are packed 120-200 people and off they go!To where?!Nobody knows. Brisk [Brest?], Bobroysk, Smolensk, this is only a [version?] However, whoever knows the stories of Chelmno, Trawinki, he knows how these unfortunate ones perish, by machine guns, gas, electric currents – this is their salvation from the pain. Later, mass graves for 1000-1500 people.

Every day the officers and SS men come out to the Umschlag Platz for no good reason other than to play a game. This game costs the lives of 100 people. They shoot whomever they fancy. First old people, the sick, cripples and children. They choose some from among the unlucky old, sick, crippled and children, these are taken by wagon to the Jewish cemetery and – shot.

The police roam around the streets, making [--] and stopping passersby. Men and women, children and the elderly are packed into wagons. Children are torn from their parents, mothers from their children, men from their wives and children. This is how the "relocation" "to the East" of entire families together looks....

The hunger in the ghetto is dreadful. There is nothing to be bought. If there is – a kilogram of bread costs 50 zlotys, a kilo of potatoes 25 zlotys, a bunch of carrots 10-12 zlotys, a head of cabbage 8-10 zlotys. The need is great, people are starving. From despair and hunger people voluntarily report to the Umschlag Platz.

The Community council has hung up signs that whoever reports voluntarily will receive 3 kilograms of bread and a kilogram of ham. Volunteers are to be found. Rather than dying of hunger it is better by bullet. So they go to their deaths.

The panic is great. People are scared to go out into the street and at home no one is safe, for an ambush can come at any minute – a blockade and off you go .

The trade in certificates is enormous. Thousands of people besiege the shops, in order to get in and find safety there. People pay thousands for a little piece of paper, which in the end is fit for nothing. Only the rich merchants, the [--] the speculators can afford this. The real members of the proletariat, who have no money, are sent away. The whole Jewish "underworld" remains where it is. They are "good friends" with "Yoel Kopete" (Ehrlich), the head Gestapo agent.

From time to time the gendarmes and SS men go out into the street. Then the real snatching begins. The certificates are no help, even those from German shops and workshops. All are packed into the wagons. There is no lack of victims here. Killing a man is easier for them than lifting up straw. Every evening the groups of healthy men and women, middle aged, whom the Germans have selected as healthy and fit to work, are led through the Jewish streets. They must be quartered in Warsaw for certain jobs. Meanwhile they are put into quarantine at Leszno Street 109. The streets are empty, no one must be found out in the street. Otherwise, they get a bullet straight away. The Germans shoot at the windows and the passersby. Concerning where those fit for work are sent we know as much as we do about those who

leave the Umschlag Platz in the wagons. Who knows if later they are not the burial men and grave diggers of those sent away? It is possible that the men and women able to work will dig the graves of the victims of the so-called "relocation".

In the first moment that it became known that the aim of taking the 46 hostages was to ensure that the relocation would be carried out by Jews themselves, I understood that no one will avoid death. If you are indeed to die – "it should be like men and not like lambs".

I was the first to throw out this thought among my friends and acquaintances. While in Centos at a meeting of the executive I presented the idea with a detailed plan before a group of friends and comrades. Listening to me were comrades Auerbach and Weinstein from the sixth precinct of YISSO, Grinkraut from the Bund, Dr. Frenkel – Mizrachi, Zuckerman – the director of Children's Kitchen on Dzielna 67 and so on. I repeated it to other friends and comrades. My belief was and is now that the community council should refuse to carry out this task and at the same time give an order, together with YISSO and other social help organizations, to resist the Germans and attack the gendarmes. In the course of one evening the entire ghetto should be set on fire. Every house committee should set fire to its building from attic to cellar, thereafter they should go out into the street with a knife, axe, stick or stone, throw themselves at the walls and demonstrate great resistance to the Germans. Let them shoot us together with our wives and children, but we will certainly succeed in killing some of them as well. Let the ghetto burn in one great fire, let machine guns crack, let bombs fall, who cares, with joy and triumph we will go toward death – like heroes, not cowards. [We will go] over the ghetto walls and then our neighbors will have to bury us later.

Certainly there will be Poles, the revolutionary element, who will use the situation and blow up the railway stations, military buildings and seats of our "defenders". The battle will surely spread to the other side of the wall. Perhaps our rebellion will be the signal [that sets off] a revolt in all of Poland, it will give courage to the Partisan brigades in Poland to begin some more active work. And perhaps the battle will even spread over the borders of Poland to all occupied lands. The fact that the Jews themselves burnt together with their houses will serve as an example for all oppressed peoples.

Sadly we have been betrayed. Our ring leaders have not the courage to die as men, only as fleas, worms or mice.

We Jews should have learned from the Germanic people [not Deutsch – Germaner]: "No enemy had access to the German's hut [cabin], since the German would burn himself together with his cabin."

We must have the courage of the Germans. And this courage exists among the toiling masses, among the Jewish working class. They, the ring leaders, the community people, the Jewish filth, fear for their stinking lives. They are ready to offer sacrifices in order to save themselves. But they too will meet that which awaits us all, the same awaits them as the poor Jewish toiling masses have already met.

They, the ring leaders, are privileged, their life is extended for an extra month.

Israel Lichtenstein.

My Last Will and Testament

With zeal and enthusiasm, I threw myself into the work of helping to collect archive materials. I was given the role of guardian of the threshold, I have hidden the material. Apart

from me, no one knew. I have only told about the place my friend Hirsh Wasser, my superior. It is hidden well. If only it will stay hidden, this will be the greatest and best we could achieve in the present, brutal time.

I know that we shall not last. It is impossible to experience such terrible murders and massacres and to survive. Therefore, I write this, my last will and testament. Perhaps I do not deserve to be remembered, but only for my courage in working with the Oneg Shabbes group, to be the most in danger, since I have hidden all of the material. Risking my head would be a trifle. I would risk my head for my beloved wife Gele Sekstein and my jewel, my little daughter Margalit.

I do not wish for any thanks, for any memorial, any praise, I only wish there to be a reminder of me, so that mine, my brothers and sisters overseas, should know where my bones were taken.

I want my wife to be remembered, Gele Sekstein, artist with dozens of paintings that she was not able to display, could not be seen in the light of day. During the course of the three years of the war she worked with children, as an educator, teacher, preparing decorations and costumes for children's productions, and received distinctions. Now together we are preparing to meet our deaths.

I wish my little daughter to be remembered. Margalit is today 20 months old. She has fully mastered the Yiddish language, speaks it perfectly. At 9 months she began to speak clear Yiddish. Her intelligence is equal to that of children of 3 or 4 years. I don't want to boast about her. Witnesses to this and people who inform me of it are the teaching staff at the school at 68 Nalewki Street, Dr. Pola Follman, Mrs. Blit-Hertzlich, Mrs. Zagan etc.

I don't mourn my life or that of my wife. I only lament the life of this bright little girl. She too deserves to be remembered.

May we be the [--] or all the rest of the Jews all over the world. I believe in the survival of the nation. They will not wipe out the Jews. We, the Jews of Poland, Czech, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, are the redeeming sacrifice for all Israel in all other lands.

31 July 1942

The 11th day of the so-called "Relocation Aktion" and the real extermination

And so it happened

As I saw already on the first day of the Aktion, so it happened

Today a decree was published, that the elders of the Jewish Police will not be covered and [unterligt?] the relocation. In the street they snatch everyone, even those who work in the shops. Some are freed again, and some are sent away. It happens that while a father is at work in the shop, a mother and children are snatched and deported. One father, Leib Schneiderman claims: "And I must continue to produce armaments for the bandits, when they snatched my wife with my three children and sent them away. Why do all our workers work in the shops, when their parents, children, brothers and sisters and all the rest of the Jews are murderously killed? Is there not a plan that all the workers should throw off their work in protest and go together with those chased and tortured exactly like Jeremiah the prophet in his time?!"

The ideal became to have a shop and especially one of the firms Töbens or Shulz. In the evening, after work, the workers paraded with ribbons on their lapel with W.C.T. (Walter C. Töbens). Who are these workers? Bourgeoisie, underworld characters and just nice youths who have bought places in the shops for money. They must be the healthy kernel of the

Jewish people, who will be saved. They will need to build the future culture of our people. Instead of the Jewish intelligentsia, the Jewish teachers, writers, social activists, painters, artists – they must be exterminated. For them there is no [redress].

The masses are enraged and bitter. They clench their fists. We see the betrayal. Would it not be easier, had they left the work to the bandits, and Jews would not extradite Jews? [What turns out? Vos vayzt zikh aroys] Anyway, rowdy bands of SS men, Ukrainians, Lithuanians parade the streets, entire streets and taking everyone without exception, thousands and tens of thousands of people are transported to the wagons.

They don't spare anyone and victims fall thereby. They shoot old people, sick and children on the spot. They [--]streets and the Jewish police help them.

Friday 31st July they took Shakhne Zagan from his home with his family, the journalist Kilanovitsh with his family, Jewish teacher Meniya Yerukhizon and deported them. The Jewish joke and laugh at the certificates from the community council, Y.H.K., Centos, Toz and detain the workers and send them to exile. Around these institutions the best Jewish powers were concentrated, the intelligentsia and social activists – they are destroyed. The only ones remaining are the newly arisen tailors, shoemakers, carpenters. The real ones anyhow died out from hunger, since due to the terrible conditions of slavery they could not survive. The new tradesmen have capital and will be able to "be sick".

In this way the Jewish people will be destroyed. They extradite people like Balaban, Zagan, Kilanovitsh and others,

Today I saw how Dr. Ringelblum sits in a carpentry shop on Nowolipki 59. He is hiding together with his family. Is this the plan? Have we reached such a stage that the activists worry only about their private lives and leave everything abandoned?

Would it not be easier if they let the Germans alone do that work? Everyone [?] and thereby staging a battle against death and life, we would at least die with honor.

A shame, the humiliation and guilt will fall on the heads of the community people. People who have sold their souls like Lichtenblum, Stahlzweig, Mieligavsky [Wielikowsky?] with their helpers, the Jewish police commanders, the apostates Sherinsky, Leikin, Yosel Kopete with the [--] the police.

We, the Jewish intelligentsia, wait for death. We know that no one will do anything for us. We know that the above mentioned people will save only themselves and for that price they kill the Jewish community in Poland.

Israel Lichtenstein.

translated by Rebecca Wolpe