

Notes by a Jewish Observer in the Lodz Ghetto Following the Deportation of the Children*

Lodz Ghetto

September 16, 1942

On September 5 the situation became clearer, and the frightening whispers of the past days became terrifying fact. The evacuation of children and old people took on the shape of reality. A small piece of paper on the wall in a busy part of the city announced an address by the President in an urgent matter. A huge crowd in Fire Brigade Square. The "Jewish Elder" will reveal the truth in the rumors. For it concerns the young, for whom he has great love, and the aged, for whom he has much respect. "It cannot be that they will tear the babes from their mothers breasts, and drag old fathers and old mothers to some unknown place. The German is without mercy, he wages a terrible war, but he will not go as far as that in cruelty." Everybody has faith in the President** and hopes for words of comfort from him.

The representative of the ghetto is speaking. His voice fails him, the words stick in his throat. His personal appearance also mirrors the tragedy. One thing was understood by everybody: 20,000 persons must leave the ghetto, children under 10 and old people over 65....

Everybody is convinced that the Jews who are deported are taken to destruction... People ran here and there, crazed by the desire to hide the beloved victims. But nobody knew who would direct the *Aktion*: the Jewish Police, the Gestapo in the ghetto, or a mobile unit of the SS. The President, in coordination with the German authorities (Biebow) decided in his area of responsibility to carry out the deportation (with his own forces). It was the Jewish Police that had to tear the children from the mothers, to take the parents from their children... It was to be expected that parents and relatives would try in this situation to make changes and corrections in registered ages. Errors and inaccuracies that had not been corrected up to now did exist. Something that gives you the right to live today may well decide your fate tomorrow. There was a tendency to raise the age of the children, because a

child from the age of 10 up could go to work and so be entitled to a portion of soup. Other parents lowered the age, because a younger child had a prospect of getting milk. Yesterday the milk and the soup were the most important things, today there is literally a question of staying alive. The age of the old people also moved up and down for various reasons.

An unprecedented migration began to the Registration Office. The officials tried to manage the situation. They worked without stopping, day and night. The pressure of the people at the office windows increased all the time. The applicants yelled, wept and went wild. Every second could bring the death sentence, and hours passed in the struggle to restrain their passion... On Saturday the Gestapo already began on the operation [deportation], without paying any attention to the feverish work of registration that had been going on at No. 4 Church Square. Everyone had supposed that the Order Police [Jewish Police] would not stand the test. It could not itself carry out the work of the hangmen....

The little ones who were loaded on the cart behaved quietly, in submission, or yelling, according to their ages. The children in the ghetto, boys and girls less than 10 years old, are already mature and familiar with poverty and suffering. The young look around them with wide-open eyes and do not know what to do. They are on a cart for the first time in their lives, a cart that will be pulled by a real horse, a proper horse. They are looking forward to a gay ride. More than one of the little ones jumps for joy on the floor of the wagon as long as there is enough space. And at the same time his mother has almost gone out of her mind, twisting about on the ground and tearing the hair from her head in despair. It is difficult to persuade them to give their children up willingly to death, as a sacrifice. It is difficult to take out the old people who hide in the smallest and most hidden corners.

All this was to be expected. The President imposed a general curfew which came into force at 5 o'clock on Sunday afternoon. Anyone who broke it was threatened with deportation.

* From the description written by O.S. (Oscar Singer), a refugee from Czechoslovakia, a journalist who managed the Jewish archives in Lodz at the time of the Occupation.

** The reference is to Rumkowski

Source: *Documents on the Holocaust, Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland and the Soviet Union*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1981, Document no.130.pp.284-286.