

From Ringelblum's Diary: Anxiety is Evoked When the Notion of Deportations Arises Among the Ghetto Jews

June 22, 1942

The topic of deportation from Warsaw does not quit the thoughts of Warsaw Jews.¹ People are asking: why should the Warsaw Jews be so privileged as to avoid the curse of deportation? After all, a brutal deportation was carried out in Cracow, the capital of the *Generalgouvernement* under the eyes of the highest authorities. Why should then the waves of eviction, which have reached quite close to Warsaw, evade us? The chairman of the Jewish Council [the Judenrat] says that he was given firm promises that deportation would not be operative in Warsaw. He explains it in a very naïve way: the governors of the displacement quarters, the commissar of the Jewish living quarters, are young people who want to evade the battle-field, and that they can do only as long as the Ghetto is left to exist. This, however, seems to be quite a poor support for our existence. There are others who indicate all those imposing numbers of tens of thousands of Jews employed in workshops working for the German army. The Armament Section (*Rüstungskommando*) is therefore interested in the subsistence of such an important stock of cheap, if not gratuitous labour, as that of the Warsaw Ghetto. The following fact is brought out to illustrate this: the manager of the Economy Department of the displacement quarters (*Transportstelle*) Heisen, is collecting statements on the high quality of Jewish production from various military workshops. The people, taught by the bitter experience of the provincial towns, are using all ways and means to penetrate into the workshops, where the number of employed (some in fact and other ostensibly) grows from day to day. Besides,

¹ Rumours of impending deportation from Warsaw began in the second half of July, 1941, and were never since abandoned. The first reports were of the expulsion of refugees, about 150,000 to 200,000 persons, and even of total deportation of all Jews. The rumours intensified at the beginning of February, initially as an effect of the disclosure of atrocities committed in the Chelmno extermination camp, and then further, following the deportations within the borders of the General-Government. Cf. Ringelblum, op. cit. pp. 292-293, 348. Czerniakow also recorded all these rumours of deportations in his diary (noted written on October 14 and 15, and on December 22, 1941, and also on May 5, 6, 15 and 18, and other dates in 1942).

new shops are opening up all the time; they work not only to supply the German army, but also to meet the needs of civilian population.²

The subject of deportation from Warsaw acquires sometimes quite a comical, or rather tragic-comical character. Not long ago (in the middle of June, 1942), all Warsaw (on both sides of the Wall) was ringing with “40 days left for the Jews to live”. The rumour was caused by a poster said to be hanging at the other side of the Wall. It was later confirmed that there was indeed a poster there saying “40 Days of Life of the Jews”. It was, however, a publicity poster for a movie which had been “produced” (or rather “cooked up”) in the course of 40 days in the Ghetto. The story of the 40 days, which reminded everybody of the “Forty Days of Musa Dagh” [the famous novel by Franz Werfel], is typical of the panicky atmosphere enveloping the Jewish lives in the Ghetto. A merest trifle convulses the Ghetto with a veritable fever of fright.

The subject of deportation was discussed today, on the June 22, at a meeting of a number of community leaders. There were several suggestions on how to meet the threatening danger. It was indicated that the only way out would be jobs in the shops for all of the Jews. Actual jobs or at least certificates of such. The rule must be: the head of a family must be employed in a shop or a factory approved by the authorities. It was pointed out that in Warsaw bribery would be of no avail, whereas in small provincial towns it could for example happen that an extermination brigade spare such a town for a price of a couple of kilograms of gold. On the other hand, the case of Lublin showed quite the contrary: the few hundred gold roubles which were collected there only aggravated the situation.

The leaders of the J.S.S., Wielikowski [and] Jaszunski, declared after coming from Cracow, that the director of the Population and Welfare Department, Türk, had told them that deportation from Warsaw is not at issue, that the Ghetto is a separate state surrounded by walls and will so remain for the whole time of the war. Only after the war is ended will the deportation take

² In his notes of May 8, 1942, Ringelblum commented on the forced labour done in the Ghetto for the Germans; he considered it an unparalleled national tragedy. “A people that hates the Germans from the bottom of its heart should survive thanks to the labour offered to the enemy, so that he may attain his victory, which would result in absolute annihilation of the Jews in Europe and perhaps in the whole world”. *Op. cit.*, pp. 348-349.

place.³ Simple-minded people attach some hopes to such promises; after all, we know quite well that in more than one town deportations came completely unexpectedly even for the local authorities. Those who are more realistic are looking for a way out. They alter birth certificates of children under ten, acquire documents of South American citizenship. Of course the last can be afforded only by very rich people. Most of the community wait humbly for whatever fate would bring them.

Another problem, which has turned our minds a little bit away from the question of deportation, is the registration for Palestine. One and all, everybody is talking of the registration of persons who have relatives in Palestine and who are enrolling to go there. People, however, are full of doubt as to whether the motives of the Gestapo are pure. It is hard to imagine that anything coming from this institution of terror would be good for the Jews, so as to register them and then send them some place.⁴ And yet, more reasonable people are asking why was this not done in the provincial towns and also, do the Germans really need a pretext to deport Jews, are not they doing it all over the country without any subterfuges?

Source: Joseph Kermish, “Emmanuel Ringelblum’s Notes, Hitherto Unpublished”, Yad Vashem Studies VII (1968), pp.180-183.

³ The director of the Population and Welfare Department (Bevölkerungswesen and Fürsorge) in the administration of the General-Government was Major Ragger. Türk was the head of this department in the Lublin district. After March, 1942, they both helped actively General Globocnik in deportation of Jews from the Lublin district to exterminations camps of Belzec and Sobibor. Their “promise” that there would be no deportation from Warsaw was a deception aimed at weakening the vigilance of the Jewish population in the Ghetto.

⁴ Tidings about the registration for Palestine, as well as for North and South America, caused great excitement in the Ghetto. People who had formerly been depressed and resigned now crowded in their thousands to join the queue to the registration office, next to the Community Center. This went on for the three days (June 21-23, 1942) of registration. However, as the excitement wore off, a counter-action made its appearance; as much as they once wanted to be registered, people now preferred to have their names struck off the register, suspecting that those who had enrolled would be caught in the nets which the Germans spread under their feet. Cf., Czerniakow’s Diary (Entries from June 3 and 13, 1942); Kaplan, op. cit. p. 522.