

From the Diary of Josef Zelkowicz on Rumkowski's Respond to the Carpenter's Strike in the Lodz Ghetto

The Lodz ghetto was officially sealed on May 1, 1940. The brutal impoverishment of the ghetto inhabitants began that summer. Very few people were working, and most Jews no longer had a source of livelihood. Although the effects of starvation were being felt, people nonetheless had the strength to protest and demonstrate. In August and September 1940, demonstrations erupted against Rumkowski and his policies. The demonstrators demanded jobs and a more equitable distribution of food. To placate the angry ghetto residents, Rumkowski reorganized the welfare system. On September 20, 1940, he issued Notice 123, proclaiming monthly support for a hundred thousand ghetto inhabitants. That month, the German authorities approved a loan of three million Reichsmarks for the ghetto, making it possible to activate the support system. Many ghetto inmates applied for relief, including some who were not indigent. To stanch the corruption, Rumkowski sent inspectors to visit the applicants' homes. Among these inspectors were Ryva Bramson and the author Joseph Zelkowicz. The vignette that follows conveys Zelkowicz's impressions of what he observed in his visits to the ghetto dwellings.

Irresponsible inciters have been attempting to disrupt the sound conduct of work in the factories, and yesterday I was forced to oust the workers from one enterprise.

According to information in my possession, similar riots were being planned in other enterprises as well. On several occasions I have warned about such disruptions and explained that the workers must bear in mind that **most work in these factories is performed for the Wehrmacht**. I am responsible for all occurrences and mishaps in the enterprises, and such disturbances by workers are absolutely intolerable. For this reason, I have decided to **impose a lockout in all factories**.

The wage that is payable today will be sent to workers at their homes on Friday, January 24, 1941, Saturday, January 25, 1941, and Sunday, January 26, 1941, by mail. Only those who worked are personally entitled to the money. If the worker is not at home, the mailman will **not** hand over the money. The employee must confirm its receipt **personally**.

I must note again that, concerned about assuring work for many people and allowing them to support themselves in peace, I have spared no effort to organize the enterprises.

I will continue to do everything within my power to provide the population with food in the most regular and plentiful manner possible. However, it should be understood and taken into account that various factors, including disruptions caused by weather and transport difficulties, often prevent the honoring of all promises with respect to food supply.

Vile and irresponsible people have been exploiting this progression of events. Individual disrupters of order have been arrested and further arrests will be made until full **quiet** is restored to the ghetto, this being my duty, for which I bear responsibility.

[Signed] Ch. Rumkowski
Judenrat chairman in Litzmannstadt
January 24, 1941

The notice is typed (not mimeographed) in German, without a heading, and carries a handwritten signature.

Source: Josef Zelkowicz, *In Those Terrible Days Notes from the Lodz Ghetto*, Yad Vashem 2002, pp. 210-211.