

BOLECHÓW

(see p. 7 ff. for *First Akcje*, Oct 28-29 1941)

Rebeka Mondszejn née Eckstein, 27 years of age, daughter of Zygmunt Eckstein (a manufacturer from Lwów), lived until November 1944 in Bolechów, presently living in Bytom at no. 3, Twenty-Eighth of January Street.

On the morning of Sunday 18 October 1941, we found out that Dr Reifeisen had hanged himself. He couldn't stand this wantonness and savagery, this chaos, so he finished himself off. Knowledge of this had a chilling effect on the town. The end of the whole Jewish community of Bolechów was felt. This also reflected on the contributory action and the gathering of furnishings for Köhler's villa. The Jews who had up to this point resisted giving things started giving not only what the committee directed but also started taking out of hiding things, which were kept outside the town at friends' places, who weren't Jews, and brought these things themselves.

For their part, Ukrainians also interfered and made demands [*zadania* is often not quite as strong as 'orders' but never as weak as 'requests']. If it was so easy to become wealthy, then they didn't want to be left behind. So after the contribution and after Köhler's furnishings, different groups of citizens, Abram Kaufman and Sruło Adler, collected for the Ukrainian militia. He found a gold watch and a few hundred dollars in the bedroom and threatened on account of these that next time he'd organize a pogrom

or an action. He got the watch, but in the meantime, Köhler found out about this competing collection. He called in the collections and threatened that he'd shoot them. They shaped themselves up and the commandant of the Ukrainian militia got nothing anymore. The collection of things and of the contribution didn't always go smoothly. There were attempts to weasel out of it, spats; it even came to slapping around certain people by the collectors, It was typical that the poor most willingly brought whatever they found at their places, even without valuing it: rings, money and so on. **[PAGE 2]**

Besides the instructions on the part of the council and German and Ukrainian dignitaries, the Gestapo and military people passing through beat, robbed and roughed people up in spite of the Judenrat.

Besides that there were Gestapo from Stanisławow: Miller shot Jews on the street; whenever he came to Bolechów, the Judenrat spread the word through the Jewish militiamen that no one should show himself on the street. Schulz and Kahlenberg arrived practically every week with orders: chickens, building materials but usually coffee, which everyone was always demanding. The Judenrat bought it from Jews and gave it to them. These demands had tight deadlines [the pun doesn't exist in Polish, in case you're wondering], one or two hours.

It wasn't possible to collect the amount of the contribution, which was very high. So Dr. Schindler, the chairman of the Judenrat, had to go Kałusz to beg for a deferment. Stryski admonished the Judenrat against this, believing it might result in the destruction of the town. It [i.e. destruction] did come soon, but not for this reason, and nothing at all could stop it.

Taking from the Jewish community and putting upon the Judenrat was not limited to the contribution and the furnishings for Köhler's villa but also presents for the Ukrainians. Aldak from Kałusz, not waiting for the end of these collections gave two further orders. Furnishing the villa in Ludwikówka to the south of Dolina in the Carpathians, in a forest location for hunting, for Governor General Frank. The Jews of Bolechów had to furnish a second such villa in Witwica, in the country to the south of Bolechów in the Carpathian foothills. Both of these villas had to be furnished in the royal style. Painted, polished, windows replaced, glass, furniture and rugs. The interiors and objects had to be provided by Jews, and the Judenrat had to facilitate it. A rash of these collections swept literally every Jewish family. **[PAGE 3]** Everyone lived in panic and worry over these individual concerns, that if they didn't obey the satraps and caciques, a catastrophe would happen, which they thought they could avert.

Besides this, the Judenrat still had to see to satisfying the most basic needs of the Jewish people, bread. With the permission of the government, the Judenrat imported flour from Dolinyi Stryj. Bread was baked that was sold in a few Jewish shops, which had been selected on several Jewish streets. A few times matches and lamp oil were given out. The Judenrat also ran a kitchen for the most needy. Cooks were taken on and overseers were selected from the ranks of the Judenrat, a few ladies always were on duty during meals. Tea was given in the morning. The Judenrat bought a lot of things for the kitchen in bulk and grain. Tea with saccharine was given for 5 *groszy* a glass. For lunch a bowl of soup and a piece of bread were given for free. It was usually potato soup. The Judenrat was rarely able to get a little edible meat. Every time this help could not save hundreds of Jews from dying of hunger. Especially those who had been driven

out of Hungary and the sub-Carpathian region of Ukraine through the Carpathians. Among other things, the corpse of the lawyer Dr Bückla the younger was found, swollen with hunger with a cup in his hand.

From January to September 1942 about 60 people from the town died of hunger alone. This was known in town from the beginning: When somebody would appear on the street with bandaged and puffy legs, it meant that after a few days he'd be taken to hospital where after another few days he'd die.

[PAGE 4] The hospital was also under the authority of the Judenrat and was in Strassman's house on the railline. Local Jewish doctors worked there, the regular nurses were local Jewish young ladies and beyond that there were night and day shifts of Jewish ladies from Bolechów. Jewish workers were also examined by Jewish doctors and treated in the Jewish hospital. There twenty five or thirty beds in the hospital. The furniture was also collected from the Jewish community. In the Judenrat there was also a funeral commission. Hersz Kleinbard directed it. Typhus patients also stayed at the hospital.

A records office, also under the authority of the Judenrat, maintained records, at the time by Dogilewski. He died in the first action, and Reich Szulim took over the recordkeeping; he did it until November 1942, when the Jews of Bolechów had to move to the ghetto in Stryj. And the record books were taken to Stryj by the Germans to the Judenrat there. There's no trace of them.

There was no schooling, *cheder*, or courses.

The Judenrat also organized a Jewish court. The members of the court were Jewish lawyers and certain very important Jewish citizens. There was also a higher appellate court headed by Dr Norbert Schindler from Stryj, who permanently lived in Bolechów. The court had a lot of work. In spite of the constant repressions, legal actions concerning violence and murders by the Germans and Ukrainians occurred, as well as disputes between Jews. There were cases before the court concerning loans offered with interest, cases about debt, cases of slighted honour, whose decisions caused money flow from private hands into the coffers of the Judenrat. **[Page 5]** The losing side bore the costs of the suit. The Jewish militia was responsible for enforcement. There were also inheritance cases. There were also grievances against the Judenrat about paying for goods bought at Jewish certain businesses. These proceedings were conducted in Polish. You could also speak Yiddish.

Until the first action, the Judenrat had enough money. It was kept mostly at Feder's and Dr. Blumenthal's. After the first action, along with the death of Feder and the plundering of Blumental's house, the money disappeared. Although the Judenrat had many responsibilities for purchasing expensive things from Jewish establishments and for buying goods to fulfil the German demands, it announced a moratorium on its responsibilities.

There were also suits concerning the high price of goods. At this moment when the Judenrat desperately needed particular goods, some took advantage of this and set inflated prices. Soon the Judenrat had to agree to everything, but later it tried to lower the prices. The "Honour" committee set prices, and the court made its judgements

based on this. At certain cases for slighted honour dozens of Jews and Jewesses were present, interested in hearing the proceedings.

After the first action, October 1941, there started coming—from Kraków or from Warsaw—a weekly Jewish paper, "*Jüdische Selbsthielf.*" They called for the creation of town councils for Jewish public welfare, JSS or *Jüdische Sociale Selbsthilfe*. There was also a council formed in Bolechów. At its head was Dr Leon Goldszlak with Abram Kaufmann as vice-chair. The council received help twice in the amount 2,000 złoty twice from Central. [PAGE 6] The money went to the kitchen, to the hospital. A little went for handout to the poorest people every Friday. The usually had enough cash from Bolechów itself. It was because of the collection for bread, for which more was collected than was spent. An offering was collected from the richest people for funerals, concerning which there was great haggling over the amount. As concerns the value of money, in 1942 barley cost 30 złoty per kilo, eggs for 6 złoty [sztuka], butter for 180 złoty, a woman's finely woven nightshirt could be traded for a kilo of butter, an English-style ladies' outfit cost 600 złoty. German officials bought the better things. The Poles also bought things, generally to keep them for trade. They took them to Lwów.

After the furnishing of Köhler's villa, the hunting villas in Ludowikówka and Witwica for Frank, the Judenrat received an instruction from the commissioner of Bolechów to "put up a casino" in the house of the lawyer Goldszlak, a luxurious one within a week. That was in November of 1941. I can't describe how much this cost the Jews of Bolechów in terms of fear and financial problems. Above all, the Judenrat. In the end the casino was furnished. Shortly thereafter, on a certain night some drunk Gestpo men completely smashed up the place and destroyed all the casino's furnishings, the

mirrors, windows and electric fixtures. Köhler called in the Judenrat at 7 am; its members were beaten again, and he ordered that they refurbish everything within 12 hours.

If Governor-General Frank came to Witwica, 8 km from Bolechów, the Judenrat was informed of this through Stryjski of the Judenrat. The Judenrat of Bolechów announced with posters that for the whole day no Jew was allowed to show himself on the streets. [PAGE 7] It mainly had to do with avoiding any provocation. Besides it was typical for such a driving through to have an escort armed to the teeth on commercial vehicles in the front, back and sides, unleashing hurricane-like fire at the Jews for the whole trip through the town.

In autumn of 1941, a group of Gestapo men travelling through appeared at 7 am and demanded 20 gold watches from the president and vice-president of the Judenrat. Understandably, these watches could not be given and so they put them under arrest and what's more, they would be held until 20 gold watches and a few kilos of silver could be gathered. After a few hours, they were released by the town government. These sorts of incidents happened very frequently. In spring of 1942, Jewish women were prohibited from wearing makeup. That had to do with preventing them from receiving the sympathy of individual Germans who might save them on account of it. This prohibition wasn't strictly enforced. Instructions and prohibitions were announced on posters printed in the town printers. The Judenrat printed announcements in Polish on a machine.

The collections happened very often. Besides the contributions and the buy-outs, there were collections for the hospital: blankets, sheets, dishes for the front, furs and so on. Constantly it was carried out with Jewish resources and the organization of the Judenrat.

At the train station in Stanisławow there was this sign: "[German] The Extermination of the Jews is our Goal." On motorcycles there were signs: "Death to the Jews." Gestapo men from brigades for killing Jews had golden sashes with words in navy blue letters: "Death to the Jews."

On Tuesday 28 October 1941 at 10 am, two cars arrived from Stanisławow, they drove up to the town hall. **[PAGE 8]** In one car were Gestapo men in black shirts. In the other were Ukrainians in yellow shirts and berets with shovels [though this word can also mean 'antlers'] on them. The latter immediately drove to Taniawa to dig one large grave. From the city hall in a half hour a Ukrainian was assigned to each Gestapo man and these pairs went with a list set by city hall for the town.

The list consisted of the wealthiest and most intelligent Jews. The Gestapo men were wearing battle uniforms. The people thought that they were collecting for a workers' brigade. After two hours they were indeed taken according to the list. On the list were: Rabbis Landau and Horowitz; Dr Blumental; Landes, Isaak; Feder, Ajzyk; Frydman, Markus; Dr Leon Frydman; Chief Dogilewski, his daughter jumped out a moving car though four months pregnant and escaped. It was 160 people in all.

The director of the Gestapo, the notorious Krüger, arrived from Stanisławow. He played around in the town hall for half an hour and then left. The action was coordinated by Gestapo Officer Schindler. The militia was also taken. At 12 o'clock, they started taking people from their houses and the streets. Near houses where a Gestapo man left, a crowd of Ukrainians arrived, who poured into the house to rob it after the Jews were led to the town square. The Gestapo men, Ukrainian militia members and innumerable young Ukrainian civilians, among them ten year old boys, chased them through the town like *hycle*. They sent the Jews and traipsed themselves to the Dom Katolicki on Wołoski Field. They all had to fall to their knees and keep their faces to the ground. Jews who thought they were being taken away for work took a few warm things with them, rucksacks and valuable things. **[PAGE 9]** At the entrance to the Dom Katolicki, a Gestapo man ordered them to give up all valuable things and money on pain of death. Money was found on the wife of Abeg Zimmerman, who had to undress like everybody else in the hall. She was shot right there. There were more such incidents. After an escape attempt through a window, indeed the only such attempt, Feder Ajzyk (=Isaac Feder?) was shot.

In the morning the doctor Szuster Isaak was at the town hall. Still nothing was known in town. The commissioner of the town, Köhler, told him: "[German] Schuster will cobble today."

Nine hundred people were packed into the hall. People were stacked on one another. Many suffocated. They were killed in the hall, shot or simply hit over the head with clubs and sticks, right there in the hall.

Isaac Landes had such a completely crushed head, that later, when 29 corpses murdered in the Dom Katolicki were taken to the cemetery and his son Dr David Landes examined all of them, he didn't recognise him. People were beaten without any reason, for example, Gestapo man Schindler threw a chair in the face of Oyli (?Cyli?) Blumental and shattered her face for amusement in excess. The rabbis were especially targeted. Rabbi Horowitz's body was literally chopped and shredded. Rabbi Landau was ordered by one of Gestapo men to stand naked on a chair and declaim a speech in praise of Germany. When he said that Germany is great, the Gestapo man beat him with a rubber stick, shouting "You're lying!" After that he shouted, "[German] Where is your God?" In the hall in the centre of the crowd the wife of Beni Halpern started to give birth and at the same time she was bewildered and started shouting. A Gestapo man shot at her, but only injured her, so he got her with a second. She laid there until 30 October. The chemist Kimmelman also died there in the hall. Completely naked, **[PAGE 10]** Szancia Reisler, the wife of Frydman the lawyer, had to dance naked on naked bodies. At midday, the Rabbis were led out from the hall and there is no trace of them. It is said that they were thrown into the sewer.

The people were kept in this way from 28 to 29 October without food or water until 16.00. At 16.00, they were all taken by car to the woods in Taniawia, 8-10 km from Bolechów. About 800 people were shot there. There was a board over a ditch onto which people were forced and they were shot and fell into the grave; some were badly injured others only just slightly. Ducio Schindler escaped from there in the evening. He climbed a tree and waited out the whole execution and filling in of the grave. He told us everything. On the second day, 30 October 1941, Commissioner Köhler ordered the Judenrat to clean up the hall of the Dom Katolicki, to take the 29 bodies to the cemetery.

The Gestapo demanded payment for the ammunition expended. The Judenrat had to pay. Beyond that, they forced them to pay 3 kg. of granular coffee for labour expenses.

About 900 people were gathered in the Dom Katolicki. But on the morning of 29 October, Judenreferent Aldak arrived from Kałusz and summoned all tailors, cobblers, seamstresses, and craftsmen in general. In addition, he summoned the Jewish militia, the printers—Ela Ellendman and Bencion Rottenberg, Dr Isaac Szuster, Dr Leon Goldszlag, Dr Blumental, Feller the pharmacist and sent them home.

On Thursday, 30 October 1941, the Gestapo returned to Stanisławow. At midday on that day, Aldak came back, this time for furniture, taken under the heading “contributions”, [PAGE 11] 30 sets of house furniture, already assembled in synagogues and private warehouses. Since he had the opportunity, he also took all the *lichters* and torahs from the temples. Certain books, copes of the Talmud, he took for himself.

On 2 November 1941 there was a reorganisation of the Judenrat. Jonasz Backenroth from Drohobycz, Israel Landes and Dr Isaac Szuster were brought in.

In all, 900 people died in the first action.

Given by: Rebeka Mondschein

Recorded by: Dr Abraham Feder

Katowice, 20 August 1946