

## CHAPTER 7

# Jewish Labor in the Shadow of the Aktion Reinhardt

After the first two years of the occupation, the economic situation of the Jews in the General Government was very difficult due to economic persecution, high unemployment, and ghettoization. However, after the beginning of Operation Barbarossa the situation began to change quite quickly. The need for more and more war material for the Eastern Front caused rapid development of new enterprises producing for the army. The drainage of Polish forced labor to Germany reduced high unemployment in the General Government. On the other hand, the search for a cheap labor force reached the great ghettos, such as the Warsaw Ghetto in the General Government and Litzmannstadt Ghetto in Warthegau. In both places in 1940, and even at the beginning of 1941, the living conditions of the Jews were catastrophic and the mortality rate was very high. In medium and small towns, the mortality was lower due to better possibilities to obtain food.<sup>1</sup> However, when predominantly German firms began to open workshops in the ghettos, the death rate dropped and living conditions improved. The Jewish inhabitants had hope. This was a change of improvement, and the Jews believed that their work was so important for the German war economy that it would save their lives. Despite this, at the beginning of 1942, the die was cast. During the entire period of *Aktion Reinhardt*, Jews were living between death and hope.

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1 YVA-JM.814. The mortality rates in Lublin in November 1940 were the following: Poles—68, Jews—61. In November 1939, 120 Poles and 59 Jews died. Lublin, Stadthauptmann, Lagebericht für November 1940, scan 379.

## THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT DURING THE WANNSEE CONFERENCE

The Wannsee conference, which took place on January 20, 1942, was attended by Dr. Josef Bühler,<sup>2</sup> representative of the General Government.<sup>3</sup> His statements are of prime importance, since they represented the official position of the General Government and directly referred to the fate of the Jews living there. During the conference, arguments concerning the use of Jews as a labor force were also presented, but these arguments were drowned out by other participants. It is worth quoting part of the protocol:

As to the question of the effect of the evacuation of the Jews on the economy, Secretary of State Neumann stated that Jews employed in essential war industries could not be evacuated for the present, as long as no replacements were available.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this argument, it should be noted that the Germans were at this time almost at the peak of their power, and despite supply difficulties on the Eastern Front, there were, in fact, no serious labor force shortages yet, and that during the winter of 1941 and 1942 millions of Soviet POWs had died of starvation.

As mentioned, Dr. Josef Bühler was one who took part in the discussion:

Secretary of State Dr. Bühler put on record that the Government-General would welcome it if the final solution of this problem was begun in the Government-General, as, on the one hand, the question of transport there played no major role and considerations of labor supply would not hinder the course of this *Aktion*. Jews must be removed as fast as possible from the Government-General, because it was there in particular that the Jew as a carrier of epidemics spelled a great danger, and, at the same time,

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2 JD Josef Bühler (1904–1948) was since November 1939 the chief of the Office of the General Governor (*Chef des Amtes des Generalgouverneurs*) Hans Frank. Since March 1940 he became the secretary of state (*Staatssekretär*), and since June 1940 he was the deputy of the General Governor (*Stellvertreter*). He fled from Kraków on January 18, 1945. Bühler was arrested by Americans on May 30, 1945, extradited to Poland in May 1946, sentenced to death on July 10, 1948, and executed in Kraków on August 21, 1948.

3 AIPN, NTN, 196/239, 193.

4 Protocol of the Wannsee conference, January 20, 1942 (NG-2586-G), in Arad and Gutman, *Documents on the Holocaust*, 260.

he caused constant disorder in the economic structure of the country by his continuous black-market dealings. Furthermore, of the approximately 2.5 million Jews under consideration, the majority were in any case unfit for work.<sup>5</sup>

Bühler's reasoning was the result of an earlier economic policy in the General Government, according to which the nonproductive population should be reduced and only the productive population be allowed to remain. The problem was that in the eyes of the German authorities, members of Jewish families of working people—that is, children under 14 years old, elderly, sick, or anyone unable to work, were also considered to be nonproductive. The remaining arguments concerning the spread of illnesses and the black market were also unfounded, since the spread of disease was the result of living conditions in the ghettos, for which the German authorities were responsible, and black market trade was a result of transforming most manufactures into war production industries, thereby creating shortages of consumer goods and food products in the general market.

Bühler endorsed the “Final Solution,” which was consistent with the principles of General Governor Dr. Hans Frank. The minutes of the conference stated:

Secretary of State Dr. Bühler further states that the solution of the Jewish question in the Government-General was primarily the responsibility of the Chief of the Security Police and the SD and that his work would have the support of the authorities of the Government-General. He had only one request: that the Jewish question in this area is solved as quickly as possible.<sup>6</sup>

To facilitate the action, Jews were persuaded that they were being evacuated to the east in order to transport them to new places of settlement and work. Ultimately, as news of mass destruction spread and the Jewish population reluctantly reported to the transports, the most brutal methods to intimidate, even terrorize, the Jews in order to break any psychological resistance were used. In addition, mass murder, constant shooting, and use of dogs during the evacuation of the ghettos to extermination camps caused additional fear.

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5 Ibid., 260–61.

6 Ibid., 261.

Deportations from the ghettos took place in stages. Frequently during the first deportation a selection was made, leaving behind a small percentage of able-bodied people. This number was usually from 10% to 30% of the total population of the ghettos. Obviously, it was also dependent on needs and opportunities. For example, before the liquidation of the Jews, the ghetto in Częstochowa had about 42,000 inmates. During the liquidation in September 1942, only about 6,000 people were left, representing approximately 15% of the total population. In some small ghettos, where there were no factories and no particular need for Jewish labor, the special units usually liquidated the entire population. Typically, in small ghettos, a *Räumungskommando* was employed. After completing their work, in general, the team was liquidated or transferred to a labor or concentration camp.<sup>7</sup>

Evacuation of larger ghettos to death camps was via the railway. In localities without a railway station, the Jewish population was usually concentrated in larger towns. Transport took place on foot or with the aid of peasant carts. In remote villages, far away from railroads, mass executions were perpetrated in the nearby forests. Łomazy, in the Lublin District, is an example of the kind of extermination that was implemented by Police Battalion 101. Similar executions took place in Józefów Bilgorajski and other places.

The beginning of the deportations of Jews to extermination camps was also marked by an extensive disinformation campaign. On the one hand, a list of those exempted from evacuation was announced, but on the other hand, the authorities did not keep their word and people who came to the square and presented themselves for document control could not be certain whether they actually would be exempt. An announcement posted in the Warsaw Ghetto contained a long list of people exempt from the evacuation:

The following are excluded from the resettlement:

- a. All Jewish people employed by German authorities or enterprises, who can show proof of this fact;
- b. All Jewish people who are members or employees of the *Judenrat* (on the day of the publication of this regulation);
- c. All Jewish people who are employed by a German Reich company and can show proof of this fact;
- d. All Jews capable of work who have up to now been brought to their workplaces are to be taken to the barracks in the Jewish quarter;

<sup>7</sup> Henryk Schönker, *Dotknięcie Aniola* (Warsaw: Ośrodek Karta, 2005), 205–6; AŻIH, 301/4605, testimony of Lejzor Richman, 3.

- e. All Jewish people who belong to the staff of the Jewish hospitals. This applies also to the members of the Jewish Disinfection Team;
- f. All Jewish people who belong to the Jewish Police (*Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst*);
- g. All Jewish people who are first-degree relatives of the person listed under a) through;
- f. Such relatives are exclusively wives and children;
- h. All Jewish people who are hospitalized in one of the Jewish hospitals on the first day of the resettlement and are not fit to be discharged. Fitness for discharge will be decided by a doctor to be appointed by the *Judenrat*.<sup>8</sup>

In Lublin, the Germans launched a document exchange. Previous personal documents were canceled and replaced by new ones.

The evacuation of the Jewish population will continue in future with the difference that the valid document permitting a person to remain in Lublin will no longer be the *Arbeitsausweis* with the stamp of the Sipo, but the *J.[uden]-Ausweis*. Those in possession of the *J.-Ausweis* are entitled to remain in Lublin, all others will be evacuated.<sup>9</sup>

The technique of document exchange was used throughout *Aktion Reinhardt* in various forms. This was a relatively simple and effective form of public confusion to prevent forgery of documents.

## EXPLOITATION OF JEWISH LABOR DURING AKTION REINHARDT

Liquidation of the ghettos meant the total elimination of the Jewish population, with almost no exceptions. Only the members of the *Raumungskommando* were allowed to live for a few days or weeks and then were also killed. Liquidations took place in a progressive manner, as those who were responsible for carrying out the selection left the healthy and able

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8 Announcement of the evacuation of the Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto, July 22, 1942, in Arad and Gutman, *Documents on the Holocaust*, 281–82; Eisenbach and Rutkowski, *Eksterminacja Żydów*, 300–302.

9 Protocol of the general meeting of the Lublin *Judenrat* on March 31, 1942, in Arad and Gutman, *Documents on the Holocaust*, 269–72; Blumental, *Documents from Lublin Ghetto*, 314–18.

to work alive. Therefore, the general argument regarding the usefulness of the Jewish workforce was still brought up in various discussions, protocols, and correspondence. Especially in the early days of liquidation actions, even in talks between German officials, it was attempted to keep the elimination totally secret. Therefore, a memorandum of the conversation between the staff of the Lublin District governor's offices, Reuter and Höfle, and the chief of staff of the liquidation action by the SSPF in the Lublin District, Odilo Globocnik, may have caused some consternation. Höfle, apparently, tried to mislead Reuter, which was possible in the first day of the action in the Lublin ghetto. The following is an excerpt of the interview notes:

It would be right if the Jews from transports coming to Lublin were already divided at the departure station in those able and unable to work. If making this division at the station is not possible, it would eventually be desirable to perform the separation in Lublin.

All Jews unable to work are to be transported to Bełżec, the furthest border station in Zamość County. *SS-Hauptsturmführer* Höfle plans to build a big camp, in which Jews able to work shall be registered according to their occupations and considering the demand.<sup>10</sup>

Further on, Höfle tried to convince the caller that the evacuation of the Jews was irreversible. Nevertheless, Bełżec was located on the edge of the district of Lublin, on the border with Galicia. "In conclusion, he stated that he could take 4–5 daily transports of 1,000 Jews sent to Bełżec station. Those Jews, once they had crossed the border, would never return to the General Government."<sup>11</sup>

SS and police commanders also elaborated on the usefulness of the Jews. On the one hand, they admitted the fact that Jews were useful and needed to work in war production, but on the other hand, they announced that they were willing to follow orders concerning the liquidation of Jews.<sup>12</sup>

10 Reuter's note, about a conversation held with Höfle, the future chief of staff of *Operation Reinhard*, in connection with an action of extermination of the Jews, commenced in Lublin, Lublin, March 17, 1942, 281.

11 Eisenbach and Rutkowski, *Eksterminacja Żydów*, 281.

12 From the final report by Katzmann, commander of the SS and police in the district of Galicia, on "The Solution of the Jewish problem" in Galicia (L-18), in Arad and Gutman, *Documents on the Holocaust*, 337.

## JEWISH INITIATIVES IN THE FACE OF *AKTION REINHARDT*

Even before the beginning of *Aktion Reinhard*, the Jewish Self-Assistance tried to take initiative of organizing Jewish communities of workers. In one of their circular letters of February 16 [1942], one month before the liquidation of the ghetto in Lublin began, they wrote:

The branches and institutions of Jewish Self-Assistance, with few exceptions, have so far limited all their activities towards providing so-called “primitive” aid: food, clothing, healing, and to combat or prevent an epidemic. This type of aid inevitably has temporary nature. Every social activity, however, should strive to ensure that after some time help will become unnecessary. Therefore, we warn our centers of the need to address other forms of assistance, more purposeful and constructive. We are thinking in particular about assistance in the field work.<sup>13</sup>

This change in concept of social assistance had not been motivated by the imminent danger of destruction. As the Self-Assistance officials explained:

Only recently we were able to persuade the central economic authorities to consider the problem of employment of Jewish craftsmen. For larger workshops and craft associations it is possible to receive orders for goods of daily use and some products of small industry. For this we need in the coming days to provide information on production opportunities by Jewish craftsmen in different localities. Primarily, it concerns joiners, coopers, tailors, shoemakers, harness and haberdashery (like toys) makers.<sup>14</sup>

In order to obtain an accurate picture of the production capacity of each locality, the Presidency of the Jewish Self-Assistance asked for a list of bigger workshops or associations of workers in mentioned branches of production or other possibilities of production in every locality: which machines they possessed; the size of orders could they accept; and in what time could they perform those orders. The local committees of Self-Assistance were also asked whether the local communities had before received orders of labor from the

13 YVA-JM.1581, ŻSS, Okólnik nr 55, Kraków, dnia 16 lutego 1942, scan 691.

14 Ibid.

German authorities, German institutions, or both German and Polish companies, and how large were these orders. The Presidency of the Jewish Self-Assistance asked for exact and precise data. In that circular letter, the Presidency asked the officials to speak with craftsmen or their associations and make effort to receive orders on the spot. The Presidency also requested the officials to provide the utmost support to artisans and their associations according to their needs and local conditions.<sup>15</sup> The necessary permits to establish labor associations were issued by: Regional Chamber of Crafts (*Gruppe Handwerk in der Abteilung der Distriktkammer Gewerbliche Wirtschaft*) or *Kreishauptmann, Stadthauptmann, Stadtkommissar, or Landkommissar*.<sup>16</sup>

After obtaining permission from the authorities, a joint office in every locality shall be formed for the organization of labor community, which will take care of all administrative matters. Next, a community manager shall be chosen, who could be authorized to establish the labor community. The manager was to be responsible for the proper operation of the community and had to sign the appropriate declaration. A text of the membership agreement should be prepared, which also had to be accepted by the supervising authority. The membership agreement recorded the commitment of members to the joint execution of any orders received by the community, joint liabilities for damages, the regulation of working schedule, payment, and the like. Members welcomed into the community were to receive unified identification cards. Next, various professional groups were to be established within the community of labor, run by headmasters, who were to guide the work from technical point of view. The community could divide orders among individual workshops, or execute the orders in joint workshops, where artisans have put their machines. The establishment of a labor community was to be reported to the appropriate territorial Chamber of Crafts. In addition, it had to be registered in the Office of the Governor of the District, Branch of Trade and Industry (*Gewerbliche Wirtschaft*).<sup>17</sup>

The community was to be created regardless of whether the order was obtained or not. According to the experience of the Jewish Self-Assistance, it was much easier to get the order for communities already organized, than for those that were yet to be established. In the localities with closed residential quarters, labor communities were to be established after approval of the

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15 Ibid.

16 YVA-JM.1581, ŻSS, Instrukcja o organizowaniu wspólnot pracy, Załącznik do okólnika nr 61 z dnia 11 czerwca 1942, scans 700–701.

17 Ibid.



appropriate authority, their branches outside the Jewish quarter in order to take their orders from individual customers. The circular of Jewish Self-Assistance also stated that when applying for the orders, not only the production of new items from normal raw material had to be taken into account. The communities should also apply for material to repair, refresh, and rework damaged clothing to make it fit for use, and eventually for orders, concerning the production of utilitarian objects from waste and substitute materials.<sup>18</sup> According to the circular letter, “People who do not have professional qualifications in the field of handicrafts should be, in consultation with the Labor Office, in part directed to work on the official facilities, and in part allocated to the needs of the existing communities, to perform their assignments after a brief training, which experience has proven possible.”<sup>19</sup>

According to the Jewish Self-Assistance, the Division of Labor [of the General Government] supported calls to the local offices of the Jewish Self-Assistance with a drafted plan to use the winter period for the preparatory work related to gardening and farming. Primarily, they had in mind intensive horticultural production, and certain branches of the livestock and agricultural industry. According to the letter of January 5, 1942, “One can use rationally all, even the smallest scraps of land, which makes it easier to accept agricultural youth.”<sup>20</sup> In towns, where it was possible, lectures on local conditions for the agricultural and horticultural production were to be arranged, short-term courses organized for landowners, written instructions issued on how to use and exploit the land, and the like. Previously uncultivated areas were prepared for transformation into allotment gardens and large sections of land suitable for cultivation were acquired. Finally, cooperation with all existing institutions of agricultural work—employing candidates for agricultural training or students of agricultural courses at all agricultural facilities—was established.<sup>21</sup>

The Jewish Self-Assistance urged their committees and delegation to organize preparatory work related to gardening and farming. Before starting the work they sent letters to most of their local committees asking to give displaced farmers and youth of both sexes preference when hiring for agricultural work. They also sent a delegate to all villages in the district of Kraków to perform preparatory work and to tour the surrounding mansions, trying to find accommodation for the

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18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 YVA-JM.1581, ŻSS, Okólnik nr 50, Dotyczy pomocy w dziedzinie pracy dla robotników rolnych. Kraków, dnia 5 stycznia 1942, scans 683–84.

21 Ibid.

Jewish agricultural workers. Thanks to the efforts of the Jewish Self-Assistance, about 2,500 Jews found work in agriculture.<sup>22</sup>

The Jewish Self-Assistance in the face of destruction and total liquidation of smaller ghettos and partial liquidation of larger ghettos wrote:

We know that in a vast majority of cities and towns inhabited by Jews, Jewish productive forces are not even roughly used. Many people who have lost their livelihood, are forced to use the assistance of our social institutions, confined as it is very common to a bowl of soup a day. Pulling certain parts of dependents to the working process, on the one hand, would relieve a large extent our [of the Self-Assistance] institutions, and on the other hand, would provide the opportunity to employ them working in their place of residence. The matters raised by us must be regarded as very urgent. Department Managers of “Work Aid” in the Municipal and District Committees of Assistance and members of the Delegations should strive as soon as possible to engage into the work process the greatest number of Jews—that is their next goal.<sup>23</sup>

In 1942, the Jewish Self-Assistance was also actively engaged in supporting Jewish workers in labor camps. In contrast to other districts, in the district of Kraków during the spring and summer of 1942 many new labor camps for Jews were established. In addition, the camp in Płaszów underwent strong development and received many new inmates. New camps were established frequently without any reasonable infrastructure, in order to perform certain works under the management of civilian firms. This is a fragment of a report concerning new established camp in Prokocim near Kraków:

In Prokocim, the camp is just being developed. Currently, about 600 Jewish workers, mostly from Biecz, Rymanów, Jasielnica, and Brzozowa live there. In addition, [there are workers from] the small number of closely located villages, such as Myślenice. In this camp, there are no sanitation facilities and we even saw the workers wash themselves in the moat. At the moment there is not even a kitchen, and lunch or dinner is cooked on the open fire. It would be very important if these people could have bath and delousing

22 YVA-JM.1581, ŻSS, Okólnik nr 61. Dotyczy pomocy w dziedzinie pracy, BARDZO PILNE, Kraków, June 11, 1942, scans 702–3.

23 Ibid.

in the first place; moreover, they should get a physician assigned by medical insurance company to visit them on-site and eventually arrange a first aid kit. Due to the large distance from their places of residence, these people are not able to receive additional food from their homes. Their journey lasted about a day, so that they came without any inventory and were simply starving. Even having some money they are not able to buy anything themselves because they are not allowed to leave the camp. They work in companies Klug and Vogel. The group from Biecz, who arrived first, had been promised 100 loaves of bread, which for technical reasons they have not yet received. Currently the number of loaves would have to be significantly increased in order to provide for the groups from Rymanów, Jasielnica, and Brzozowa. To organize constant help for these people, it is required to communicate with the companies Klug and Vogel, as well as with the communities they come from. Their home municipalities could bring food to Gorlice, and from there it could be transported to Kraków by road from the Płaszów camp. Clothes and shoes should also be provided, because some people have very tattered clothes and walk barefoot.<sup>24</sup>

Another report of the Jewish Self-Assistance from the labor camp in Koszcz, near Kraków, describes accommodation and nutrition of the workers:

**Accommodation.** Workers [in the camp Koszcz] live in underground dungeons, disastrous in terms of sanitation. The straw, in which they sleep, is already very old, as it remains after the Russian prisoners. As of yesterday, the 18th of this month [April 1942], 69 people were sent to the second fort to reduce overcrowding. In the fort, there is no straw at the moment, so that the workers are sleeping on the bare ground. Despite this relocating, the workers continue to complain of overcrowding. Due to the deterioration of the water supply tubes, there is lack of water in the dungeons and the toilets are in bad shape. It would be very important for health reasons if the workers could get some mattresses and blankets to cover. For now, it is still chilly in the evenings, the accommodations are very wet, and they do not have coat. They also sleep in their clothes. As workers indicate, the community in Działoszyce has mattresses and blankets, which it would be important to get. Ing. Strauch promised to deliver fresh straw and repair water tubes.

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24 YVA-JM.1581, ŻSS, Notatka, Kraków, August 6, 1942, scan 295.

**Nutrition.** During the first days, the workers did not receive any bread. Only on the 18th of this month [April 1942], after the intervention of the head of the works, they were given 200 g of bread and the soup was also more rich and nourishing than in previous days.

During our stay, the delegate of the community of Kazimierz [Wielki] came to visit the camp, and we talked about the food. He stated that he was ready to help the people of his community (9 people). He is only waiting for concrete proposals from our side.

If we can secure assistance with the meals, I hope that the relationship at work will also be improved successfully. Already the 30 or so workers who are employed on Wilga [River] get extra dinners at the local people's kitchen (*kuchnia ludowa*), and the question of accommodation was also favorably resolved, so that there is a good mood among the employees.<sup>25</sup>

The Jewish Self-Assistance was probably also one of few, if not the only body, that could intervene in favor of Jewish workers and bring about real change. The Jewish Self-Assistance had not only direct access to every labor camp, but was also was in constant contact with the German authorities, especially with the Department of Internal Affairs, Group for Population and Welfare (BuF). It must be underlined that interventions of the Jewish Self-Assistance were frequently effective and could bring a real improvement of the workers' conditions.

After the visit to the camp in Koszcz, the representatives of the Jewish Self-Assistance wrote:

Our current task:

1. Firstly, contact with Ing. Strauch in order to find as soon as possible a remedy for the deficiencies in terms of sanitation. It is important to issue passes for some people from among the workers who could then go to the city and carry out errands from all inmates.
2. Ensure that food rations for the workers are actually given to them.
3. Examination by a physician of all employees on the site, as there is a certain percentage of people completely unable to work, including epileptics. These people were taken off the street and sent [to the labor camp].

25 YVA-JM.1581, ŻSS, Notatka z odwiedzin obozu pracy w Koszczu dnia 17 i 18 kwietnia br., Kraków, April 19, 1942, scans 120–21.

4. The most important task is to send a delegate to Działoszyce, who should consult with the local Municipality and the Delegation of the ŻSS in order to determine the best way to help the camp (in previous years the Commune [in Działoszyce] subsidized the same workers, paying them 2 to 3 zł per day).
5. To arrange with Ing. Strauch a weekly bath for the workers (on Sunday). Similarly, to arrange with the local Community that these people can take a bath free of charge.
6. Among the workers there are about 30 people, who are married and have children. The Community of Działoszyce promised that they would be exchanged. This matter is quite urgent.<sup>26</sup>

In other camps, the situation of the Jewish workers was not much better but bearable:

In the company in Płaszowianka, 59 Jewish workers are employed, coming mostly from Książ Wielki [ . . . ] and Miechów. Conditions there are bearable, the kitchen has its own board of workers, and the management is reasonable. They have recently been provided 800 kg of potatoes at the maximum price. They only ask for a certain amount of clothing and a certain number of shoes. [ . . . ] In the company Płaszów Factory of Bricks and Roof Tiles, there are relatively bearable conditions for the workers. Recently people originating from Fryszak and Żmigród were transferred to the company from the camp in Płaszów 12. These people are unable to work and starving.<sup>27</sup>

In order to expand and standardize the care of workers in camps in and around Kraków, Jewish Self-Assistance founded a joint commission after consulting with the commissioner of the Jewish community in Kraków, which managed to establish a direct agreement with the direction of labor camp in Płaszów and discuss the main points of their care—which aimed to improve the position of workers placed in that camp, regardless of the locality they came from. To improve the feeding of the workers, absolute, regular, and disciplined assistance was required from various localities and from the Jewish councils and delegations in these towns, from which groups of workers were recruited.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> YVA-JM.1581, ŻSS, Notatka, Kraków, August 6, 1942, scan 295.

It was decided to send a truck from the camp in Płaszów every fourteen days to important towns in the center of the region, such as Działoszyce, Miechów, Bochnia, Jasło, and Gorlice, to receive food, especially bread, and parcels of clothing and underwear. At the request of the management of the camp in Płaszów, partition of bread was to take place centrally—that is, the bread was to be evenly distributed in equal parts to everybody. To do this, each Jewish council had to ensure that for every worker coming from their locality and staying in Kraków, they would be provided with an additional ration of at least 300 g per day or 4.5 kg for fourteen days. Additionally, there were plans to distribute specific quantities of other products, such as marmalade and legumes.<sup>28</sup>

Although the members of the Jewish Self-Assistance tried to avoid unambiguous information concerning liquidation of Jewish ghettos, in a note concerning a discussion with a representative of BuF they noted:

Activity of the Jewish Self-Assistance (ŻSS). Mr. Stachow was interested in our activity today, all the more that *it is known that the number of neighboring towns in the county of Kraków or other counties of the district of Kraków remained without Jews*. [emphasis mine—W.M.] I have explained that 15–55-years-old men able to perform physical labor have been mostly sent to labor camps. I have portrayed the relations in these camps and added that we are doing everything in our power to come to the rescue of these people. The situation in the camp in Płaszów is so well known to Mr. Stachow that he intervened once to procure better food rations and he knows that the conditions in this regard have changed slightly in favor of [the campers].<sup>29</sup>

It was a very important development because the Presidency of the Jewish Self-Assistance became a central body whose jurisdiction encompassed all of the General Government. It was able to negotiate with the German administration of the General Government. Moreover, it became the central body to initiate and coordinate establishment of new labor communities or craftsmen in the wake of ongoing *Aktion Reinhardt*. The Jewish Self-Assistance, as the central organization of social assistance in the General Government, was probably the only Jewish organization that had

28 YVA-JM.1581, ŻSS, Do Rady Żydowskiej Frysztak, Kraków, August 2, 1942, scans 154–55.

29 YVA-JM.1581, ŻSS, Notatka z rozmowy z referentem BuF im Distrikt Krakau p. Stachow. Kraków, September 23, 1942, scan 751.

access to every Jewish ghetto and labor camp, receiving constant and actual reports on the development of events, and had a perspective that permitted them to see a complete and exact picture of what was happening to the Jews in the General Government. As such, the Jewish Self-Assistance tried to avoid the worst: the destruction of Jews in the General Government, providing its assistance to every possible Jewish community, ghetto, labor camp, or other gathering of Jews.

### ACTIVITY OF MAX FRAUENDORFER DURING THE AKTION REINHARDT

Among the representatives of the civil authorities, one of the most active defenders of the Jews in the high ranks of the General Government was the head of the Labor Department, Dr. Frauendorfer. He was responsible for coordinating the use of the pool of labor in the General Government and providing forced laborers for the Reich. He represented a considerably more rational approach than the police authorities. Frauendorfer held much more balanced views than Frank. While the position of the civil authorities in Jewish affairs in the summer of 1940 was much more powerful, in 1942, when the *Aktion Reinhardt* was already in progress, the police authorities and SS came out victorious from this conflict.

Perhaps, Frauendorfer underestimated his own position, but he tried to preserve the Jews who had employment in their workplaces, as there was a shortage of qualified manpower. On June 22, 1942, the following statement by Dr. Frauendorfer was recorded in the minutes of a meeting:

According to President Dr. Frauendorfer, resettlement of the Jews, representing a major proportion of the population, would cause far-reaching consequences in all sectors of public life. The country, in terms of labor force, is very exhausted. Approximately 100,000 professionals are employed in the armaments industry, 800,000 workers live in the Reich, and a further 100,000 workers employed in the labor detachments [*Dienststellen*] of the commander of the armed forces in the General Government.<sup>30</sup>

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30 Statement of Head of the Main Department Labor of the General Government Frauendorfer on a need for further employment of the Jews in the interests of the German economy, Kraków, June 22, 1942, in Eisenbach and Rutkowski, *Eksterminacja Żydów*, 240.

Frauendorfer, undoubtedly, represented the faction that urged care for a skilled labor force, because he realized that it was not possible in such a short time to find or train others who could replace the Jews. Obviously, “far-reaching consequences” in Frauendorfer’s speech meant a significant decrease of military production and manufacturing in a difficult time for the economic activity in general, when, in fact, the fate of the war was in balance. We have to bear in mind that at the same time when Frauendorfer warned about a decrease in war production, Albert Speer, nominated by Hitler to the post of Minister of Armaments on February 8, 1942, was reforming the military industry. Clearly, the activities of Himmler and Albert Speer were in conflict; nevertheless, this clash, in the General Government in 1942, could appear as local, without any special significance for the outcome of the war.

The difficulties of mobilizing a labor force became much more acute in 1943 and 1944. Recorded in the protocol of a meeting on June 22, 1942 was the following: “President Dr. Frauendorfer is currently dependent exclusively on the work of the Jews [. . .]. They are in the absence of Polish professionals, irreplaceable.”<sup>31</sup> Despite this, Dr. Frauendorfer was fully aware of the limit of his power and his argumentation, since in his speech he said, “The Jews are not, in fact, to be excluded from the actions conducted by the SS, but during the war we should exploit their work. He [Frauendorfer] is not interested in the withdrawal [*entzogen*] of Jewish workers from the economy or the industry.”<sup>32</sup> As we can assume, Frauendorfer clearly tried to agree with the general political line that the Jews should be “evacuated,” but not now—preferably later.

Frauendorfer’s speech clearly provoked violent reactions from some SS and police authorities, because only three days later he sent another circular letter to the departments of labor and employment offices in the districts, writing about the need to communicate with the local commanders of the police on matters relating to forced labor of the Jewish population:

The engagement of the Jews affects the interests of the police. Therefore, ensure immediately that the Jews are allowed to be hired only after consultation with the relevant local police commander. Labor Offices are prohibited, until further notice, to take all the steps needed to offset labor shortages in various districts.<sup>33</sup>

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31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Circular of the head of the Main Department Labor of the General Government, Frauendorfer, to the all Labor Departments and Employment Offices in the districts on



It was certainly a setback in comparison to his speech of June 22, 1942. This time he clearly gives up and underlines that the Jews were in the hands of the police, and only the police were authorized to take decisions concerning the exploitation of Jewish forced labor. As this letter goes:

It is expected that in future the police itself will to some extent use Jewish labor force, especially in the armaments industry. In these circumstances, the role of the intermediary, which Labor Offices currently have, will become redundant. Any eventual police requests for help, addressed to the Labor Offices, shall be fulfilled, of course, as far as possible.<sup>34</sup>

However, he did not urge the labor offices to help the police, but only to comply with their requests to a certain extent.

Harsh criticism from the police can be observed in the report of Friedrich Katzmann, in which he accused the civil administration of being unable to deal with the Jewish problem. Katzmann insisted that only the SS and police were capable of handling Jewish matters.

As the administration was not in the position to overcome this chaos, and proved weak, the whole issue of Jewish labor was simply taken over by the SS and Police Leaders. The existing Jewish Labor Offices, which were staffed by hundreds of Jews, were dissolved. All work certificates issued by firms and official employers were declared invalid, and the cards given to Jews by the Labor Offices revalidated by the Police.<sup>35</sup>

Katzman, like other SSPF, offered ideological, rather than rational economic considerations, showing a harsh attitude towards the Jews—contrary to the position of the civil administration.

The actions of Dr. Frauendorfer coincided with the activity of Jews who wanted to save their lives by working in factories necessary for the Wehrmacht. But the motives for such conduct were different, because Frauendorfer needed to ensure a sufficient number of qualified laborers, and the most available

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the need to communicate with local police commanders in matters of Jewish forced labor (Kraków, June 25, 1942), in Eisenbach and Rutkowski, *Eksterminacja Żydów*, 240.

34 Ibid.

35 From the final report by Katzmann, commander of the SS and police in the district of Galicia, on “The Solution of the Jewish problem” in Galicia (L-18), in Arad and Gutman, *Documents on the Holocaust*, 338.

and amenable workers were Jews. The Jews, on their part, had an alternative: either to work or to die. Naturally, a person would try to find a job at all costs. Katzmann referred to that situation in his report:

Their place of work was often only a means to an end for them: firstly, to escape the sharper measures taken against the Jews; and, secondly, to be able to carry out their black-market dealings without interruption. Only continuous police intervention could prevent these activities.<sup>36</sup>

Katzmann was aware of the corruption prevailing among German officials, who in exchange for various rare goods were willing to arrange work for Jews:

In addition, Jewish “organizing” on behalf of their “employers” reached catastrophic dimensions [so] that energetic action had to be [performed] in the interest of the reputation of the German people. [. . .] Draconic measures had to be introduced . . . after it was noted in increasing numbers of cases that the Jews had succeeded in making themselves indispensable to their employers by providing goods in short supply, etc. [. . .] It is very sad to have to note that the wildest black-market deals with the Jews were made by Germans who were brought here, and in particular those in the so-called “operating firms” (*Einsatzfirmen*) or the “ill-reputed trustees” (*berühmte Treuhänder*), both of which operated Jewish firms, taken from their owners. Cases were known where Jews seeking to obtain some kind of working certificate not only did not ask for pay from their employers but paid [their employers] regularly, themselves.<sup>37</sup>

Katzmann’s criticism was directed not only towards the civil administration, but also to the Wehrmacht.

In the course of this *Aktion* thousands of Jews were again caught in possession of forged certificates or labor certificates obtained fraudulently by means of all kinds of excuses. These Jews were also sent for special treatment (*Sonderbehandlung*). The Wehrmacht authorities in particular aided the Jewish parasites by issuing special certificates without proper control. [. . .] There were cases where Jews were caught with from 10 to 20 such

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 337.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 337.

certificates. When Jews were arrested in the course of further checks, most of the employers felt obliged to attempt to intervene in favor of the Jews. This was often done in a manner that can only be described as deeply shameful.<sup>38</sup>

He did not refer to the war production, so needed by the Wehrmacht, but rather was willing to accuse the Wehrmacht of corruption and the Jews of forgery and cheating. Needless to say, Katzmann considered himself a soldier, even if until then he had not served even one day at the front line.

### COMPLETION OF AKTION REINHARDT AND THE CONCENTRATION OF JEWS IN CHOSEN CITIES

The campaign of mass murder of Jews in death camps during the first months ran smoothly. After activating the Bełżec death camp, where Jews from the districts of Lublin and Kraków were murdered, Sobibór death camp opened soon afterwards, and in late July the third death camp in Treblinka started operation. Himmler was pleased with himself. Every day, thousands of Jews were sent to their deaths and the numbers of Jews in the General Government declined dramatically. Some of the ghettos were liquidated completely, and others were converted into so-called small (provincial, reduced) ghettos (*małe getta*) or “remainder” ghettos (Germ. *Restghetto*; Pol. *getto szczątkowe*). The progressive murder of Jews undoubtedly resulted in Himmler’s euphoria. To survey his achievements, he visited Katowice, Auschwitz, and then some other cities in the General Government, among them Lublin. On July 19, 1942, he issued an order to complete the Final Solution in the General Government.

Himmler planned to end the “resettlement of the entire Jewish population of the Government-General” by December 31, 1942. According to his order from December 31, 1942, no people of Jewish origin could remain within the General Government outside of the collection camps in Warsaw, Kraków, Częstochowa, Radom, and Lublin. All other work in which Jewish labor is employed had to be finished by that date or, in the event that this was not possible, transferred to one of the collection camps.<sup>39</sup> So at this time, despite

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38 From the final report by Katzmann, commander of the SS and police in the district of Galicia, on “The Solution of the Jewish problem” in Galicia (L-18), in Arad and Gutman, *Documents on the Holocaust*, 338.

39 Order by Himmler on July 19, 1941 for the completion of the “Final Solution” in the Government-General (NO-5574), in Arad and Gutman, *Documents on the Holocaust*, 275.

the fact that more and more Jews were sent to labor camps in arms factories in the district of Radom and other places, Himmler did not plan to establish a network of labor camps close to great factories, except for designated areas. Although he envisaged that it might be difficult to accomplish this task, he, apparently, believed that the obstacles could be overcome. Himmler had not forgotten, as usual, to present arguments justifying his conduct, even if it seemed redundant. As he wrote in his order:

These measures are required with a view to the necessary ethnic division of races and peoples for the New Order in Europe, and also in the interests of the security and cleanliness of the German Reich and its sphere of interest. Every breach of this regulation spells a danger to quiet and order in the entire German sphere of interest, a point of application for the resistance movement and a source of moral and physical pestilence. For all these reasons a total cleansing is necessary and therefore to be carried out. Cases in which the date set cannot be observed will be reported to me in time, so that I can see to corrective action at an early date. All requests by other offices for changes or permits for exceptions to be made must be presented to me personally.<sup>40</sup>

The idea of concentrating the Jews in larger towns, in order to facilitate their management or the actions against them was not something new. It had already been instructed in the telegram from Reinhard Heydrich dated September 21, 1939. Such concentration was also carried out before and during *Aktion Reinhardt*.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, during the discussion at Globocnik's office it was already said that "to the use of Jewish auxiliary forces at the German institutions (*Dienststellen*) are to be put only the Jewish professionals who are indispensable. They should be housed in a special part of their ghetto."<sup>42</sup> Therefore, not only concentration of Jews in determined places but also separation of working forces facilitated further development. However, despite Himmler's order of July 19, 1942, already in the autumn it was clear that full implementation of this idea would not be possible. Therefore, HSSPF issued two orders. The first one was released on October 28, 1942, for the Warsaw and Lublin Districts, setting aside

40 Ibid.

41 From a letter of the Deputy Commissioner of the Jewish quarter in Warsaw, Grassler, to the Department *Raumordnung* [Planning] of the Warsaw District on the concentration of Jews in the various counties, Warszawa, March 3, 1942, in Eisenbach and Rutkowski, *Eksterminacja Żydów*, 178–79.

42 YVA-JM.12331, Notiz für Brigadeführer über die Besprechung beim Amtschef am 8. August 1941, 10 Uhr ist festzuhalten, scan 221.

several places where the Jews could stay.<sup>43</sup> The second order, dated November 10, 1942, concerned the Radom, Kraków, and Galicia Districts.<sup>44</sup> These directives were issued in the spirit of Himmler's order of July 19, 1942, since they restricted Jewish places of residence and prohibited living outside the permitted areas. The second paragraph of the October regulation reads as follows:

From December 1, 1942 it is forbidden for any Jew in the Warsaw and Lublin Districts to stay outside the Jewish quarter, or leave it without police permission. From the date of December 1, 1942 other people [i.e., non-Jews] are allowed to reside in the Jewish quarter, or just come to it only having a police permit. The authorizations are granted in accordance with Jewish residential quarters by *Kreishauptmann*, for the Warsaw Ghetto—by the commissioner of the Jewish residential district.<sup>45</sup>

This order did not concern the Jews working in the armaments industry who lived in closed camps.<sup>46</sup> The third paragraph of the regulation prohibited the Jews, under penalty of death, from leaving the designated sites and the non-Jewish population from helping the Jews—also under penalty of death.<sup>47</sup> The result of this residential confinement for Jews was the establishment of closed labor camps. One of them was the camp in Płaszów, where Jewish workers were transferred by order of Scherner—the commander of the SS and police in the Kraków District—dated December 14, 1942.<sup>48</sup>

Limitation of Jewish freedom of residence also affected the Poles, and in some regions the Ukrainians, as it was forbidden to grant Jewish refugees any assistance under penalty of death. As the mayor of Przemyśl announced on July 27, 1942:

II. Every Ukrainian or Pole who attempts by any conduct to disturb the action of resettlement of Jews will be shot.

43 Police regulation on establishing Jewish residential areas in District Warsaw and Lublin, October 28, 1942, in Eisenbach and Rutkowski, *Eksterminacja Żydów*, 313–14.

44 Police regulation of Higher SS and Police Commander Krüger on establishing Jewish residential quarters in some towns in the districts of Radom, Krakow and Galicia, November 10, 1942, in Eisenbach and Rutkowski, *Eksterminacja Żydów*, 316–17.

45 Police regulation on establishing Jewish residential areas in District Warsaw and Lublin, October 28, 1942, in Eisenbach and Rutkowski, *Eksterminacja Żydów*, 313–14.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 The commander of the SS and police in the district of Kraków, Scherner to entrepreneurs on the transfer of Jewish workers employed by them to the camp in Płaszów, Kraków, December 14, 1942, in Eisenbach and Rutkowski, *Eksterminacja Żydów*, 253.

- III. Every Ukrainian or Pole who will be found in the Jewish quarter looting Jewish homes will be shot.
- IV. Every Ukrainian or Pole who tries to hide any Jew or to help him to hide will be shot.<sup>49</sup>

This prohibition also applied to taking possession of Jewish property:

- V. The acquisition of Jewish property for money or for free is prohibited. Offences against this ordinance shall be punished as harshly as possible.<sup>50</sup>

Similar regulations were issued by the police in other towns of the General Government, since regulations issued by higher level officials<sup>51</sup> were often repeated by the administration at lower levels. Regulations published by SS and police leaders were frequently repeated by *Stadhaupleute* and *Kreishauptleute*. In the district of Radom, such regulation was issued by SSPF Herbert Böttcher.<sup>52</sup>

## THE RESULTS OF DEPORTATIONS ON THE ECONOMY OF THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT

The deportation of Jews from the General Government achieved the desired propaganda effect, of which Frank boasted in his speech on August 15, 1942:

[...] if someone among the visitors of Kraków, Lwów, Warsaw, Radom, and Lublin today would doubt the successful results achieved in this area by the efforts of the German administration, it would not be easy. Formerly,

49 Notice of the *Kreishauptmann* of the Przemyśl County, warning Polish and Ukrainian population against assistance to the deported Jews under death penalty, July 27, 1942, in Eisenbach and Ritkowski, *Eksterminacja Żydów*, 298.

50 Ibid.

51 Circular of the SS and police commander in Radom, Böttcher, to the administrative and police authorities ordering to warn the Polish population that hiding Jews and helping them will be punished by death penalty, Radom, September 21, 1942, in Eisenbach and Rutkowski, *Eksterminacja Żydów*, 299.

52 JD Herbert Böttcher (1907–1950) was since August 1939 regiment commander of SS regiment in Memel; then since October 1940 police president (*Polizeipräsident*) in Kassel; and since the beginning of 1942 he held the post of SSPF in Kaunas. At the end of 1942, he was nominated for the post of SSPF in the district of Radom. After the assassination of Franz Kutschera on February 1, 1944, Böttcher was SSPF in the district of Warsaw, and since November 1944 he was the commander of the police in Königsberg.

Jews leisured here. However, this smelly people were only allowed here before 1939! So where are the Jews today? One will see almost no trace of them (applause). Everywhere one only sees working Jews.<sup>53</sup>

From his statement it could be understood that the long-awaited transformation of the Jews into a productive population had finally taken place. All Jews were working, because those who were not able to work were murdered. This was confirmed in Fischer's report: "In the Jewish quarter in Warsaw, about 35,000 Jews remained. These are almost exclusively the workers left behind in munitions factories."<sup>54</sup>

Also, food shortages and the economic situation in the Jewish quarter of Warsaw were due to the new principles:

[The] SS and police commander who was responsible for the entire Jewish action has obliged firms to pay for Jewish workers—with effect from September 1, 1942—5 zł per day for each remaining Jewish worker. They should transfer 3 zł to the SS and police commander and use the remaining 2 zł to maintain the Jewish worker.<sup>55</sup>

This statement illustrates how the forced workers were transformed into slaves, and the ghettos—into labor camps. From September 1, 1942, Warsaw Jews did not receive any remuneration for their work. The value of their daily work was estimated to be 5 zł, of which the SS received 60%, as holders of slaves; and the remaining 40% was taken by the establishments for themselves, for maintenance costs. Such a system allowed corruption, because with sufficient quantity of workplaces, the establishments could reduce maintenance costs, leaving larger sums for themselves and increasing profitability.

The original success of using Jewish productive capabilities before their liquidation turned out to be unfavorable for the economy afterwards. As Fischer evaluated in his report:

While in July the value of exports from the Jewish quarter [in Warsaw] exceeded 15 million, in August the total was reduced to 1.9 million, and in

53 Keynote speech of Hans Frank on the occasion of the annual meeting of the NSDAP, August 15, 1942, Frank, *Okupacja i ruch oporu*, vol. 1, 510.

54 From the report of the Warsaw District governor for August and September, 1942 to the authorities of the General Government about the situation in the Warsaw Ghetto after the great deportation, Warsaw, October 15, 1942. *Dunin-Wąsowicz, Raporty Ludwiga Fischera*, 305–6.

55 *Dunin-Wąsowicz, Raporty Ludwiga Fischera*, 305–6.

September to 1.1 million, while these are still the old settlement of transactions of goods and services.<sup>56</sup>

Various branches of industry were also in decline:

Warsaw textile industry suffered heavily after deportation of Jews. This branch of industry was from the end of 1939, with few exceptions, in the hands of the Jews, and most of the crew were also Jewish. Jews did not train Aryans, so that there were almost no skilled Aryan workers. Among 3,500 industrial knitting workers there were formerly at least 3,000 Jews. As a result of resettlement of Jews, a significant decrease in production took place. In August, production dropped from 4.4 million zł to 3.3 million zł, or by about 25%. In fact, however, production dropped by 50%, as companies made a bid for more goods than they had in stock. Returning back to normal production can only occur when a sufficient number of Aryan professionals will be trained.<sup>57</sup>

The consequences for other industries in 1943 will be discussed in subsequent chapters. Undoubtedly, “resettlement” of Jews did not concern only the Jews who were unable to work, but also a large number of laborers. Not always could they provide relevant documents, because sometimes they worked in home-production or illegal manufacture. Even the people running households were useful because it allowed others to work. Therefore, one cannot agree with the notion that only nonproductive Jews were deported. Moreover, motives of deportation were ideological and not economic. Even where economic arguments were presented, the police often did not take them into account.

At the end of 1942, the number of Jews in the General Government dropped significantly compared to the period before *Aktion Reinhardt*. Statistics Officer Korherr of the RFSS reports in his paper “The Final Solution of the Jewish Question in Europe,” delivered in Berlin on March 23, 1943,

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> From the report of the Warsaw District governor for August and September 1942 to the authorities of the General Government about the situation in the Warsaw Ghetto after the great deportation, Warsaw, October 15, 1942, 305–6.



that according to official statistics, 297,514 Jews were still left in the General Government at the end of 1942.<sup>58</sup>

This number is not accurate, because even during this period a number of Jews remained in hiding. However, given the large percentage of able-bodied Jews who were among those nearly 300,000 people, it still was undoubtedly a significant potential labor force, which could be used in the General Government economy, affording a chance to survive for most of those Jews. However, even this limited number of Jews still alive in the General Government, became a bone of contention between the SS and police on the one hand, and the civil administration, the Wehrmacht, and the private sector on the other.

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58 The paper of Korherr, statistics officer at the RFSS, entitled "Final Solution of the Jewish Question in Europe," Berlin, March 23, 1943, in Eisenbach and Rutkowski, *Eksterminacja Żydów*, 322.