

*Jerzy Tomaszewski*

## THE EXPULSION OF JEWISH POLISH CITIZENS FROM GERMANY ON OCTOBER 28–29, 1938

The direct cause of the mass expulsion of Jews who were Polish citizens from Germany at the end of October 1938 was the Act of March 31, 1938, envisaging the conditions and methods of depriving people living abroad of their Polish citizenship<sup>1</sup>, and later the regulation of the Minister of the Interior from October 6, 1938, which compelled those people to submit their passports to the consular offices for examination<sup>2</sup>. The offices were requested to make a note of confirmation and after October 29, 1938, passports without such a note would not authorize their holders to enter the territory of the Polish state. The intention of the authors of the 31 of March Act (they were the employees of the Consular Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs headed by Wiktor Tomir Drymmer) was to deprive persons of non-Polish nationality, above all Jews, of Polish citizenship. Precisely in this way was it understood in Germany, hence on May 24, 1938, the Embassy of the Reich in Warsaw sent an aide mémoire where it expressed the conviction that the fact of holding a Polish passport was sufficient proof of retaining links with the Polish state, so “for all the holders of valid Polish passports deprivation of Polish citizenship on the basis of this act does not come into play”. The Polish reply avoided an unequivocal confirmation of this thesis, saying only that “the fact of holding a valid passport by a Polish citizen creates a presumption favourable to the holder of maintaining a link

---

<sup>1</sup> This act deserves to be discussed separately, since the problems connected with this issue go beyond the scope of this article. See J. Tomaszewski, *Ustawa o pozbawianiu obywatelstwa z 31 marca 1938 r. (The Act on the Deprivation of Citizenship of March 31, 1938)* in: *Historia-prawo-polityka (History, Law, Politics)*, ed. by J. Baszkiewicz, A. Bodnar and S. Gebethner, Warszawa 1990, pp. 114–122.

<sup>2</sup> Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Current Legislation Bulletin of the Republic of Poland) 1938, No. 80, item 542.

with the Polish state”<sup>3</sup>. In other words the reply meant that the Polish authorities reserved for themselves the right to judge whom the resolutions of the Act concerned and who would be deprived of citizenship.

Initially the act of depriving persons staying in Germany of their Polish citizenship was exercised slowly, so as not to attract the attention of the German authorities. However, when in summer 1938 further German regulations exacerbating the discrimination against the Jews were issued, and especially when new police regulations concerning foreigners were introduced, an immediate possibility emerged of mass voluntary return to Poland or of expulsion by the German police of Jews who did not possess German citizenship. The Memorial of the Federation of Jewish Polish Citizens Resident in Germany of October 18, 1938, stated among other things: “(...) we are threatened by the police regulation of August 22, 1938, concerning foreigners, and especially by clause 1 of this regulation, saying that only such foreigners are allowed to stay in the territory of Reich ‘who for personal reasons or because of the purpose of their stay in the territory of Reich guarantee that they deserve the hospitality extended to them’. This resolution by its very nature delivers every foreigner into the hands of police organs and on the basis of this regulation (...) it will be possible, depending on the point of view of any police officer, to expel any foreigner without any legal proceedings”<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, the situation in Reich simply compelled the Jews to emigrate, although regulations concerning currency allowed the government to deprive every emigrant almost of his whole property. At the same time the countries of traditional immigration created obstacles difficult to overcome. The British authorities limited the numbers of Jews who were allowed to enter Palestine. European countries protected their own labour markets and as a rule denied entry to persons suspected of an intention to settle down and take up a job. In some cases the Jews and other refugees from the Third Reich did receive entry visas, but were denied the right of employment. This resulted in many tragedies. Nor did overseas countries want to permit a free immigration of people deprived of the means of existence. In the United States of America there was a rigorous quota on immigrants from particular European countries, and immigration offices introduced further strictures which prevented the already allotted quota to be used to the full. Some

---

<sup>3</sup> Archiwum Akt Nowych, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, henceforth quoted as *AAN*, *MSZ* (The Archives of Modern Records, Ministry of Foreign Affairs) file 12049, pp. 99, 202–203. On the same day — May 24 — at the consular conference in Berlin W.T. Drymmer informed the consuls about the real purpose of this act. The convergence with the date of the German *aide mémoire* was perhaps not incidental.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* file 12291, p. 226.

countries of Latin America, while supporting immigration intended to settle new areas, favoured the influx of peasants while reluctantly accepted people with other occupations. Emigration agreements signed by Poland in the years 1938–1939 — in spite of the stance of Polish negotiators — sometimes included a clause that effectively excluded Jews as candidates for arrival<sup>5</sup>. As the result the only choice left for the Jewish Polish citizens staying in Germany was to reemigrate. Although the Polish countryside was overpopulated and there was vast unemployment in towns, difficult material conditions seemed a lesser evil than constant danger and chicanery in the Third Reich. The Polish consul in Leipzig, Feliks Chiczewski, wrote in his report of October 26, 1938: “Although among those Jews who do not know Poland and were born in Germany there is no tendency to emigrate to Poland conditions may emerge where Poland will be their last resort. In the last few weeks more and more Jews came calling, which was not the case before, with the intention to settle down in Poland”<sup>6</sup>.

Probably the knowledge of the decline in living conditions of the Jews in Germany sparked the issue of the above-mentioned regulation of October 6, 1938. Thus, without waiting for the complicated formality of depriving a given person of Polish citizenship, it was possible to deny the right to return at once to all those who were not meant to enter Poland, by the very act of refusing to provide a note in checking.

I did not succeed to clarify the inner history of this regulation. It is true that formally speaking the Act was issued by the Minister of the Interior with the agreement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. However several days after its appearance (the Current Legislation Bulletin with the text was published with the date of October 15) in his talk with Jan Szembek, Minister Józef Beck “(...) pointed out that the regulation of the Minister of the Interior in this regard was from the beginning not to his liking. However, there can be no question of its revocation. If the Germans begin to expel our citizens, we should reciprocate by an analogous regulation”<sup>7</sup>. This suggests that the character of the agreement was rather formal.

Perhaps documents clarifying the circumstances of this decision will be found in the future in archives that are not accessible or are unknown to the historian today. However the decision is hard to understand. The Polish

<sup>5</sup> See Z. Landau, J. Tomaszewski, *Gospodarka Polski międzywojennej 1918–1939*. Tom IV. *Lata interwencjonizmu państwowego 1936–1939* (*The Economy of Inter-War Poland 1918–1939*. Vol. IV. *The Years of State Interventionism 1936–1939*), Warszawa 1989, pp. 23–28.

<sup>6</sup> AAN, MSZ, file 12291, p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> *Diariusz i teki Jana Szembeka (1935–1945)*, t. IV. *Diariusz i dokumentacja za rok 1939* (*Diary and Portfolios of Jan Szembek, 1935–1945*), vol. IV. *Diary and Documentation for the Year 1939*, comp. J. Zaráński, Londyn 1972, p. 332.

government did receive a warning of the Auswärtiges Amt (aide mémoire of May 24, 1938) that the Germans did not intend to sit in silence as the Polish policy made it difficult for them to expel Jews from their country. Nevertheless the regulation of October 6 was a further step in this policy and even indicated the concrete date from which the Polish authorities would have a full freedom of decision over which of the Polish citizens had the right to return.

Probably not in connection with the regulation as yet, but under the influence of the act of depriving Jews of their Polish citizenship, the German authorities took the first steps. Polish ambassador in Berlin, Józef Lipski, wrote on October 17, 1938, to Warsaw: "The mass action taken up for the last few weeks in the territory of Reich by the Polish Consulates, of depriving people of Polish citizenship, starts to produce a reaction on the German part. This is indicated among other things by the practice followed by the authorities for a certain time, of refusing the return visas to Polish citizens who are permanent residents in Germany and who want to go abroad or to Poland for a certain time. (...) The German authorities declare that they can grant return visas only to those who present a certificate from the Polish Consulate that they will not be deprived of Polish citizenship"<sup>8</sup>.

I am inclined to believe the German authorities took advantage of the regulation of October 6 as a convenient pretext for the mass expulsion of Jewish Polish citizens<sup>9</sup>. Even if one takes into consideration the delayed edition of the Current Legislation Bulletin, there seems to be a deliberate delay in the fact that the German ambassador in Warsaw, Hans Adolf von Moltke, only on October 26 did receive a telephone order from Berlin to submit an aide mémoire to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its content and the way the talks went on were noted by Jan Szembek:

"From the content of the regulation the German Government draws a conclusion that Jewish Polish citizens who do not receive a checking stamp would have to stay permanently in Germany of which the Reich cannot allow. Since the regulation is to come into force on 29 this month, the German Government wishes to warn that if this regulation is not repealed until the 27 this month, they will start expelling Jewish Polish citizens. The Ambassador would like to receive a reply possibly not later than this evening.

---

<sup>8</sup> AAN, Polish Embassy in Berlin, file 3509, p. 89.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. K. Jonca, *Casus Herschela Grynszpana. Uwagi o przestankach i skutkach "nocy kryształowej" w Trzeciej Rzeszy (The Case of Herschel Grynszpan. Remarks on the Circumstances and Effects of the "Crystal Night" in the Third Reich)*, Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis No. 765, Studia nad Faszyzmem i Zbrodniami Hitlerowskimi X (Studies of Fascism and Nazi Crimes X), Wrocław 1987, p. 73.

I expressed my astonishment that without any previous discussion of the subject the German Government informed us only two days in advance in question of a regulation of such gravity.

The Ambassador said that the content of the regulation reached the Embassy only on the 17th this month. Berlin was informed immediately but the whole issue had to be subjected to meticulous investigation so that only today could the Government of Reich take a stand on it"<sup>10</sup>.

The Polish reply was delivered the next day but could not satisfy the German diplomats as it was evasive. It said among other things:

"The regulation (...) does not envisage its application to some special groups of Polish passport-holders staying in any territory. The main purpose of this regulation is to check the passports of exclusively individuals who visit the Embassy to return to Poland. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not envisage such calls occurring and therefore does not expect the checking of passports to be a large-scale activity. (...) Without concealing the fact that the Polish Government does not want the large numbers of Polish passport-holders, deprived of property and driven into a state of complete destitution by the orders of the German Government, to come back to Poland en masse, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs expresses at the same time a readiness to initiate talks with the German side aimed at clarifying the material condition of the said individuals and at regulating the whole issue which, at any rate, has no direct connection with the regulation of October 6 this year"<sup>11</sup>.

The German diplomats were doubtless aware of the already initiated action of depriving people of Polish citizenship, hence — even if they did not know the secret instructions of W.T. Drymmer — they had to read this rhetoric as a cover for the real intentions of Polish authorities. The content of the reply gives one the impression that the Polish diplomats wished to take advantage of the deprivation threat to Jews staying in Germany in order to extract some economic concessions in the Jewish favour. The tone of the note, confident in the strength of its position, could have been a bluff on the part of Minister Józef Beck. One should however take into consideration the close Polish-German relations in the previous months of 1938 when Polish diplomacy supported the German tactics against Czechoslovakia. January 1938 saw the talks of J. Beck in Berlin — discussed so many times by historians — in the next weeks German politicians visited Warsaw and it seemed there was a wide understanding in the relations between the two countries. However the mentioned exchange of notes took place already

---

<sup>10</sup> *Diariusz i teki Jana Szembeka*, vol. IV, p. 329.

<sup>11</sup> AAN, Polish Embassy in Berlin, file 883, pp. 77-78.

after the Munich conference and the essential solution of the fate of Czechoslovakia, when Germany did not need Poland's support any longer. The Third Reich embarked on the policy of escalating postulates addressed to Poland, especially in regard to the legal status of Gdańsk and the so-called corridor through Pomerania. The German diplomats in these conditions did not have to reckon with their Polish interlocutors. What is more, the exemplary lesson of power politics could prove useful for the designs of the Third Reich.

The German authorities did not wait for a reply, and preparations for the mass expulsion of Jewish Polish citizens went ahead before their aide mémoire was submitted to Warsaw. On October 26 Heinrich Himmler as the chief of police and Reichsführer SS ordered his subordinates to prepare mass injunctions to leave Germany until October 29 for all Jewish Polish citizens and for their deportation to Poland<sup>12</sup>. These began to be carried out on October 27, probably before the Polish reply reached Berlin.

We are in possession of accounts from various German towns concerning the course of events that took place. In some localities on Thursday afternoon and evening, October 27, the police offices informed the Jewish Polish citizens that they would be deported to Poland on the next day<sup>13</sup>. As it seems, that evening the arrests began frequently with the people subject to deportation, to prevent attempts to ignore the injunction. This kind of information applied especially to the Saxon cities of Borne, Dresden, Chemnitz, Zwickau, Mittweida<sup>14</sup> and also Stettin and the Frankfurt-am-Main region<sup>15</sup>. From the latter town consul Stanisław Nałęcz Korzeniowski reported that the injunctions to leave Germany mentioned 28 of October. The first news showed that the expulsion embraced all Polish citizens, not only Jews. Probably at the beginning the police authorities in some localities arrested Polish citizens with other than Jewish nationality so as to be on the safe side, for there were no such reports the next day, the Poles already arrested were released and the people who reached the Polish frontier were exclusively Jews.

<sup>12</sup> *Dokumente zur Geschichte der Frankfurter Juden 1933–1945*. Herausgegeben von der Kommission zur Erforschung der Geschichte der Frankfurter Juden, Frankfurt a.M. 1963, pp. 422–423; E. Meizer, *Relations between Poland and Germany and their Impact on the Jewish Problem in Poland (1935–1938)*, Yad Vashem Studies, vol. XII, p. 220. K. Jonca says that the order in the name of H. Himmler was given by Reinhard Heydrich; K. Jonca, *Casus*, p. 73.

<sup>13</sup> Yad Vashem, account No. 02/23. Information from Düsseldorf.

<sup>14</sup> A. Diamant, *Chronik der Juden in Dresden. Von der ersten Juden bis zur Blüte der Gemeinde und deren Ausrottung*, Darmstadt 1973, pp. 358–370; S. Milton, *The Expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany October 1938 to July 1939*. Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook, 1984, vol. XXIX, pp. 175–176.

<sup>15</sup> See telegrams from Polish diplomatic offices in Germany in the evening hours of October 27, 1938, AAN, Polish Embassy in Berlin, file 3618, p. 97; MSZ, file 12165, p. 25, 40.

The relatively early commencement of expulsion in Frankfurt-am-Main was probably due to the distance separating this region from the Polish frontier. The first news about the injunction of deportation arrived at the Consulate of Poland in Frankfurt about 16.45 hrs., during the next 24 hours the information proliferated, confirming the mass character of the whole action. On the evening October 28 the Consulate informed Warsaw that it started immediate interventions with the local police authorities. They turned out to be ineffective, as the Presidium of Regency in Wiesbaden declared that they only fulfil express orders from Berlin<sup>16</sup>.

There are several salient points which are striking in this report. Above all there can be no doubt that Polish diplomatic offices in Germany were surprised by the expulsion. The Embassy of Poland in Berlin learned about it only after a telephone call from the Polish Consulate in Frankfurt-am-Main. Moreover, in the late hours of October 27 this Consulate informed the Embassy of a simultaneous action in Berlin itself. It must therefore be stated that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not inform the Consulate and Embassy in advance of the possibility of expulsion, although precisely such a threat was contained in the German aide mémoire of October 26. It seems that the possible German reaction was not taken into consideration either. I do not think this was a result of mere remissness. It is more probable that nobody in Warsaw took German warnings seriously. The same conclusion is suggested by the fact that Polish frontier posts and the local offices of the Polish State Railways were no less surprised when they were burdened with transporting the displaced people up-state.

The thickest wave of arrests and of injunctions to leave Germany came — it seems — early in the morning of October 28. Further accounts from some towns in Saxony, from Nuremberg and Berlin<sup>17</sup>, and also the reports of Polish consuls from Leipzig, Munich, Oppeln and Breslau<sup>18</sup> say that at that precise moment the police instigated a wide-range action. However there are some accounts from Berlin and Altona giving the night of October 28–29 as the date of displacement<sup>19</sup>. Although one can suspect that the authors of accounts made several years later might mistake the day, yet the exactness of detail and dramatic character of these events make one rather believe the original date correct. Probably the extent of the displacement action was so large that the police force were lacking for the simultaneous realization of the whole action.

---

<sup>16</sup> Report see: *AAN, MSZ*, file 12165, pp. 68–73.

<sup>17</sup> *Yad Vashem*, accounts Nos. 01/15, 02/546, 03/1271, 487/55, 1903/1753.

<sup>18</sup> *AAN, MSZ*, file 12291, pp. 10–13, 37–41, 29–32, *MSZ*, file 12165, p. 30.

<sup>19</sup> *Yad Vashem*, accounts Nos. 01/35, 01/169.

The way in which the arrests and displacement were carried out differed and depended on local conditions. In some localities displacement concerned only men. Thus it occurred above all in Berlin, as accounts show<sup>20</sup>. In this town, it seems, the action of displacement was carried out relatively gently. An employee of Palästina Amt in Berlin, Dr. Fritz Berger, underlined in his account the friendly attitude of the Head of the Foreigners' Affairs Office in Berlin (it was assessor Hennig)<sup>21</sup>. Although he carried out Gestapo orders, within the limits allowed to him he tried to make things easier for the people subject to displacement. He excluded from the transport the men with a doctor's certificate of illness. Probably he was no exception. Anna Nieder says that on the night of 27–28 October a group of persons were warned by rabbi Freier of the threat of displacement, and at 5.00 hrs. on the morning of October 28 a friend of hers working in the police telephoned to her, which enabled her brother to hide<sup>22</sup>. In Altona, Elberfeld and Cologne only men were arrested with the purpose of displacement<sup>23</sup>. Information from many other cities tells of arrests and displacement of the whole families, men, women and children<sup>24</sup>. These differences may partly be ascribed to inexact orders of the central authorities but also to the initiative of local *NSDAP* activists who wanted to get rid of all the Jews from their region as quickly as possible.

In particular cases the authors of accounts provide information about the brutal methods of arrest. Dorota Pliskin from Vienna said: "(...) after the door was opened, five Germans in civilian clothes entered and produced Gestapo functionaries' cards. Our whole flat was turned upside down, then they told us to follow them without letting us dress. They only told us to take our Polish passports. My sister and I were not even allowed to dress and we were taken in our night-gowns"<sup>25</sup>. It should be stressed that all this took place at the end of October, on a day that was described as very cold. There was information from Bochum that the police did not take into consideration either the age or the condition of health of those who were taken out of their homes<sup>26</sup>.

According to the Reich currency regulations people were allowed to take only 10 marks per head, however it seems that there were no uniform principles concerning personal belongings. The displaced persons who were

---

<sup>20</sup> Yad Vashem, accounts Nos. 01/169, 01/272, 487/55.

<sup>21</sup> Yad Vashem, account No. 01/272.

<sup>22</sup> Yad Vashem, account No. 01/15.

<sup>23</sup> Yad Vashem, accounts Nos. 01/35, 01/169, 02/427.

<sup>24</sup> Yad Vashem, accounts Nos. 02/178, 02/486, 03/2033, 033/1271.

<sup>25</sup> Yad Vashem, account No. 03/2033 (the document is in Polish).

<sup>26</sup> Yad Vashem, account No. 02/23.



arrested accidentally, those who were initially told that the purpose of arrest was to check their documents, etc. did not have the chance to take with them anything at all. An extreme example was the above-mentioned story from Vienna which told of people being dragged out of their homes dressed only in their underwear. In other cases the police allowed the people to take smaller or bigger luggage. The account from Leipzig from where — it seems — most people were ruthlessly displaced, stated: “You are not allowed, said the policemen, anything besides 10 marks per person. However we started to beg and entreat for so long that they allowed us to pack the indispensables at least. There were two suitcases in all and one bundle where we wrapped our linen. (...) After coming downstairs I went quickly to buy some food, while the family were waiting in the yard”<sup>27</sup>. It seems probable that similar questions were answered on the spot by functionaries who carried out the displacement, therefore the fortunes of the arrested differed greatly depending on the attitude of the former to Jews. One of accounts concerning displacement from Berlin allows one to suppose that a special ruthlessness was shown by Gestapo functionaries, while the order police (*Schupo*) and criminal police (*Kripo*) often, although not always — made some tiny concessions<sup>28</sup>.

There were special circumstances of displacement in Leipzig. Much evidence reveals that the news of the action against Polish citizens spread very quickly before arrests were started. In the opinion of the Chief of Police in Leipzig the news of the expulsion came from Halle, where it was implemented on October 27 at 18.00 hrs., while in Leipzig itself not till early morning the next day<sup>29</sup>. According to the report of Polish Consul Feliks Chiczewski the displacement in Leipzig began at 4 o'clock in the morning and the Consulate learned of it about 6 o'clock. While the consul — to no avail — took up intervention with the local police and in Dresden with the office of governor of Saxony, many refugees who managed to escape from the police called at the Consulate<sup>30</sup>.

According to the information provided by police chief in Leipzig the refugees “who inquired at the Consulate, were summoned to call there immediately together with members of their families”<sup>31</sup>. Although F. Chiczewski does not mention it in his report, such a reply is quite probable. The

<sup>27</sup> Yad Vashem, account No. 1903/1753.

<sup>28</sup> S. Milton, *op. cit.*, pp. 175–177.

<sup>29</sup> Reichsstatthalter in Sachsen to Auswärtiges Amt November 28, 1938, Yad Vashem, microfilm JM/2220.

<sup>30</sup> AAN, MSZ, file 12291, pp. 10–13.

<sup>31</sup> Reichsstatthalter in Sachsen to Auswärtiges Amt November 28, 1938. Yad Vashem, microfilm JM/2220.

report says: "From early morning hours the Consulate was besieged by hundreds of citizens, whose numbers during the day grew to 1,000 persons. The whole large garden, all the entrances, staircases, waiting-room, cellars and part of the private apartments of the head of the office and janitor were filled with refugees". According to the police report 1,296 persons found themselves on the premises. It seems this data is more realistic than F. Chiczewski's estimate. As the result — in the opinion of the governor of Saxony — only about 50 of Jewish Polish citizens were displaced from Leipzig, as the German authorities did not want to encroach on the territory of the Polish Consulate. According to the same information "(...) the Polish Consul-General in Leipzig not only warned Polish Jews in so far as he could make contact with them, and invited them to come to the gardens of the Consulate, but also induced them to burn their passports". F. Chiczewski's report makes no mention of passport-burning. Probably it was not a result of the Consul's initiative, but mere sporadic behaviour, whose aim was to prevent the German authorities from formally identifying the citizenship of persons included in the displacement action and to deprive the latter of documents that were necessary for crossing the Polish frontier.

F. Chiczewski's behaviour aroused great indignation of the German authorities and was the cause of an intervention of *Auswärtiges Amt* with the Polish Embassy in Berlin, about which I could not, however, find any information in Polish archives<sup>32</sup>. In all likelihood this intervention provoked the writing of extremely detailed reports of the Polish Consulate in Leipzig, describing the course of expulsion action.

It seems that F. Chiczewski's assistance to people in avoiding displacement was — at any rate on such a large scale — an exception. According to the report of Polish Consulate in Munich the acquaintances and lawyers of the arrested Polish citizens collected their children from schools (if they were not detained together with their parents) and left them under the Consul's charge. As the result the office building became a shelter for 30 children of various ages and over 70 adults who by some fortunate chance managed to avoid arrest. Some of them were afraid to return to their apartments, and wandered about the city<sup>33</sup>. Others took shelter in the building of Polish Consulate in Berlin. According to advice on the telephone from Consul Roman Wodzicki, conveyed to Warsaw on October 28 at 10.40 hours, "about 300 Jews are staying at the Consulate-General, and about the same number in front of it"<sup>34</sup>.

---

<sup>32</sup> *Auswärtiges Amt* to *Reichsstatthalter* in Sachsen, end of November 1938, Yad Vashem, microfilm JM/2220.

<sup>33</sup> *AAN, MSZ*, file 12291, pp. 37–41.

Although we do not possess any analogous information from the majority of Polish diplomatic offices in Germany (in some regions only single families of Jewish Polish citizens were resident and they were detained and deported without any difficulty), it seems that as a rule the endangered persons were given assistance and they could take shelter in the office buildings. With one exception of the Polish Consulate in Frankfurt-am-Main, which reported on the evening of October 28: "Today in the Consulate about 200 persons were gathered who escaped arrest by spending the night away from their homes. All called for assistance, explanation, intervention, etc. Acquainting them with the situation, I told them to depart for their homes and to obey the orders of local authorities, as further staying in the Consulate was pointless"<sup>35</sup>.

The Polish Consulates immediately intervened on behalf of the displaced. It seems that the first to do so was the Polish Consulate in Frankfurt-am-Main, prior to 18.00 hrs. on October 27. The report from October 28 said: "The Consulate General tried to establish contact with the local police authorities, in the first place with the police Chief. The police districts were not able to give any answer — they were fulfilling the order of the police Chief. The Police Head Office in Frankfurt-am-Main after several attempts at making contact with it, finally declared that it received the order from Regency in Wiesbaden — and it knew nothing about its motives (which it knew, of course, but was not authorized to disclose them). (...) About 18.00 hrs. we managed to make a connection with the Head Office in Wiesbaden, with councillor Sander, chief of the political department and of foreigners' movement affairs in whose hands — as it turned out — rested the control of the whole action. Councillor Sander said that he received the order from Berlin and it would be strictly followed to full extent. No local intervention could be of any avail, as the Regency fulfilled the orders of their superiors. He could not, for he was not allowed to, provide the reason of the mass expulsion, and anyway he could not say anything else on this matter"<sup>36</sup>.

The Consulate informed the Polish Embassy in Berlin, which on the same evening intervened with *Auswärtiges Amt*, probably between 19.00 and 20.00 hrs., as the coded telegram informing about this fact was transmitted at 22.00 hrs. "*Auswärtiges Amt* in reply to the question explained that this disposition was made in connection with the Polish regulation about checking consular passports and Moltke's intervention in this matter"<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> *AAN, MSZ*, file 12165, p. 36.

<sup>35</sup> *AAN, MSZ*, file 12165, pp. 68–73.

<sup>36</sup> *AAN, MSZ*, file 12165, pp. 68–73.

<sup>37</sup> *AAN, MSZ*, file 12165, p. 25.

On the morning of October 28 other Polish Consulates started to intervene with the local authorities. The results of this were inconspicuous, as everybody alleged there was an order from Berlin, nevertheless some differences in the standpoints of particular officers could be noticed. Consul F. Chiczewski after an ineffective intervention with the police, addressed — as he says in his report of November 1 — “the governor of Staatskanzlei in Dresden, Dr. Lahr, as the figure with most influence on the governor of Saxony, asking him to issue dispositions that would soften the rigorous execution of expulsion by excluding from transports the old, the sick, women and children. Dr. Lahr most categorically refused, saying that this was a decree of central Berlin authorities. (...) It turned out, however, that this order could be softened, as I later obtained a consent from the police chief in Leipzig to exclude from transport the old and the sick. Dr. Lahr’s standpoint only corroborated the extremely anti-Jewish policy that was carried out in Saxony, led by governor Mutschmann, renowned for his hatred of Jews”<sup>38</sup>.

Also on October 28 the Polish Consulate in Munich intervened with the local authorities. The report of October 29 said: “At 12 at noon the head of our office went to see Mr. Siebert, the premier of Bavaria, who was however unavailable. The head of our office handed in a written protest to Mr. Stengel, the councillor of Bayerische Staatskanzlei, who declared that the Bavarian government was helpless in this case, since all the action had been ordained by the Chief of the Reich police, Mr. Himmler”. As the result of further interventions with the police “we were at least assured that pregnant women, sick and old people and children would be treated with more leniency and the police designated special doctors to take care of them. During the evening information even came that some persons of those categories were released”<sup>39</sup>. The results of interventions by other consuls turned out to be analogous. The responsible functionaries were often unavailable, interventions usually ended up in receiving allegations of the order from Berlin.

Everything shows that the mass expulsion of Jewish Polish citizens came as a complete surprise to Polish diplomats. At the crucial moment ambassador Józef Lipski was not in Berlin, hence the first interventions with Auswärtiges Amt were taken up by diplomats lower in rank. On October 28, probably no earlier than at noon, and rather in the afternoon, the head of the minister’s secretariat Michał Łubieński handed in to the German chargé d’affaires in Warsaw (Franz von Scheliha) a statement where he proposed

---

<sup>38</sup> AAN, MSZ, file 12291, pp. 10–13.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37–41.

among other things: "a. The Polish Government is ready to immediately start negotiations concerning the whole issue of Polish Jews in Germany. b. Until November 15 the Polish Government agrees not to deprive of their citizenship the Jews resident in Germany, counting on the finalization of negotiations at this term"<sup>40</sup>. M. Łubieński threatened also to expel German citizens from Poland as a retortion. In reply the Germans approved of negotiations but on condition that Poland would prolong until November 15 the term of obtaining check notes in their passports by Polish citizens in Germany; in return they promised to withhold the expulsion of the Jews<sup>41</sup>. The initial agreement was reached only on October 29. On the morning that day M. Łubieński and F. von Scheliha established the principles to which — after contacting Berlin — the representative of Reich expressed an approval at 18.50 hrs. in the afternoon: "1. Stopping further transporting of Jews from Germany. 2. Withdrawing the Jews staying on the Polish frontier. 3. The question of expelled Jews who are staying in the Polish territory (7,700 persons) will be the subject of negotiations on November 2, 1938 (Wednesday). In case of the acceptance of those terms by the Germans the minister decided to: a. stop retortions applied by Poles, b. continue checking passports of those who were expelled in a regular way"<sup>42</sup>. Owing to this the expulsion was terminated on the evening of October 29.

One can surmise that Polish consuls were not informed or were informed imprecisely of the talks in Warsaw. A person displaced from Leipzig relates that the Polish consul, who came several times to the Polish citizens gathered at the railway station, assured them — probably about 10.00 hrs. a.m. on October 28 — that the German authorities made a mistake and all of them would soon be free to go home. He assured them of it repeatedly till about 12 o'clock, shortly before transportation departed for the Polish frontier<sup>43</sup>.

The interventions by Polish consuls and diplomats made on October 28 did not influence the course of the expulsion. The displaced were gathered in police accommodation or in prisons, and later conducted to the railway stations or directly escorted there by the police. Transport from small localities was directed to junction stations (among others Leipzig) and hence to the Polish frontier.

The predicament of the displaced was indeed drastic. For the most part they were minor trade — and craftsmen but, apart from them, the rich and

<sup>40</sup> AAN, Polish Embassy in Berlin, file 883, p. 76.

<sup>41</sup> AAN, MSZ, file 12165, p. 94.

<sup>42</sup> AAN, Polish Embassy in Berlin, file 883, p. 74.

<sup>43</sup> Yad Vashem, account No. 1903/1753.

the intelligentsia were also expelled. Mostly roused from sleep, they had the occasional opportunity to pack indispensables and food. They had to hand the keys to their apartments, shops and workshops over to the police, but most of the time they could not contact their families, acquaintances or legal representatives regarding the fate of their property. The displacement frequently broke urgent business, hence — regardless of the loss incurred by having to close down the shop, workshop or firm — the displaced could suffer further considerable losses. Their property, left to its fate, was formally protected by the police, as the accommodation they left was locked and officially sealed. However, under the conditions of the Third Reich the protection by the authorities of Jewish property was doubtful, so the displaced had to be prepared for the kind of looting of their apartments and workshops that would not be punished by law.

Moreover, the displaced were leaving for the unknown. Sometimes they learnt about the decision of expulsion to Poland only several hours after their arrest. Most of them were born in Germany or had lived there for several decades. They often did not even know Polish and had no relatives or acquaintances in Poland. All their property was left in Germany, so they had to prepare themselves for the mercy of charitable institutions.

The maximum of suffering was achieved by the behaviour of police organs. In some localities — as reports say — the police behaved correctly. Consul Stanisław Nałęcz Korzeniowski reported from Frankfurt–am–Main: “The behaviour of the police towards the arrested was impeccable. They received food and were transported in 3rd class passenger carriages free of charge. In many cases before transport departed the displaced were allowed to contact the Polish Consulate General by phone<sup>44</sup>”.

Much more ruthless was the action carried out in Leipzig. According to consul F. Chiczewski’s report, the displaced had merely 20 or 60 minutes at their disposal for packing indispensables. Then they were conducted to the meeting points and thence transported by buses to the railway station. The sick were also taken away. It is true that some of them were successfully placed in hospitals, but a case of a woman who died of heart attack was reported. In some cases parents found themselves in the station while children were left at school. Sometimes the children were exported while their parents — temporarily absent from home — remained. The consul stated: “In general German people stood by and observed the ruthlessness of their police with indifference. Only in the evening was any unrest noted, in the Leipzig station where the German commuters, indignant with the arrogance of the police, summoned the Jews with their shouts to leave the

<sup>44</sup> AAN, MSZ, file 12165, pp. 68–73.

carriages. The immediate intervention by the police nipped the riot in the bud. The whole action left very sour taste in German intellectual circles. The majority of this group condemns with outrage the ruthless methods applied recently<sup>45</sup>.

Similar information about the ruthlessness of the police came from Munich concerning both this city and its region<sup>46</sup>. In Halle — as F. Chiczewski informed in the above-quoted report — the local head of the office for foreigners' affairs without giving a receipt took from the displaced all the valuables and cash surpassing 10 marks per person, while they were in prison<sup>47</sup>.

An analogous picture of how the people were transported to railway stations emerges from the already quoted accounts preserved at Yad Vashem. In this difficult situation great help was offered by the Jewish religious communities in Germany. In Düsseldorf representatives of the community intervened with the Regency and the Presidium of the Police, where although they met with a kind reception (the author of the account mentioned one of his interlocutors as "a kind man and correct as to form, which is by no means a normal fact with regard to Jews in Germany today"), but they managed to obtain only a permission for a visit in the prison, allowing them to provide the persons staying there with food and to convey to them some information and news important for settling current affairs<sup>48</sup>.

In Hamburg, too, the representatives of the community endeavoured to intervene with the local and central authorities, while co-operating with the Polish Consulate. The displaced were supplied with food and used the consulate representatives as intermediaries in taking care of their most urgent affairs. At the station, directly before the displaced were put into the carriages, the community provided them with food for the time of travel, and money<sup>49</sup>.

In Berlin the displaced intervened both with the representatives of the community and the Zionist Palestine Bureau, obtaining the above mentioned concessions to the sick, elderly and infants. A vital activity was also developed by the Union of Jewish Polish Citizens who helped i.a. with the assessment of losses suffered by the displaced, with the purpose of obtaining later compensation<sup>50</sup>.

---

<sup>45</sup> AAN, MSZ, file 12291, pp. 10–13.

<sup>46</sup> Report from October 29, 1938, AAN, MSZ, file 12291, pp. 37–41.

<sup>47</sup> AAN, MSZ, file 12291, pp. 10–13.

<sup>48</sup> Yad Vashem, account No. 08/23.

<sup>49</sup> Yad Vashem, account No. 01/35.

<sup>50</sup> Yad Vashem, accounts Nos. 01/4, 01/15, 01/272.

Also in Leipzig the Jewish community offered far-reaching assistance to the displaced. At the railway station its representatives provided the displaced with food. The refugees gathered in the garden of the Polish Consulate (several hundred people could not find enough room in the overcrowded building, and it was raining for many hours) were provided with three large tents. Consul F. Chiczewski wrote: "I must underline the great generosity of the Jews and the high effectiveness of charitable organizations which all during that time with admirable dedication provided their co-religionists with food, milk and hot meals"<sup>51</sup>. It should be added that the Jewish organizations in Leipzig offered assistance also to the displaced from other towns who in this city had to change their trains for ones bound for Poland.

The displaced were mostly directed to the frontier passages near Bytom (Beuthon) and Zbąszyń (on the German side — Neu-Bentschen, today — Zbąszynek), small groups were conveyed to the Polish frontier in Pomerania. Although the directions of transport were determined by distance and the arrangement of railway lines, the transportation of the displaced from Vienna e.g. came — at least in part — to the relatively distant Zbąszyń. The crossing of the Polish frontier took place in various ways.

The transportation of the displaced from southern areas of Germany (Leipzig, Dresden, Nuremberg, Munich, Stuttgart and other) was made as a rule to Silesia, where their fate was similar to those displaced from Breslau, Oppeln and smaller localities of these lands. Part of them were directed through Bytom. Consul Jan Małczyński informed from Oppeln on November 4 that according to the estimates made by Polish authorities the frontier posts in the region of this city were passed by from 1,700 up to 1,800 people, wherein almost 1,500 went through the railway station in Bytom. Apart from that about 2,500 people were driven through illegal passages in the country<sup>52</sup>. It seems to be too low an estimate, since consul F. Chiczewski assessed the total number of those displaced only from his region at about 5,000 people, while apart from that Leipzig was a junction station for transport from the West<sup>53</sup>. Even if we take into account that some of them later turned back from the Polish frontier, the number of those who came to Poland — together with the victims of displacement from Silesia — must have surpassed 5,000 considerably. According to German data about 6,000 people were expelled across the Silesian frontier<sup>54</sup>. The character of all the

<sup>51</sup> AAN, MSZ, file 12291, pp. 10–13; Yad Vashem, account No. 033/1271.

<sup>52</sup> AAN, MSZ, file 12291, pp. 29–32.

<sup>53</sup> AAN, MSZ, file 12291, pp. 10–13.

<sup>54</sup> K. Jonca, *op. cit.*, p. 73.



estimates was similar, at any rate, both on the German and on Polish side, because of the dimensions of the action, the quick rate of displacement, and finally because large numbers of the displaced were forced to cross the Polish frontier illegally and therefore they avoided any registration.

At any rate at the railway station in Bytom were concentrated about two thousand people whom the German authorities endeavoured to send as quickly as possible further to Poland. Those smuggled by force were gathered — at least in part — in the Bytom synagogue<sup>55</sup>. Consul J. Małczyński wrote: “The treatment of the Jews in the police-stations and prisons was also severe and ruthless. The Jewish refugees gathered in one of the halls of the railway station in Bytom were forbidden to talk, and their requests for being allowed to buy victuals also for the most part proved of no avail”<sup>56</sup>. Polish frontier authorities did not expect such an influx of people wanting to enter Poland, and therefore checking documents took a long time. Railway carriages for further transport were lacking, hence the management of the German railways in Oppeln demanded that Polish State Railways provide additional ones. As the report of the German Section of the Polish Ministry of the Interior pointed out, the management of the Katowice Polish State Railways received an order to delay meeting this demand<sup>57</sup>. Warsaw counted on the positive result of diplomatic interventions and on the cessation of displacement. This behaviour, however, added even more distress to the victims of the German action.

The basic attitude to the displaced was expressed by the instruction of the Ministry of the Interior given on October 29 to the voivodes of Toruń, Poznań, Łódź, Kielce and Katowice, i.e. in frontier voivodships.

“1. Jews who hold valid Polish passports and have relatives in the territory of our state should leave for the residences of those relatives.

2. Jews who hold valid passports and have no relatives in the territory of our state who could offer them assistance, should be directed to localities relatively the closest to the boards of the Jewish religious organizations, which should offer them necessary assistance. These Jews will be assisted by the Committees for the Refugees from Germany, active in major towns, which will resume their activity.

3. Those Jews who have no valid Polish passports or stateless persons should be transported to the German side without delay and should not be allowed to enter the Polish state”<sup>58</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>56</sup> AAN, MSZ, file 12291, pp. 29–32.

<sup>57</sup> AAN, MSZ, file 12165, pp. 13–14.

<sup>58</sup> AAN, MSZ, file 12165, p. 10.

The displaced who came by railway through Bytom, when they found themselves on the Polish side, as a result of this instruction were directed to various localities inside Poland. In the documents made available to me I find no information as to the ways of solving the problem of railway tickets. One can only surmise that those displaced who managed — despite the German interdictions — to take cash with them, payed for the tickets themselves. In other cases assistance was given by the Jewish committees.

This concerned, however, a minority of people directed through the Silesian frontier. The rest found themselves in a much more difficult situation. Some of them were deprived of their luggage carried in other carriages. Consul J. Małczyński wrote in the quoted report: "Late at night the terrorized and frightened Jews, wherein also old people and children, were carried to the Polish frontier and forced to cross it, the German side declaring openly that in case of any attempt at escaping the police or other escorting detachments would use their guns, and a return to Germany would be punished by imprisonment in the Dachau concentration camp. According to the information obtained, there were cases when those who escorted the displaced Jews, once they delivered them to the Polish frontier fired warning shots, which naturally aroused panic among the expelled, as a result of which possessions were lost, while those escaping also received injuries"<sup>59</sup>.

This picture is confirmed by other reports. The well-known politician, Henryk Rozmaryn (in the years 1922–1935 member of Polish parliament) wrote to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "Polish Jews living in German frontier cities are driven to the Polish frontier across the fields and along roads on foot. Katowice witnessed the arrival of the famished Jewish children, in a terrible state, girls and boys in school uniforms with manuals in their hands. These children were taken to the carriages straight from school. Many of them fell ill on the way. Katowice witnessed the arrival of a woman who broker her leg on the way"<sup>60</sup>.

Persons forced to cross the frontier illegally (according to the apparently innocent term they were "thrown across") often encountered protests of frontier guards. The report of the German Section of the Polish Ministry of the Interior said: "At the time when the Polish frontier authorities were preparing for the reception of the Jews, the German authorities, without waiting, transferred the expelled from trains to the buses, carried them to various illegal passages and with the help of the police, Gestapo and SS drove them quickly to the Polish side. Hence many of them have no passports. Those who passed were children, women, babies in prams. All

<sup>59</sup> AAN, MSZ, file 12291, pp. 29–32.

<sup>60</sup> AAN, MSZ, file 12165, p.52.

this went on in a great muddle. Apart from the numbers quoted, the frontier guards and Polish police turned a great number back. The latter are waiting on the German side of the frontier for the possibility of being 'thrown across'"<sup>61</sup>. Comparison with other reports allows one to observe some inaccuracy in this account. Throwing across the frontier took place regardless of the fact that other persons were being collected at the station in Bytom.

One is struck, however, by the information that Polish services in control tried to "turn" the victims of expulsion "back" to the German side. This was routine behaviour in case of attempts at crossing the frontier illegally. It was the duty of frontier guards to prevent such cases, so they acted according to rule, although the situation clearly defied any rules and the circumstances were abnormal, for in this case the frontier was crossed by thousands of people, who did it against their will, driven under threat of guns. All this happened on a cold October night, in the rain.

A dramatic history of a large group of the expelled was related by Josef Kohs. The train that was carrying them stopped about 2 kilometres before Bytom, together with other transportation, at about 21.00 hrs. on October 28. The people were driven by SS-men outdoors into the rain, then quickly driven in the dark towards the frontier. Many people dropped their baggage. J. Kohs kept one suit-case but dropped two other pieces of luggage. In the crowd there were also small children. After several kilometres the escort lagged behind and the displaced, without knowing it, found themselves on the Polish side where they reached a country inn. Only about 9 o'clock in the morning did two policemen with an official arrive and the expelled learnt that they were at Radzionkowo. They were soon provided with food but had to pass normal duty and passport offices, which was additional torment under the circumstances. Finally they were told they were free and could go wherever they wished<sup>62</sup>. Some sources provide information about people wandering in the frontier zone between the posts of both sides<sup>63</sup>.

The largest number of the expelled were directed to the frontier passage in Zbąszyń and its vicinity. They were carried in trains up to Neu-Bentschen station on the German side of the frontier whence, partly on foot, they were directed to the Polish side. The first group (numbering 654 persons) came at about 20.30 hrs. on October 28. The commander of the State Police Frontier Post at Zbąszyń related: "(...) on the Polish side they were arrested by the police about one kilometre from the frontier. At once I put the whole Police Station on the alert, I withdrew the detained to the frontier line and

<sup>61</sup> AAN, MSZ, file 12165, pp. 13-14.

<sup>62</sup> Yad Vashem, account No. 1903/1753.

<sup>63</sup> S. Milton, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-180.

surrounded them with a cordon of policemen and frontier guards who gradually arrived"<sup>64</sup>. In the next hours further groups came, others arrived on successive regular trains to the station in Zbąszyń. This lasted until noon October 29. The general number of the expelled was estimated at 6,000 people. The report described also the scene of brutal violence of the Germans observed from the Polish side: "The largest group of about 700 persons was expelled about 9.30 o'clock through the Zbąszyń-Rogatka passage. This group sat on the ground near the Polish frontier on the German side, refusing to enter the Polish territory. As the forces of the police and frontier guards were not sufficient, the German authorities brought a company of soldiers who with fixed bayonets started to attack those sitting, beating them and treading over them. With bayonets and butts of their guns did soldiers force the expelled to go over to the Polish side".

Probably the majority of people expelled through Zbąszyń and its environs crossed the Polish-German frontier in regular trains. The recapitulation of data contained in the report by the commander of the State Police Frontier Post shows that from 17.40 hrs. about 4,300 persons came along this way, while about 1,700 on foot. The latter number should be enlarged, because it is impossible to define how many of the expelled reached Poland through illegal passages. The people who came by train were subjected to regular checking procedure which — because the small frontier station was ill-suited for such mass movement — lasted long. Among those who came, a certain number of people without Polish passports, with invalid passports, and even German citizens of Jewish nationality were found. The report says that on October 30 several groups of these persons, 123 persons together, were expelled from Poland by regular trains. In their number there were 23 persons (German citizens) resident in Poland, expelled as a retortion for the German expulsion action. The German authorities sent all of them back to Poland on the evening the same day. They were directed back to Germany on the next train. This time Germans forced about 65 persons to go back, with a letter saying that according to the Polish-German agreement reached in the meantime — further expulsion should be stopped. Those 65 persons eventually stayed in Poland after several travels between the two states<sup>65</sup>.

All the others who came on the trains were temporarily placed in the railway station in Zbąszyń. Its rooms were not suitable for such a number of people waiting, therefore the conditions of their stay turned out to be extremely difficult. Only in the evening October 29, after checking docu-

---

<sup>64</sup> Archiwum Państwowe, henceforth quoted as AP (State Archives) in Poznań, Starostwo Nowy Tomyśl, file 937.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

ments, did the frontier authorities permit departures up-country. However, it turned out that the expelled had not enough money for tickets, while the railway authorities did not foresee such an extraordinary situation. According to the report of the Regional Management of State Railways in Poznań from November 12, 1938, on the night of October 29 390 persons left Zbąszyń by regular trains and 500 persons by a special train, provided by State Railways (*PKP*) for the expelled. On the next day the station was left by a further thousand persons, who could buy the tickets owing to the assistance of a Jewish Committee. On the next day the Polish authorities ordered to withhold the departures<sup>66</sup>.

An additional problem connected with the departures was a shortage of staff at the railway station, which probably never before in its whole history had to issue such a lot of tickets within such a short time.

Even though the situation of the expelled who stayed for many hours in the overcrowded station, ill-adjusted for such purposes, was extremely difficult, they were privileged in comparison to others, driven across the frontier under threat of gun-fire. One of those who went by train across the frontier said: "On the way from Neu-Bentschen to Zbąszyń we saw about a thousand people on the country road, among them old people, small children, prams etc. This was transportation from Hamburg which came to the Polish frontier at 7 a.m and was sent further on foot. These people were received by Polish frontier functionaries with fixed bayonets, and because they wanted to go back, the German police and SS pushed them onward, beating them with gun-butts and saying: 'you can go safely, they are too scared to shoot'. Then the Polish functionaries ordered the people to lie down and they all had to fall to the ground, wet from rain. Three warning shots were delivered and they were all allowed to pass across the frontier"<sup>67</sup>.

This account diverges largely from the data contained in other documents, especially as regards the size of this group from Hamburg. Since the total number of people driven on foot and registered by Polish officials amounted perhaps to no more than 2 thousand, and successive groups were coming from the evening the day before and were let into the territory of Poland, at 7 a.m. on October 29 there could not possibly be a thousand people on the road crossing the frontier. However one element recurs in various documents — the attempts of Polish frontier posts to stop the groups crossing the frontier on foot in places not designated for that purpose. An account of a person displaced from Hamburg (probably belonging to the group mentioned in the previous account) says that the expelled after leaving

<sup>66</sup> AAN, MSZ, file 12291.

<sup>67</sup> Yad Vashem, account No. 02/427.

the train were subjected to an examination in search of money. In view of the large number of people it was however rather superficial, due to which considerable sums of cash could sometimes be smuggled. Later they had to go about 7 kilometres on foot in cold rain under threat of beating those who lagged behind. Many lost their luggage then and old people and women with small children were in a special plight. On the Polish side there was one guard who, although he fired several warning shots, could not stop the ruthless escort from driving the numerous groups out. Then the deathly tired group awaited the decision of Polish authorities in the near-by copice, and about 10–11 a.m. they were allowed to enter Zbąszyń. This account makes no mention of the order to lie in the mud of the country road<sup>68</sup>.

Another account describes a numerous group of the displaced from Nuremberg who after midnight, in the early hours of October 29 were driven to the Polish side across the forests near Zbąszyń. The German escort used dogs and fired warning shots. About 4 o'clock in the morning the Polish guards drove the displaced into the No-Man's-Land between the posts and only after long bargaining did they allow them to cross the frontier and come to Zbąszyń<sup>69</sup>.

The critical analysis of the accounts of the displaced persons and documents of Polish authorities shows some divergencies, but they are easy to understand if we consider the special situation on the night of October 28–29 in Zbąszyń region. On the one hand the frontier was crossed by hundreds of the displaced, frightened, tired, sometimes on the verge of a physical and nervous breakdown, unaware of where they were being driven. Above all they longed for the end of their wandering, for finding a temporary haven, shelter from the pain, cold and the escort that drove them. On the frontier they met with an unfriendly reception and only after a certain time, sometimes lasting several hours, were they able to cross over to the Polish territory where they could not, however, receive either immediate help or shelter. No wonder then that their accounts, given several years later, contain some inaccurate details, while what remained in their memory was the general impression of this dreadful night.

On the other hand Polish frontier personnel were surprised by the sudden appearance of hundreds of persons crossing the frontier in various places, sometimes in woodland. Such cases were not covered by any regulations and had not been experienced before. It is true that in the past there were some cases of "throwing" across the frontier some single persons from the German side, but the expulsion action occurred for the first time

---

<sup>68</sup> Yad Vashem, account No. 01/35.

<sup>69</sup> Yad Vashem, account No. 033/1271.

on such a mass scale. The attempts to stick to formal regulations caused additional suffering to the expelled, at the same time, however, the lowest functionaries obeying army discipline were afraid to act without order against the obvious rules. Their accounts too, could be inexact, because they could not orientate themselves in the middle of the events of those dramatic hours.

Regardless of the divergencies, which are of secondary character, the general picture of “throwing” people across the frontier and the reaction of the Polish functionaries stands out quite clearly. On the Polish side the groups of the expelled encountered surprised frontier guards and only after a certain time could they pass over to the Polish territory. However, it turned out that Zbąszyń, a small town, was not prepared for receiving such great numbers of refugees. Only some of those “thrown across” on foot could find shelter in the overcrowded rooms of the railway station, the majority stood waiting in the square and the streets surrounding it. Only about 8 a.m. on October 29 were they directed to the former army barracks in Zbąszyń, which although in bad repair (among others also stables were used) at least provided a roof over their heads<sup>70</sup>.

A small group of the displaced came to the railway station called Drawski Młyn. According to the account of the Regional Management of State Railways in Poznań 128 persons came on October 28, another 28 on the next day. The German authorities announced falsely that they were farm labourers returning from Germany. On October 28 the Polish side provided additional railway carriages for their transport. According to the account of one of the expelled from this group they were exclusively men from Berlin and probably Cologne. At the beginning they were detained in the rooms of the station, then they were allowed to stay in the village. Information given by both documents differs in this respect. According to the report of RMSR “faced with the complete lack of accommodation, the voivodeship decided to put the expelled in six goods–passenger carriages and in part under the red Cross tent, where they have been staying until now” (the date of the report is November 12, 1938). According to the account of one of the expelled “those who had money could rent a room, very dearly. The ones with no money lived in a big dancing room, which we rented for this purpose”<sup>71</sup>. It is possible that the difference was caused by the fact that after

---

<sup>70</sup> Cf. report by the commander of the frontier post at Zbąszyń (*AP* in Poznań, Starostwo Nowy Tomyśl, file 937) and report of *DOKP* (The Regional Management of State Railways) in Poznań (*AAN*, *MSZ*, file 12291).

<sup>71</sup> *AAN*, *MSZ*, file 12291; Yad Vashem, account No. 01/169.

a few weeks spent in the tent and in railway carriages the expelled moved to the village.

The fact that on the evening of October 29 the expulsion was stopped on the strength of the preliminary Polish–German agreement, meant that part of the people transported to the Polish frontier could return home. Fragmentary information says that on October 30 about a thousand people went back through Leipzig to Frankfurt–am–Main, while 325 persons came back to Leipzig<sup>72</sup>. About 700 persons could come back to Munich, further groups to other towns in south Germany<sup>73</sup>. Probably the fewest people could go back to the towns in the eastern provinces of Reich, whence the authorities found it the easiest to “throw” them “across” to Poland in early hours after the whole action was started.

Very little is known about the conditions of return, perhaps the account contained in Consul Konstanty Jeleński’s report from Munich of November 5 may be considered typical: “At Guben the arrested after several hours of waiting were told they were free and could go back at their own cost to their places of residence. After long bargaining the prices of return tickets were reduced by 60%. The arrested Polish citizens collected between themselves about 2,000 marks, which sum was handed in to the commander of the transportation. For the rest of the sum due, the commander of the transportation demanded a written obligation or a draft on behalf of the Israelite Religious Community at Munich. However, the Polish citizens refused to make such a promise. The transportation returned to Munich at 10 p.m. on Sunday October 30”<sup>74</sup>.

The conclusion of the Polish–German agreement made it possible to return home also for the Jews staying on the premises of the Polish Consulate in Leipzig. Consul F. Chiczewski wrote in his report of November 1, 1938: “On Saturday evening at 19 hrs. I obtained the consent of the Police Chief in Leipzig for them to return to their apartments. The Chief of the Police promised that the Jews who found shelter in the Consulate would not encounter any obstacles in their stay in Germany until the final regulation of this matter through a Polish–German agreement”<sup>75</sup>. These words give one the impression as if the Leipzig police learnt about the preliminary Polish–German agreement on the evening of October 29, while the consul had no information on this subject as late as November 1.

---

<sup>72</sup> Report of the Polish Consulate in Leipzig from November 1, 1938, *AAN, MSZ*, file 12291, pp. 10–13.

<sup>73</sup> Report of the Polish Consulate in Munich from November 5, 1938, *AAN, MSZ*, file 12291, pp. 186–187.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *AAN, MSZ*, file 12291, pp. 10–31.



The Polish authorities were surprised not only by the fact of expulsion, but also by its dimensions. About 22.20 hours on October 28 the Polish Embassy estimated the number of the expelled at 2–3 thousand persons<sup>76</sup>. On the morning of October 29 the number of 7,700 persons was mentioned in the talks with F. von Scheliha<sup>77</sup>. According to the data of the German Section from October 30, there were in all 10,653 persons expelled from Germany<sup>78</sup>. The secretariat of H. Himmler informed that on October 28 and 29 the expulsion affected about 12 thousand people<sup>79</sup>.

All these data, however, are only rough estimates. Perhaps the summing up of the most important groups of the displaced will enable us to size up the phenomenon. According to the information given by German police authorities in Gliwice about 6,000 persons were carried or driven across the Polish frontier<sup>80</sup>. The report of the Regional Management of State Railways in Poznań shows that about 1,900 persons left the Zbąszyń railway station up-country. Finally the summing up of the statistical data relating to the persons staying in the camp for refugees in Zbąszyń allows one to draw a conclusion that about 9,000 persons passed through it<sup>81</sup>. All in all we arrive at a number of about 17,000 persons expelled from Germany as the result of the action on October 28 and 29, 1938. Naturally these are only approximate data. The number of people expelled to Poland increased during the next months by members of families who on the strength of the Polish–German agreement of January 1939 had a right to enter Poland.

The brutal action of mass expulsion of Jewish Polish citizens from Germany was the first action to be undertaken by the Nazi authorities on such a mass scale. This resulted from a programme aimed at getting rid of all the Jews from the Third Reich. The direct cause was provided by the unfortunate act of March 31, 1938, and later the regulation of the Minister of the Interior from October 6, 1938. The analysis of the policy of German authorities in the course of the year 1938 leads to the conclusion that Jewish Polish citizens — regardless of the behaviour of the Polish government — were doomed to be removed from Germany at short notice. However the decisions of the Polish government created an excellent pretext for speeding up the displacement and at the same time favoured its extremely brutal realization. Thus, the Polish diplomat Anatol Mühlstein was right when in conversation with Jan Szembek he criticized severely the behaviour of the

<sup>76</sup> Telephone message AAN, MSZ, file 12165, p. 40.

<sup>77</sup> Note AAN, Polish Embassy in Berlin, file 883, p. 74.

<sup>78</sup> AAN, MSZ, file 12165, p. 23.

<sup>79</sup> Documents on German Foreign Policy 1918–1939, Series D., vol. V, document No. 92.

<sup>80</sup> K. J o n c a, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

<sup>81</sup> AP in Poznań, Starostwo Nowy Tomyśl, files 937 and 938.

Polish authorities. J. Szembek noted: “He began by sharp attack of our policy towards the Jews, and especially the act that deprived them of citizenship. He described it as ‘a great blunder’, a wrong and false move. Its aim was to reduce the numbers of Jews in Poland and as a result — because of the German expulsion — their numbers grew by 20 thousand people, to say nothing of the fact that the mentioned act caused a growth of inhuman persecution of Jews in Germany”<sup>82</sup>.

*(Translated by Agnieszka Kreczmar)*

---

<sup>82</sup> *Diariusz i teki Jana Szembeka*, vol. IV, p. 400.