**DOC. 13**

**A Jewish eyewitness now in Palestine gives an account of how
the Germans persecuted the Jews in Włocławek, September 1939**[[1]](#footnote-1)

Protocol of the statement made on June 7th, 1940, by Mrs. M.P. of Włocławek, now residing in Jerusalem, before the United Aid Committee of Polish Jews.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The liquidation of the Jewish Community of Włocławek

Appearing before us is Mrs. M.P. from Włocławek, who now lives in Jerusalem. She testified as follows:

A few days after they marched into Włocławek,[[3]](#footnote-3) on the eve of Yom Kippur,[[4]](#footnote-4) the Germans broke into a private home where Jews had gathered to pray. They ordered those present to leave the building and run; then they ordered them to ‘Stand still!,’ but several Jews did not hear the order and continued running. Thereupon the Germans opened fire and killed five or six of them. On that Yom Kippur the Germans set fire to both large synagogues. The fire also spread to several private homes. The Jews threw their belongings outside, where they were then looted by the Polish mob. The arson was carried out primarily by members of the SS. The Jews tried to salvage the burning houses. Then the Germans took all the Jewish men out of one of the houses, 26 in number, and forced them to sign affidavits stating that they were the ones who had set fire to the building. After taking these statements, the Germans informed the prisoners that they would be sentenced to death for arson and that they could not be saved unless they paid a ransom of 250,000 złotys. The Jewish population of Włocławek raised the required sum from amongst themselves, and the prisoners were released. Then the Germans started raiding the houses. They caught around 350 Jews, some of whom they settled in barracks, while others were sent to the Mühsam factory.[[5]](#footnote-5) From there they were taken to work every day, but were given no food – and only their families were permitted to provide them with nourishment. After numerous negotiations the prisoners were permitted to occasionally return to their homes, for a short leave, and subject to a special exit permit, in order to wash, change their clothes, eat, and the like. This permanent subordination of the 350 prisoners by no means put an end to the abduction of Jews from the city streets, and their subsequent forced labour. Then there was the Jewish Council (Judenrat) which was established in place of the community’s previous administration, and whose entire activity was limited to carrying out the orders of the German administration – it would provide a certain number of Jewish workers each day, as per the Germans’ demands. Those seized and abducted to work would be mercilessly beaten and abused. Their [the Germans’] behaviour toward the Jews could be demonstrated by the fact that one of these Jews, Jacob Hayman, fifty two years old and too weak for physical labour, was beaten and stabbed with daggers while working. A few days after returning home he died from his injuries. In October the Germans decreed that Jews must attach a yellow badge to the back of their clothing and that may no longer walk on the pavement, only in the middle of the road. Shortly after they had collected the ransom for the alleged arsonists in the sum of 250,000 złotys, the Germans set a new fine of 500,000 złotys for the alleged violation of the prohibition of using the pavement. The schools closed.

A few days after entering the city, the Germans closed and confiscated Jewish factories and shops. The Jews were required to register all their property, and were not permitted to keep more than 200 złotys at home (In Warsaw - 2,000 złotys).[[6]](#footnote-6) There were many instances of beatings and abuse of Jews. They would beat [the Jews] not only during the hours of forced labour, and not only under whatever pretext, but also for no reason at all: they would simply walk up to Jewish passers-by, shout ‘Ż*yd*,’[[7]](#footnote-7) and begin to beat them. Within a short time they issued permits to leave the city to those who had requested them. To receive this permission, applicants had to stand in one of three lines: ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche), who received the travel permits for free; Poles, who would pay one złoty; and Jews - 10 złotys. Jewish women were also seized for forced labour, but such cases were rare, and their work was not hard. They were treated ‘mercifully’ at work, meaning they were not injured, but merely slapped in the face. However, they were forced to scrub floors wearing only undergarments. This was not the attitude toward Jewish women in general, who were in fact abused as well. The Germans would break into Jewish apartments at night, under the pretence of a search, and they would force the women to strip naked. This happened to Mrs. S., a woman of social standing, who was forced to dance and jump naked before the Germans. There were numerous similar cases.

The Polish population suffers from the Germans as well. The first arrests took place immediately after the Germans entered. They maltreated members of the Polish intelligentsia as well as priests. All those imprisoned were sent to work in Germany, somewhere near Königsberg. There has been no news from there since December. Many leaders of the Polish intelligentsia were shot, including the city’s president Mystkowski.[[8]](#footnote-8) The town was completely cleansed of Polish intelligentsia members. The Polish craftsmen and labourers were banished from the city, and the suburbs where they lived were set on fire. Many were caught and sent to central Germany to work. Only a few faint signs of the city’s Polish character are preserved. Some of the city’s German residents have declared themselves ethnic Germans (‘Volksdeutsche’), and they torment and harass both Poles and Jews. They serve as a kind of auxiliary guard for the German authorities, and they are the driving force behind all acts of violence. The Poles had treated the Jews fairly. Poles came to the Jews of their own accord and offered them shelter in their homes, for them or for their belongings. The Germans also shut down and seized factories and shops belonging to the Poles.

**DOC. 37**

**On 15 November 1939 the teacher Chaim Kaplan from Warsaw
writes about the mass escape of Jews across the German-Soviet demarcation line[[9]](#footnote-9)1**

Handwritten diary of Chaim Kaplan,[[10]](#footnote-10)2 entry for 15 November 1939

15 November, 1939

There is no end to the flight! They flee to the Führer’s ‘friend,’[[11]](#footnote-11)3 who welcomes the persecuted Jews with open arms, those whom the fury of the persecutor forced to leave their homeland.

One must admit that our Sages’ words were correct: “The Almighty prepares the remedy before the sickness.” Were it not for Soviet Russia, we would be choked to death. Polish Jewry has suffered complete and utter destruction. Tens of thousands of young Jews were left without means of sustenance. Every day sees a new decree. Every morning, a new discrimination comes in place of the last horror, which the Jews are still trying to comprehend. It is terribly confusing to read all the orders, edicts, announcements, and notices that the conqueror publishes. We know in advance that they hold no good news for the Jews. We are always discriminated against, whether for good or for bad: they feed the poor from public kitchens – except the Jews; they eliminate unemployment by means of providing necessary work – except for the Jews. The Jews are not taken into account.[[12]](#footnote-12)4 In every public position, the Jews have a special status. It is against them that the occupier fights. That is what a German general explicitly stated. Jewish youth have no present and no future, and it flees for its very life. The escape is accomplished in various ways: on foot, by automobile, by train, in carts, and in all sorts of other vehicles. The border is open. There is no obstacle from the Soviet side.[[13]](#footnote-13)5 And the Nazi conqueror has no established policy. One never knows what is prohibited and what is permitted. For the same offense, in some cases they may be lenient and in others strict. This is understandable, for wherever there is arbitrariness and malice, there can be no fixed or specific policy. Moreover, what one authority permits the other prohibits. Immediately after the occupation, the border was open. They let anyone cross without a written permit, and whoever wanted to stand on line for three days could even receive a permit which explicitly states that the bearer is entitled to cross the border into Russia with his baggage and possessions, using any means of transportation. But all this is in writing. In reality, the route is perilous. According to the ‘law,’ those crossing the border are permitted to take only twenty złotys with them. This is a sadistic law that cannot [possibly] be obeyed, and consequently, people connive to smuggle out larger sums; and here many failed. In transit, they were assaulted and robbed and left naked and penniless. The border guards know that Jewish lives and money are [considered] public property and they deal with those who cross in whatever fashion strikes their fancy. People therefore prefer to cross without permission: They do not trust the legality of the conqueror. When they cross secretly they feel safer, for every refugee takes with him a larger sum of money than the ‘law’ permits. And so, word of the ‘green border’ has spread among the refugees, and experts in border crossings earn tremendous sums through their ‘profession.’

Those in the know estimate that over a million refugees have fled to Russia.[[14]](#footnote-14)6 And no matter how the numbers swell, they are welcomed. But where will this large mass of people settle? Some, experts in a certain craft, have managed. Some of these, especially those skilled in a particular handicraft, have already transferred to the Russian interior. But the majority either have some available cash and are satiated, or have nothing and are hungry and thirsty. As always, there are those who are successful and those who have no luck and suffer. But all in all, one must not deprecate Soviet Russia, which opened its gates to the Polish exiles and saved them from untold suffering. The Soviets condemn America and England, the wealthy democracies, for closing their gates and turning a deaf ear to the heartrending cries of the German refugees at the very hour of their most terrible distress. The Soviets, on the other hand, say, “Come, we will give you work; just join us.”

The politics of sovereign friendship does not permit reprimanding the Nazis to abandon their despicable practices toward the Jews. ‘Jews’ is a complex concept. Among them are the wealthy, whom they despise. Their work is done by others; they benefit from it. The Nazis hasten the much-desired proletarianization. Such men they do not despise. But the Jewish youth who yearn for work, for manual labor, for a life of creation and construction and accept the authority of the Stalinist Bolshevism – they are desirable guests. Tens of thousands of them are fleeing from the Nazi hell.

Here is what happened to us in a single day:

After much work and effort the schools were opened, which exist only by a miracle. Because of the dearth of students, the teachers don’t even earn enough for a dry crust of bread. One school of three hundred students dwindled to one hundred; another, of one hundred, is down to twenty. The teaching is not being done properly, because of crushed spirits and insufficient pay. We earn as much as Hanina and his small measure of carobs.[[15]](#footnote-15) Now even this has come to an end… Because of the contagious diseases spreading throughout the city, especially typhoid fever, all the schools of every kind or type have been ordered to shut down. From now on, we may look forward to lives of hunger and poverty, of degradation and ugliness.

It is a day of reckoning for loose Jewish women too. Just as a Jewish shoemaker is forbidden to sew new shoes, thus Jewish women are forbidden to engage in… prostitution. The conqueror fears “race desecration,” and if prostitution as a profession is permitted also to Jewish women, their soldiers may not be able to conquer their urges and stumble – heaven forefend – with a non-Aryan harlot.

And proper Jewish women were also advised to not fraternize with the soldiers; if not, they will be accused of sabotage, and, according to Frank’s most recent order,[[16]](#footnote-16)7 sentenced to death, no more and no less…

1. The original has been lost. Published in *Sefer ha-Zeva’ot* (The Book of Horrors), ed. Benjamin Mintz and Yisrael Klausner (Jerusalem: ??, 1945), p. 6. This document has been translated from the original Hebrew. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This presumably refers to the Committee of Four, whom the executive of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem appointed toward the end of 1939. The committee members were Izaak Grünbaum, Emil Schmorak, Elijahu Dobkin, and Rabbi Moshe Shapiro. Grünbaum, a native of Poland, tasked the last president of the Zionist Organization in Poland, Apolinary Hartglas (1883–1953), with collecting statements from survivors. Hartglas had come to Palestine after fleeing Warsaw in early 1940. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Wehrmacht occupied the city on 14 Sept. 1939. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In 1939 the eve of Yom Kippur fell on 22 September. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Engineering works including an iron foundry founded in 1884 by Jewish businessman Hugo Mühsam. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The prohibition of possessing more than 2,000 złoty in cash was imposed in the General Government on 20 Nov. 1939 (*VOBl-GG* 1939 no. 7, 20 Nov. 1939, pp. 57–58) and in the Warthegau on 18 Nov. 1939; see Doc. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Polish in the original, meaning ‘Jew.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Witold Mystkowski (1896–1939), accountant; lived in Włocławek from 1927, where he was the town president (mayor) from 1935 to 1939. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 1 USHMM, Collection 2004.405, pp. 205-207. This document has been translated from Hebrew. Published in: Hayim Kaplan, *Megillat Yissurin: Yoman Getto* *Varshah*, (Tel Aviv: 1966), pp. 82-84. Incomplete German translation can be found in: *Buch der Agonie: Das Warschauer Tagebuch des Chaim A. Kaplan*, ed. Abraham I. Katsh, (Frankfurt/M.: 1967), pp. 82-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 2 Chaim Kaplan (1880-1942), Hebrew teacher. He trained in the Mir yeshiva, studied pedagogy in Vilnius. In 1902 he founded (and was later director of) an elementary school with Hebrew as the language of instruction. Kaplan travelled to the USA in 1921 and to Palestine in 1936, and was murdered in Treblinka. He wrote a diary from 1933 to 4 Aug. 1942, and handed his recordings on to Władysław Wójciek, who hid them. In 1952, Wójciek gave the section of the diary covering the period from end-December 1939 until April 1941 to the Jewish Historical Institute (AŻIH, 302/218). He later emigrated to the USA where he sold another part of the manuscript which he had only previously recovered. Today, the entries for Aug-Dec 1939 and June/July 1942 are held at USHMM; another part covering the period of May 1941 - May 1942 is at the archive of Moreshet, the Mordechai Anielevich Memorial Holocaust Study and Research Centre (D.2.470) in Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 3 Meaning, toward the Soviet Union. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 4 Meaning: Nobody takes care of the Jews. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 5 A different perspective can be found in Docs. 33, 63, and 275. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. 6 It is estimated today that between 200,000 and 300,000 Jews flew from Western Poland into Soviet-occupied territory. Among them were tens of thousands of persons displaced by the Germans. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Hanina Ben Dosa was an ancient Jewish scholar and miracle-worker from the 1st century A.D., also famous for his Spartan lifestyle. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. 7 This could not be found. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)