**DOC. 13**

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

Transcript of a statement made by Mrs M.P. of Włocławek before the United Aid Committee of Polish Jews[[2]](#footnote-2) in Jerusalem, dated 7 June 1940

The liquidation of the Jewish Community of Włocławek

Appearing before us is Mrs M.P. from Włocławek who now lives in Jerusalem and 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 entered 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 kept running. Thereupon the Germans opened fire and killed five or six Jews. On that Yom Kippur, the Germans set fire to the two large synagogues. The fire also spread to a number of private houses. The Jews threw their belongings outside, where they were then looted by the Polish mob. SS men in particular participated in setting the fires. The Jews tried to save the burning houses. Then the Germans took all the men who were in one house, 26 in all, and forced them to sign statements stating that they had set the buildings on fire. 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 złoty. 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 about 350 Jews, some of whom they took to a barracks and others to the Mühsam factory.[[5]](#footnote-5) From there, they were taken to work every day, but they were given no food. Only their families were allowed to provide them with food. After exhausting negotiations, the prisoners were occasionally given special permission to return home to wash and change their clothes, to eat etc. Although the Germans already had 350 prisoners who were forced to work, this by no means put an end to the abductions of Jews. They were seized in the streets and forced to work. Then there was the Jewish Council (Judenrat), which was established to replace the previous community administration and whose activities were were limited to carrying out the orders of the German administration. As per the the Germans’ demands, it provided a certain number of Jewish workers each day. Those seized and taken off were mercilessly beaten and abused by the Germans. One incident will serve to illustrate how they treated the Jews at work: one of these Jews, Jacob Hayman, 52 years old and too weak for physical labour, was beaten and stabbed with daggers while working. He died from his injuries a few days after he returned home. In October the Germans ordered that the Jews had to attach a yellow badge to the back of their clothing and that they could 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 złoty, the Germans set a new fine of 500,000 złoty for every alleged violation of the prohibition on using the pavement. Moreover, the schools had to close.

A few days after entering the city, the Germans closed and confiscated all Jewish factories and shops. The Jews were required to register all their property. Jews were not permitted to have more than 200 złoty at home (2,000 in Warsaw).[[6]](#footnote-6) There were many instances of physical attacks on Jews. They were not only beaten under any pretext during forced labour, but also for no reason at all. People would simply walk up to Jews in the street, shout ‘Ż*yd*’[[7]](#footnote-7) and begin to beat them. For a while, those who had submitted a request earlier were allowed to leave the city. To receive this permission, the applicants had to stand in three lines: ethnic Germans (Volksdeutsche) received the travel permits for free; Poles had to pay one złoty, and Jews 10 złoty. 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, i.e. they were not injured, they were merely hit in the face. But they were forced to scrub floors wearing only the undergarments that they had on. Howecer, not all Jewish women were safe from maltreatment. The Germans would break into Jewish apartments at night, under the pretence of searching them, and force women to strip naked. This is what 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 also suffers under the Germans. Immediately after they marched in, the Germans arrested members of the Polish intelligentsia and priests. All these prisoners were sent Germany for labour, somewhere near Königsberg. There has been no news from there since December. Many members of the Polish intelligentsia were shot, including President Mystkowski.[[8]](#footnote-8) The town was almost completely cleansed of its intelligentsia. Polish craftsmen and labourers were removed from the city. The suburbs where they lived were set on fire, many of them were imprisoned and sent to Germany for work. Only a few faint signs of the city’s Polish character remain. Some of the local Germans have declared themselves ethnic Germans and abuse and harass both Poles and Jews. They serve as a kind of auxiliary guard for the German authorities and are the driving force behind the violence. The Poles treated the Jews fairly. Some of them came to the Jews of their own accord and offered to protect them or their belongings in their homes. The Germans also shut down and seized factories and shops belonging to Poles.

**DOC. 37**

**On 15 November 1939 the teacher Chaim Kaplan from Warsaw
writes about the mass escapes 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

November 15, 1939

There is no end to the “flight!’ They flee to the “Führer’s” “friend,”[[11]](#footnote-11)3 who welcomes with open arms the persecuted Jews, forced to leave the land where they were born by the fury of the persecutor.

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 are 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: when the poor are fed from public kitchens – except the Jews; when unemployment is eliminated 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 is fighting. That is what a German general explicitly stated. Jewish youth has no present and no future, and it is fleeing 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 queue up for three days could even receive a permit explicitly stating that the bearer is entitled to cross the border into Russia with his baggage and possessions, by any means of transportation. But all this is in writing. But in reality, the route is perilous. According to the “law,” those crossing the border are permitted to take only twenty zloty with them. This is a sadistic law that cannot [possibly] be obeyed, and consequently, people connive to smuggle out larger sums, and here many fail. On the way, they are assaulted and robbed and left naked and penniless. The border guards know that Jewish lives and money are 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 legalities 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 at 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 made it. Some [others], those skilled in a particular handicraft, have already been transferred to the Russian interior, but the majority either have some available cash and are full, 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 refugees from the Germans 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 admonishing the Nazis so that they abandon their despicable practices toward the Jews. “Jews” is a complex concept. Among them are those who are 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 that so desire work, to do manual labor, to live 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 earn enough for a dry crust of bread. One school of 300 students dwindled to 100 and one school of 100 to 20. The teaching is not being done properly, because of anguish of spirit 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 closed. 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 “pollution of the race,” and if prostitution as a profession is permitted to Jewish women too, it is feared that its soldiers will not be able to conquer their urges and may go astray – heaven forefend – with a non-Aryan harlot.

And it was suggested to proper Jewish women too that they must not fraternize with the soldiers either; and if they do so, they will be accused of sabotage and according to Frank’s most recent order,[[16]](#footnote-16)7 sentenced to death, no less and no more…

1. The original has been lost. Published in *Sefer ha-Zava’ot* (Book of the Horrors), ed. Benjamin Mintz and Yisrael Klausner (Jerusalem: ??, 1945), p. 6. This document has been translated from Hebrew. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This presumably refers to the Committee of Four, appointed by the executive of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem at 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 Sept. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Engineering works including an iron foundry founded in 1884 by Jewish businessman Hugo Mühsam. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The prohibition on 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: Jew. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Witold Mystkowski (1896–1939), accountant; lived in Włocławek from 1927, where he was the town president (i.e. 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 Varsha, Tel Aviv 1966, pp. 82-84. Incomplete German translation in: Buch der Agonie. Das Warschauer Tagebuch des Chaim A. Kaplan, ed. by Abraham I. Katsh, Frankfurt/M. 1967, pp. 82-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 2 Chaim Kaplan (1880-1942), Hebrew teacher; trained in the Mir yeshiva, studied pedagogy in Vilnius, founder and later director of an elementary school with Hebrew as language of instruction in Warsaw in 1902; trip to the USA in 1921; trip to Palestine in 1936; murdered in Treblinka. Kaplan wrote a diary from 1933 that ends on 4 Aug. 1942. He handed his recordings on to Władysław Wójciek who hid them. In 1952, Wójciek gave the part 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 that he had only previously recovered. Today, the entries for Aug. until Dec. 1939 and June/July 1942 are held at USHMM; another part covering the period of May 1941 until May 1942 is at the archive of the Moreshet Mordechai Anielevich Memorial Holocaust Study and Research Center (D.2.470) in Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 3 Toward the Soviet Union. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 4 This means to say: Jews are not taken care of. [↑](#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 maker from the first century A.D. also known for living in poverty. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. 7 This could not be found. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)