



The Polish Inhabitants of Lodz Under Occupation

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War breaks out

In September 1939 when the Germans occupied Lodz there were no concrete plans on how the country should be administered. The different administrative areas were decided later on. The status of the city of Lodz was also undecided.

On the 4th of November 1939 Adolf Hitler decided that Lodz should be annexed to the Third Reich. The consequences of this decision were obvious. The city would undergo major changes. A Germanization of the city was planned, something which later turned out to be a long process.

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The city of Lodz is given the name Litzmannstadt.

Polish cities are Germanized.

The Germans started by reconstructing the history of the city. According to their historiography, Germans were the main builders of nineteenth century Lodz. The second action was a very peculiar process – all the Polish names of streets, parks, quarters etc. in the city disappeared and the streets were renamed of Nazi heroes. The best example was the renaming of Lodz in April 1940 to Litzmannstadt. According to German guidelines this was only supposed to be the beginning. The total rebuilding of the city was planned. Some areas were to be totally pulled down and replaced by parks and residence districts. Fortunately, only part of the plan was realized.

Germanization of Lodz

The Occupation Forces realized that permanent Germanization would require a change of the city's ethnic composition. Before the outbreak of the war in 1939, Lodz was inhabited by three main national groups: 370 000 Poles, 233 000 Jews and 67 000 Germans. The first task for the occupying authorities' was to increase the number of make Germans in the city. The number of Poles and Jews who inhabited the city had to be diminished. One way to achieve this goal was forcing people to move to the General-Government [Central parts of Poland occupied by Nazi Germany.] In this way the population decreased with approximately 27 000 people between 1939 and 1941. During the following years large groups of Poles were sent to forced labor in Germany.

In the first months of the war an extensive action was launched against the Lodz intelligentsia. Persecutions affected clerks, lawyers, scientists, social and political activists. Many of them were shot in the nearby forests.

Discriminating laws

In January 1940 German authorities issued a decree, regulating the occupation and the confiscation of Polish property. Already prior to this a large number of inhabitants were forcibly evicted from their flats. In 1940 more than 100 000 Poles were trying to flee east. Poles deprived of their possessions were not allowed to hold independent posts in industry, nor could they work as civil servants or as self-employed professionals.

German criminal law, envisaging harsh punishments, including death penalty for offences against Germans or for economic offences, became an acute means of terror. New decrees obliged Poles to denounce any criminal offences, if not they could face life imprisonment death penalty.

Civil liberties of Poles were severely limited, first by curtailing the freedom for Poles to get around the city. Signs with inscriptions: „Nur für Deutsche” or „Für Polen kein Zutritt” were put up everywhere. Poles were forbidden to enter cafes or restaurants, except for a few places situated on the outskirts of the city. Going to libraries, cinemas or theatres was prohibited, except when German propaganda films were shown.

Germans separated one park, three churches and a secluded cemetery, for Poles. Religious practices were severely restricted, numerous Polish Catholic priests were arrested and churches were turned into storerooms. Poles were obliged to observe a curfew – in summer from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m., in winter – from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. In Wartheland, the area around Lodz, a special permission was required for travelling by train or bus. Poles were permitted to travel on tramways only in certain carriages.

From 1941, only Poles who worked at least two kilometers from home had the right to use bicycles. Usage of the postal services was limited, which acutely hindered food parcels to be sent to Lodz. A long list was composed by the Germans of everyday items that Poles were forbidden to own, and the list was frequently subjected to change. The list included radios, cameras and binoculars. During the winter, boots, furs and warm clothes were confiscated.



Polish citizens are forced to flee.

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As opposed to the General Government or even the towns of “the old country” [the parts of Poland that belonged to Germany before 1937], no newspapers were issued in Lodz. The “Gazeta Łódzka”, published for a short time after September 1939, contained mainly German regulations and propaganda materials. Polish printing houses were shut down and publishing Polish writers was prohibited. At the end of 1940, a list of three thousand forbidden Polish books was published.

The task of the schools was to teach Polish children order, cleanliness, obedience and the basics of the German language, in order to bring up good workers for Germany. The situation was completely different for the German population. The number of schools and educational institutions increased.

Food rationing

Already immediately after the outbreak of the war, food supply became the one of the main problems for the inhabitants of Lodz. In autumn 1939 there was a shortage of almost all basic grocery products. In the winter, deliveries of food from nearby settlements and villages almost came to an end. This led to a big increase in food prices and at the end of January rationing of food was gradually introduced. From May 1941 all groceries were rationed. When the shops were insufficiently supplied, the Polish inhabitants did not get a full ration. Poles could only do their shopping after ten o'clock and only in certain shops.

Under these circumstances the black market as well as the illegal smuggling of goods from the countryside flourished. Black market prices were much higher than those determined by the authorities – for example the price of bread was fifty times higher than the price set by the authorities. This meant that most inhabitants tried to get food in other ways, for instance by stealing from the fields or shopping directly from the farmers. Severe punishments were meted out for illegally slaughtering an animal. Apart from lack of food there were also shortages in other necessities, like clothes, shoes and cleaning products. The black market was almost totally inaccessible for the Polish population.

The Labor Office allocated special cash allowances to the unemployed. The sums varied depending on nationality. No allowances were allocated to the Jewish population.

The number of unemployed gradually decreased, a contributing factor was the large groups of workers sent to Germany. In May 1942 there was a shortage of labor, and a system of forced labor was introduced by the authorities for people between the ages fourteen to sixty five. The Polish population worked mainly in industry. Salaries were very low. The Germans dominated trade and transport, as well as all services. They held all managerial posts, but gradually this number decreased as more Germans were drafted into the military services.



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In November 1939, the Germans destroyed the monument dedicated to Tadeusz Kościuszko, the legendary Polish general and symbol of Polish patriotism.



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Transport of Polish prisoners of war.

A crucial element of Nazi policy was the strife to strengthen the German population of Lodz. Approximately 35 000 Germans were placed in Lodz. Most of them were civil servants or military personnel from different party organizations, or German businessmen.

Another way to show the number of Germans among the population was the introduction of a German nationals' list. In October 1944 there were 107 624 people on the German nationals' list.

Germans arriving in Lodz often occupied flats of evicted Jews and Poles. The apartments provided excellent living conditions, in the richest districts of city. The administration created ideal conditions for the newly arrived.

The occupied city of Lodz – Litzmannstadt – actually consisted of three different urban areas. The Jewish part was totally separate from the rest of the city. The borders between the two other parts, the Polish and German Lodz, seem to have been more fluid, but well noticeable. German legislation excluded Poles from many spheres of society, reducing them to a cheap labor force. Poles were allowed only a minimum of living space. The already difficult economic situation in Hitler's Germany was getting worse and worse with the defeats on the Eastern front. This development made the German occupational authority change their policy towards Poles and Jews.

The treatment of the Polish population became somewhat more lenient. Special courses were organized in an attempt to prepare them for stepping in as substitutes to civil servants or workers that were drafted to the front. The transport of Jews from the Litzmannstadt ghetto to the death camps stopped between autumn 1942 till summer 1944. During this period the ghetto became like a big slave labor camp.

As a result, the Germanization of Lodz was slightly halted – Poles remained the biggest ethnic group in the city until the end of the occupation and Litzmannstadt was the city with the highest percentage of Polish population in the Third Reich.



A Volksdeutsche ("ethnic German") in Lodz, Litzmannstadt.

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