



# German Politics Influence the City of Lodz

## **ETERNAL ECHOES**

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## Polish Jews are forced out of Germany

We are now in the fall of 1938: Many Jews had come from Eastern Europe to work in Germany. Some of them had lived there for many generations, but only very few had German citizenship. In the autumn of 1938 the Nazi authorities decided that all Polish Jews without citizenship should be sent back to Poland. Approximately 15 000 Jews were affected by this decision. The Polish authorities did not want to let them in to Poland even though they were Polish citizens. Instead they were placed in camps along the Polish-German border, near the town of Zbaszyn.

One of the affected families was the Grynspan family. They had lived in Germany since 1911. Their son Herschel had fled from Hannover to Paris in 1936 when he was only 15 year's old, to escape from the Nazi oppression. When he heard that his parents and sister had been deported from Germany and stayed in terrible conditions in a refugee camp, Herschel got hold of a gun, went to the German legation in Paris and shot the diplomat Ernst vom Rath. Two days later, on the 9th of November vom Rath died of his injuries. Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels used this as an excuse to start an organized campaign against the Jews living in Germany.

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Herschel Grynszpan, at the time of the arrest in November 1938.



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Jewish refugees on the border between Germany and Poland.

The evening on the 9th of November was the start of the so called “November-pogrom” which lasted several days. Thousands of shop windows were shattered and Jewish shops were plundered. The broken glass lay like crystal on the streets – maybe that is why the pogrom is called the Crystal Night. Men and women were shot, beaten or received deadly blows. Some committed suicide. It is estimated that around 400 Jews were killed during the night between the 9th and 10th of November, the total number of dead during the November pogrom is probably some 1 500 people. Close to 300 synagogues were set on fire and approximately 30 000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps, just because they were Jews. The Nazi government decided that the Jews of Germany were to pay one billion Reichsmark in damages, a huge amount of money at that time.



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The start of the November Pogrom on the 9th of November 1938.

Jakob was also affected by the November pogrom. Many of his mother's relatives were sent out of Germany, as well as an acquaintance to the family, Fräulein Rappaport.

## German troops occupy Lodz

On the 1st of September 1939 German troops invaded Poland. The world was in shock, but for the Polish government the attack was no surprise. The German demands after the defeat in the First World War, when Germany lost the port town of Danzig, among other things, and the so called “Polish Corridor” at the Baltic Sea, had become stronger since Adolf Hitler assumed power in 1933. Contrary to the provisions in the peace treaty signed in Versailles, the German army had gradually become better equipped and modernized.



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German soldiers at the Polish border on the 1st of September 1939.

In March 1938 Germany annexed Austria, one year later they invaded the Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia and six months after that German troops went into Poland. The Polish army was prepared for an attack from Germany and had prepared a strategy for stalling the invading troops along the border, while at the same time building a reserve force further east. The Polish army leaders thought that they could hold out against the German forces until Poland's allies England and France would attack Germany. The Polish population in Lodz, both Jews and non-Jews, dug trenches and built fortifications to protect the city. They had not predicted the very rapid advancement of the German troops. Nor did England and France come to Poland's rescue. They submitted written protests to the government in Berlin and declared war on Germany on the 3rd of November, but without attacking.

Shortly before the outbreak of the war, in the end of August, the former enemies, the Soviet Union and Germany, signed an agreement promising not to attack each other. The so called Molotov-Ribbentrop pact let Germany invade Poland



without fearing a Soviet counterattack. In a secret document attached to this non-aggression pact, the parties agreed to partition Poland and divide the rest of Eastern Europe in different spheres of interest. Germany was given all of Western and most of Central Poland. The Soviet Union got the Baltic countries Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as Eastern Poland.

On the 8th of September 1939 German troops marched into the city of Lodz. Some of the 660 000 inhabitants welcomed the troops – they belonged to the big German minority living in Lodz.

## A council of elders responsible for all Jewish affairs is set up

Thousands of Jews choose to flee Lodz right after the outbreak of the war. Some fled to Warsaw where they thought they would be safer. Others went east to the Soviet Union, such as the brother of Jakob and his girlfriend.

In October Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski was elected by the Nazi administration to head the Council of Elders. The council consisted of a group of elder men who were to take care of all Jewish affairs and be responsible for executing all the orders of the Nazi administration.

In November the SS-general Arthur Greiser became the head of the civilian administration in Warthegau, the area annexed to Germany where Lodz was situated. The town was renamed Litzmanstadt in April 1940. Together with the SS major general Friedrich Uebelhoer he started a process that would make the area “German” as soon as possible. Churches and schools were closed, synagogues were blown up and burnt down.

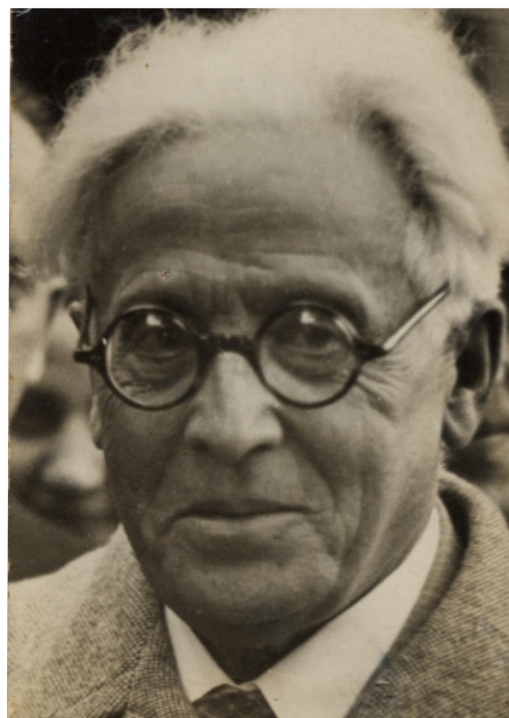
Political leaders, civil servants, teachers and priests were arrested and jailed. Some were eventually deported to the east, others were shot in the forests outside Lodz. The aim was to keep a small part of the Polish population as a work force and to clean the area completely of Jews.

Several decrees were immediately instituted limiting the possibilities of the Jewish population to earn their living. Jews were prohibited to sell and buy leather and textile, traditional business areas for many Jews. All shops and businesses owned by Jews were to be marked with a yellow sign with the word “Jude” (“Jew”).

On the 16th of November 1939 an order was issued, instructing all Jews, regardless of age, to wear a yellow band on the right arm. Shortly after that it was forbidden for Jews to walk on the main street, Piotrkowska, renamed Adolf Hitler-Straße. Jews were not allowed to visit the parks nor could they use trams or other means of transportation. They did not have full access to their bank accounts, were not allowed to leave their apartments between five in the afternoon and eight in the morning and when a Jew met a German on the street he had to step down into the gutter.



German troops marching into Lodz on the 8th of September 1939.



Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski.

Jewish shops and apartments were searched under the pretext that they were being searched for weapons, but in reality they were plundered for goods and valuables. Sometimes civilian Germans from the city of Lodz participated in these raids.

On the 10th of December 1939 Friedrich Uebelhoer wrote a secret memo where he outlined his plans for a ghetto in Lodz. First the Jews had been marked with a yellow star so that they could be identified, now it was time to gather them in a special area. Uebelhoer concluded the memo with the following words: “The creation of a ghetto is of course only a temporary measure. I reserve the right to decide when and how the ghetto, and thus the city of Lodz, shall be cleared of Jews. The ultimate goal (Endziel) must in all circumstances be the eradication of this plague boil.”

In February 1940 an order was issued telling all Jews to move to a special area in the north part of the town. On an area of four square kilometers all the 165 000 Jews that were still in Lodz were concentrated, while they waited for a “final solution to the Jewish question” as it was called. From the 1st of May 1940 the ghetto was completely sealed off from the outside world.



A sign at the entrance to the ghetto “Settlement Area for Jews. Entrance forbidden”.

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