

# Fear and Terror: The Expulsion of Polish Jews from Saxony/Germany in October 1938

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## ABSTRACT

This article is a regional study that focuses on the expulsion of Jews with Polish citizenship from Saxony, mostly long-term legal residents of Germany, in the context of the so-called 'Polenaktion' (27–29 October 1938). The article gives a brief overview of the expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany and highlights the special circumstances in Saxony, specifically in Leipzig. The article examines the role of the local police forces in carrying out the arrests and transports to the German–Polish border. It further draws attention to the tumultuous situation near Beuthen (Bytom) where the distressed expellees were chased across the border into Polish territory. The article also traces the steps of individuals and families after their disorienting arrival in Poland. Finally it addresses the question of the 'returnees' – a limited number of expellees who were allowed to return to their hometowns in Germany for a short period in order to take care of their businesses, financial affairs and apartments. Highlighting Saxony as one example, this article shows that the brutal mass expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany was not only an unprecedented act of mass violence and viciousness against Jews in Germany, but also became a precursor, a 'test case,' for subsequent mass deportations. The Security Service of the Reichsführer-SS and the Main Office of the Security Police most likely did not have fully developed plans for mass deportations ready in October 1938. However, the Nazi authorities could draw on their experiences during the Polenaktion with regard to logistics, coordination of administrative steps and offices, panic control, intimidation, and brutality. These measures set the stage for the arrests and mass transports during the November Pogrom not even two weeks after the Polenaktion and for the mass deportations during World War II.

## KEYWORDS

Expulsion; Polish Jews from Germany (Polenaktion); November Pogrom; (Kristallnacht);  
Beuthen; (Bytom); Saxony

This paper is a regional study focusing on the expulsion of Jews with Polish citizenship from Saxony, mostly long-term legal residents of Germany, in the context of the so called Polenaktion (27–29 October 1938). The expulsion of about 20,000 Polish Jews from Germany served as a ‘paradigm’ for later deportations with respect to coordination among the police forces, railway administration, the SS and SD, municipal agencies, and financial authorities on the national and regional levels. In general, the police headquarters in each state requested special trains (Sonderzüge) from the regional offices of the railway administration (Deutsche Reichsbahn). In some instances, special railcars carrying Polish Jews who had been expelled were attached to regular trains.<sup>1</sup>

The Polish border town of Zbąszyń (Bentschen in German) has become a symbol for the Polenaktion. After the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) received news of the mass deportation of Polish Jews, it sent the director of its Warsaw office to Zbąszyń.<sup>2</sup> The JDC organized a comprehensive aid program, which not only addressed the refugees’ immediate needs of food, shelter, and medical attention, but eventually also included its own registration and emigration offices, nurseries, a clothing depot, a public bath and laundry facility as well as transportation and postal departments.<sup>3</sup> In the months following the expulsion of Polish Jews,

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Gottwald and Diana Schulle, *Die Judendeportationen aus dem Deutschen Reich von 1941–1945: Eine kommentierte Chronologie* (Wiesbaden: Marix, 2005), p. 26f.

<sup>2</sup> Morris C. Troper, Summary report of JDC efforts to aid Polish Jews expelled from Germany, March 31, 1939, JDC Archives, NY\_AR3344, Document 509705.

<sup>3</sup> Morris C. Troper to Joseph C. Heyman, December 1, 1938, with enclosed report by Isaac Giterman, JDC Archives, NY\_AR3344, Document 509804; Nathan Katz to JDC New York, with enclosed copy of report by Morris C. Troper, November 13 and 14, 1938, JDC Archives, AR3344, Document 509810.

the small town of Zbąszyń became the destination for refugees who did not have relatives in Poland who could take them in. The JDC and other aid organizations provided the most basic needs. A report on the refugee camp set up in Zbąszyń summarized the difficult conditions:

As the winter months set in, the hardships became almost unendurable. Negotiations between the German and Polish governments proceeded slowly, in fact came to a standstill several times. A number of deportees, unable to endure the physical and mental anguish died; six of them, including a young girl of 18, became insane. The individual tragedies were poignant indeed. In many cases parents were separated from children, husbands from wives.<sup>4</sup>

The transports took advantage of existing railroad lines: trains from west and southwest Germany by and large took the expellees to Zbąszyń, whereas the transports from east and southeast Germany ended up in Beuthen (Bytom) in Upper Silesia. Building on the existing research on the situation of Polish–Jewish deportees in Zbąszyń, the emphasis here is on the expulsion of between 5000 and 6000 Polish Jews to Beuthen. Compared to publications on the deportations to Zbąszyń and the subsequent opening of a refugee camp across the Polish border,<sup>5</sup> little research has been done on what happened to the refugees chased across Saxony and along the border near Beuthen.<sup>6</sup> This article seeks to redress this deficit in the existing scholarship.

The article begins by giving a brief overview of the expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany and highlights the special circumstances in Saxony, specifically in Leipzig. It examines

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<sup>4</sup> Troper, Summary report of JDC efforts.

<sup>5</sup> Jerzy Tomaszewski, "Letters from Zbąszyń," *Yad Vashem Studies* 19 (1988), pp. 289–315; Emanuel Ringelblum, "Letter to Raphael Mahler, December 6, 1938," in Yitzhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman, and Abraham Margaliot (eds.), *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, trans. Lea Ben Dor (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1981), p. 123f; Gertrud Pickhan, *Niemandsland: Die Briefe der Greta Schiffmann und das Schicksal einer jüdischen Familie, ausgewiesen aus Dortmund im Oktober 1938* (Essen: Klartext, 2000); Trude Maurer, "The Background for Kristallnacht: The Expulsion of Polish Jews," in Walter Pehle (ed.), *November 1938: From Kristallnacht to Genocide*, trans. William Templer (New York: Berg, 1991), pp. 44–72.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to Zbąszyń and Beuthen, Polish Jews were also forced across the border in Chojnice (Konitz) and Dworsky-Młyn.

the role of the local police forces in carrying out the arrests and transports to the German–Polish border and draws attention to the tumultuous situation near Beuthen, where the distressed expellees were chased across the border into Polish territory.

The article also traces the subsequent steps of some individuals and families after they arrived in Poland, disoriented and bewildered with no sense of where to go. Finally, it addresses the question of the ‘returnees’ – a limited number of the expellees who were temporarily allowed to return to their hometowns in Germany for a short period of time in order to take care of their businesses, financial affairs, and apartments. In addition to archival sources, the victims’ personal recollections and letters are contextualized against the backdrop of the diplomatic negotiations between Germany and Poland.

#### The events leading up to the Polenaktion

Throughout the 1930s, the anti-Jewish laws and actions in Nazi Germany aimed at intimidating, marginalizing and excluding Jews from German society and at limiting their civil rights with the primary goal of forcing them to leave Germany and economically benefitting from their emigration. The year 1938 saw an intensification of anti-Jewish measures. While some laws specifically discriminated against German Jews,<sup>7</sup> others targeted all Jews living in Germany, with the primary goal of excluding them from the German economy, depriving them of their means of income, and ultimately forcing them to leave Germany.<sup>8</sup> A foreign ministry circular leaves no doubt as to the ‘ultimate aim of Germany’s Jewish policy [which] is the

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Law regarding changes of first names and family names (RGBl part 1, p. 1044), August 17, 1938; Decree on introduction of identity cards for Jews, to become effective January 1, 1939 (RGBl Part 1, p. 922), July 23, 1938.

<sup>8</sup> See Trude Maurer, “Ausländische Juden in Deutschland 1933–1939,” in Arnold Paucker (ed.), *Die Juden im Nationalsozialistischen Deutschland* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1986), pp. 189–210.

emigration of all Jews living in German territory .... The Jew has been eliminated from politics and culture, but until 1938 his powerful economic position ... remained unbroken.’<sup>9</sup>

Anti-Jewish measures increased the pressure on all Jews to leave Germany, which in 1938 included about 20,000 Polish Jews.<sup>10</sup> However, the JDC and the Reich Association of Jews in Germany agreed that Polish (and other Eastern European) Jews should return to their respective homelands rather than consider immigration to the US or West Europe.<sup>11</sup> Under ever worsening economic conditions and despite the futile attempts of Polish consuls to intervene on behalf of Polish Jewish merchants, the situation of Polish Jews in Germany grew dramatically worse in the fall of 1938.<sup>12</sup>

Although the economic situation in Poland stabilized in the mid-1930s, the political situation had become more precarious for Jews following the death of Marshal Josef Piłsudski, chief of state, in May 1935.<sup>13</sup> He had opposed the antisemitism of the rightwing National Democrats, and many Jews in Poland had considered him an advocate for their rights. After Piłsudski’s death, waves of anti-Jewish measures,<sup>14</sup> such as ‘ghetto benches’ at universities<sup>15</sup> and the ban of kosher slaughtering,<sup>16</sup> led the question of Jewish emigration to arise again. In the

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<sup>9</sup> “German Foreign Ministry Memorandum on Policy Regarding Jews in 1938,” Berlin, January 25, 1939, no. 58, in Documents on the Holocaust, pp. 126–131.

<sup>10</sup> An additional 30,000 Polish Jews lived in annexed Austria.

<sup>11</sup> Yfaat Weiss, *Deutsche und polnische Juden vor dem Holocaust: Jüdische Identität zwischen Staatsbürgerschaft und Ethnizität 1933–1940*, Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte (München: Oldenbourg, 2000), p. 144.

<sup>12</sup> Jerzy Tomaszewski, *Auftakt zur Vernichtung: Die Vertreibung polnischer Juden aus Deutschland im Jahre 1938*, trans. Victoria Polmann (Osnabrück: Fibre, 2002), p. 102.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Marcus, *Social and Political History of the Jews in Poland 1919–1939* (Berlin: Mouton, 1983), p. 355.

<sup>14</sup> Emanuel Melzer, *No Way Out: The Politics of Polish Jewry 1935–1939* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1997), pp. 39–70.

<sup>15</sup> Gentile Polish students attempted to intimidate and eliminate Jewish students from the universities. See Ezekiel Lifschutz, “Selected Documents Pertaining to Jewish Life in Poland, 1919–1939,” in Joshua Fishman (ed.), *Studies on Polish Jewry 1919–1939: The Interplay of Social, Economic and Political Factors in the Struggle of a Minority for its Existence* (New York: YIVO Institute, 1974): p. 280; see also Emanuel Melzer, *No Way Out: The Politics of Polish Jewry 1935–1939* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1997), p. 81ff.

<sup>16</sup> Marcus, *Jews in Poland 1919–1939*, p. 357f.

1930s, the British Mandate of Palestine had become the prime immigration destination for Polish Jews. In fact, the percentage of immigrants from Poland rose from 36% (1932–1936) to 44% (1937–1939) of the total Jewish immigration to Palestine.<sup>17</sup> The Polish government also sought additional destinations for the Jewish population. In late 1936, the Polish government appointed a committee under the leadership of Mieczysław Lepecki to explore Madagascar as a suitable place for the relocation of Polish Jews. After 13 weeks, the committee reported that realistically only about 500 families could be settled there.<sup>18</sup>

Two years later, in its attempt to prevent impoverished Polish nationals from returning to Poland, the Polish government ratified a law regarding the revocation of Polish citizenship on 25 March 1938.<sup>19</sup> According to Yehuda Bauer, the original aim of this ruling was to prevent Polish Jews in Vienna from entering Poland after the German annexation of Austria on 13 March 1938.<sup>20</sup> However, it soon became obvious that all 50,000 Polish Jews in Germany and Austria would be affected. This law created considerable diplomatic friction between the German foreign ministry and the Polish consulates in Germany, especially in the fall of 1938 when the Polish government issued an additional decree.<sup>21</sup> Although the Polish Ministry of the Interior had passed the new citizenship law in March 1938, the Polish foreign ministry was unprepared to

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 388; in comparison, German Jewish immigration from 1933 to 1941 amounted to 24 percent of all Jewish immigration to Palestine.

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press and Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004), p. 82.

<sup>19</sup> Tomaszewski, *Auftakt zur Vernichtung*, p. 90f. The law stated three reasons for revoking the citizenship of Poles living abroad: 1) if an individual worked against Polish interests, 2) if an individual spent five consecutive years abroad and had lost ties to Poland, and 3) if an individual did not return from abroad by the deadline set by a Polish consulate.

<sup>20</sup> Yehuda Bauer, *My Brother's Keeper: A History of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1929–1939* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1974), p. 243.

<sup>21</sup> The Polish Ministry of the Interior issued a decree on October 6, 1938 requesting that all Polish citizens living abroad have their passports checked and revalidated at Polish consulates by the end of the month. Failure to do so would result in being barred from returning to Poland.

enforce it at that time.<sup>22</sup> It is also entirely possible that the Polish government was waiting for the outcome of the international refugee conference in Evian from 6 to 14 July 1938, as Dan Diner suggests.<sup>23</sup>

The situation of Jews in Germany had become even more precarious and economically difficult in 1938, and the Sudetenland crisis in the fall of that year heightened tensions in and between European countries, and within Jewish communities in particular. The Munich Agreement of 29–30 September 1938 enabled Germany's annexation of the Sudetenland in exchange for Hitler's promise of peace. A letter from a German Jewish woman to her daughter who had recently immigrated to the US captures the widespread opinion, at least among the older generation at the time: 'Thank God the difficult and worrisome days have finally passed. The whole world breathes a sigh of relief since war could be avoided. It would have been too terrible.'<sup>24</sup>

For a variety of reasons, German–Polish relations changed noticeably after the signing of the Munich Agreement. Germany no longer depended on Poland's support in the annexation of the Sudetenland. Trying to solve Czech–Polish territorial disputes<sup>25</sup> and other foreign policy issues, the Polish government underestimated the viciousness and brutality of the Nazi regime. The Ministry of the Interior in Poland issued a decree in mid-October based on the March 1938 law, which required Polish citizens living abroad to obtain a special stamp in their passport within two weeks. This measure created a crisis in German–Polish relations and negotiations: the

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<sup>22</sup> Tomaszewski, *Auftakt zur Vernichtung*, p. 90.

<sup>23</sup> Dan Diner, "Die Katastrophe vor der Katastrophe: Auswanderung ohne Einwanderung," in Dan Diner and Dirk Blasius (eds.), *Zerbrochene Geschichte. Leben und Selbstverständnis der Juden in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1991), p. 154f.

<sup>24</sup> Rebecca Boehling and Uta Larkey, *Life and Loss in the Shadow of the Holocaust: A Jewish Family's Untold Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 65.

<sup>25</sup> Regarding Poland's annexation of the Teschen (Zaolzie) area on October 1, 1938.



German government resented being put on the spot with such short notice, and the Polish government realized too late that Germany would not agree to a compromise and would continue to disregard international treaties and human rights. On 26 October 1938, the German ambassador to Poland, Hans Adolf von Moltke, warned the Polish government that Germany would expel Polish citizens if the Polish government did not annul its October decree.<sup>26</sup> On the same day, the chief of the Security Service of the Reichsführer-SS, Reinhard Heydrich, ordered the revocation of residence permits for Polish Jews in Germany.<sup>27</sup>

The mandatory residency registration with the local police in Germany made it fairly easy for the authorities to produce lists of names and addresses of Polish Jews in a relatively short time. Although the general course of action was similar in most locations – arresting Polish Jews and handing them the expulsion order – there were considerable local and regional differences in the ways in which the expulsion was executed, which speaks to the lack of centralized organization, personnel, and resources. In some places, such as Wiesbaden, Berlin, and Leipzig, entire families were deported, while in others, such as Hamburg and Cologne, the order applied only to men over the age of 15. One of the reasons for this difference was the interpretation of the express letter sent by Heydrich's deputy Werner Best as an addendum to Heydrich's letter. Although Heydrich's order was less specific, in his letter, Best referred to 'the largest possible number of Polish Jews, in particular male adults' to be forced in group transits across the border to Poland before midnight of 29 October 1938.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Tomaszewski, *Auftakt zur Vernichtung*, p. 108.

<sup>27</sup> Schnellbrief (i.V. Heydrich), October 26, 1938, in *Kommission zur Erforschung der Geschichte der Frankfurter Juden* (ed.), *Dokumente zur Geschichte der Frankfurter Juden 1933–1945* (Frankfurt am Main, 1963), p. 422f.

<sup>28</sup> Dr Werner Best, Express Letter to Prussian Government, October 26, 1938, S.V.7. no. 2255/38-509-27, in Adolf Diamant (ed.), *Gestapo Leipzig: Zur Geschichte einer verbrecherischen Organisation 1933–1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Selbstverlag, 1990), p. 87.

The arrests and group transports began in some parts of Germany on 27 October 1938, while the majority of Polish Jews were arrested between the morning of 28 October and the afternoon of 29 October 1938. The arrests came as a total shock. In general, the deportees were allowed to take 10 Reichsmark and hand luggage with them. The police sealed off their apartments and businesses within hours. Forced to vacate their apartments immediately (or within 24 hours in some locations), many people were unable to pack necessary items. In several cases, parents were separated from their children, who were picked up from school after the parents had already been arrested. In other cases, families were torn apart due to their different citizenship, residency permits, or emigration papers (or lack thereof), or simply because they happened to be traveling at the time of the roundups. It is not entirely clear why some police chiefs ordered the arrests immediately after having received Heydrich's express letter while others waited until the next day.

#### Arrests of Polish Jews in Saxony: the special role of the Polish consul in Leipzig

The documents available prove the decentralized handling of the expulsion orders and disprove Tomaszewski's assumption that the Aktion started in western Germany because of the longer distance to the German-Polish border.<sup>29</sup> In fact, in parts of Saxony, which is closest to the German-Polish border, mass arrests and deportations began on Thursday, 27 October. The police chief of Dresden reported to the Ministry of the Interior of Saxony that the arrests had been made late in the evening on 27 October: 'The detainees were gathered in suitable locations and transported the next morning by truck to the Dresden Neustadt train station.'<sup>30</sup> Almost 60

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<sup>29</sup> Tomaszewski, *Auftakt zur Vernichtung*, p. 114.

<sup>30</sup> Adolf Diamant, *Chronik der Juden in Dresden: Von den ersten Juden bis zur Blüte der Gemeinde und deren Ausrottung* (Darmstadt: Agora, 1973), p. 363.

years later, Rolf Neuding, who was 20 years old at the time, remembered that night of terror: ‘At 8 pm we sat down for dinner and heard a knock at the door. There were two policemen in uniform [Schupos]<sup>31</sup> and [they] wanted to see our passports. We had Polish passports, which they took away from us. They demanded that we come with them. We were totally shocked. We were not allowed to take anything with us. The policemen took us to a big dance hall full of Jews. And then panic set in ... . Nobody had any idea what was going on.’<sup>32</sup>

Polish Jews in Halle were also rounded up on the evening of 27 October.<sup>33</sup> Word traveled fast to nearby Leipzig. In Leipzig, known for its Yiddishkeit,<sup>34</sup> the shock of the impending expulsion of Polish Jews hit particularly hard. With about 9000 Jews, Leipzig had one of the largest Jewish communities in Germany in 1938.<sup>35</sup> Due to the thriving fur business and the city’s international trade fair, which dated back to the Middle Ages, Leipzig had a fairly large Polish Jewish population, too – they made up about one-third of Leipzig’s Jewish population, 3364 adults and children.<sup>36</sup> After Berlin, Leipzig was home to the second-largest Eastern European Jewish population in Germany.<sup>37</sup>

When warnings about the impending arrests reached Leipzig on the evening of 27 October, some people managed to hide and stay with friends. Others sought shelter at the Polish

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<sup>31</sup> Schupo is short for Schutzpolizei, or uniformed municipal police.

<sup>32</sup> Rolf Neuding, Shoah Foundation, VHA, Code 29024. (Translations of German texts throughout this article were provided by the author.) Although Neuding had moved to Northern Germany, his Dresden dialect is still noticeable after so many years. Rolf Neuding errs in the date of the family’s arrest, which was not October 28 (the date widely known for the Polenaktion); in Dresden, the arrests began the night before.

<sup>33</sup> Adolf Diamant, *Gestapo Leipzig: Zur Geschichte einer verbrecherischen Organisation in den Jahren 1933–1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Selbstverlag, 1990), p. 88.

<sup>34</sup> Rabbi Shlomo Wahrman, *Lest We Forget: Growing up in Nazi Leipzig 1933–1939* (New York: Mesorah Publications, 1991), p. 84.

<sup>35</sup> Adolf Diamant, *Chronik der Juden in Leipzig* (Chemnitz and Leipzig: Verlag Heimatland Sachsen, 1993), p. 383.

<sup>36</sup> Diamant, *Juden in Dresden*, p. 376.

<sup>37</sup> Steffen Held, “Der Novemberpogrom und die Massenverhaftung Leipziger Juden 1938/39,” in Ephraim Carlebach-Stiftung (ed.), *Judaica Lipsiensia: Zur Geschichte der Juden in Leipzig* (Leipzig: Edition, 1994), p. 195. Feliks Chiczewski (1889–1972) was the Polish consul in Leipzig from 1936 to 1939.

consulate in the city, which had been opened to Polish Jews by Consul General Feliks Chiczewski in the early morning hours of 28 October.<sup>38</sup> As is customary in international diplomacy, Chiczewski considered the consulate, which housed both his office and residence, and the surrounding garden Polish sovereign territory. The Leipzig police, however, disputed that claim, since the Polish government had not actually purchased the villa, but was renting it from the Jewish Ury family.<sup>39</sup> The police chief dutifully noted the Polish consul's 'erroneous assumption' that the consulate was 'extraterritorial grounds,' but given the fragile state of German-Polish relations, the Leipzig police refrained from entering the premises. However, before allowing some people to enter the Polish consulate, the police checked their identification papers.<sup>40</sup> They arrested others in the street outside the consulate and put them in police cars.<sup>41</sup> Foreign observers such as the American consul in Leipzig, David Buffum, were in contact with the Polish consul and followed the developments with great concern.<sup>42</sup> The cab drivers in Leipzig quickly became aware of this business opportunity, but not all of them were willing to drive Jews to the Polish consulate.<sup>43</sup> Those who did made sure not to stop directly in front of the consulate.<sup>44</sup>

The Polish consul and his staff generously sheltered 1296 Polish Jews in the consulate's building and garden, which was of course difficult given the limited sanitary and medical

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<sup>38</sup>Feliks Chiczewski (1889–1972) was the Polish consul in Leipzig from 1936 to 1939.

<sup>39</sup> Brothers Moritz and Julius Ury founded the first department store in Leipzig in 1896.

<sup>40</sup> Wahrman, *Lest We Forget*, p. 87.

<sup>41</sup> Testimony of Hillel Shechter, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), 03.9059.

<sup>42</sup> David Buffum to Cordell Hull, Report No. 608, October 30, 1938, in Sybil Milton, "The Expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany: October 1938 to July 1939 – A Documentation," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, vol. 29 (1984): pp. 181ff.

<sup>43</sup> Miriam Ron, "This Is Not the Story of Someone Else," Interview by Kathryn Berman and Jackie Metzger, Yad Vashem, n.d., accessed November 21, 2016, <http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/interviews/ron.asp>; Miriam Ron reported that a taxi driver refused to take her and her family out of fear that his car windows would be broken if "they" saw Jews inside the cab.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*; see also Barbara Kowalzik, *Wir waren eure Nachbarn: Die Juden im Leipziger Waldstraßenviertel* (Leipzig: Pro Leipzig, 1996), p. 172.

provisions.<sup>45</sup> This emergency situation also led to an unprecedented ‘cooperation between the Polish Jewish community and the German Jewish community.’<sup>46</sup> The Ury department store provided blankets and tents, and the Schmeidler bakery delivered bread to the consulate.<sup>47</sup> Ella Kroch, the wife of bank owner Hans Kroch, organized the relief efforts and supply of food to and at the Polish consulate. One of the boys she instructed to take food, blankets, deck chairs, and other things to the consulate was Rolf Kralovitz, who was 13 years old at the time. As Hungarian Jews, the Kralovitz family was not directly affected by the Polenaktion. In an interview later on, Rolf recalled, ‘I was busy from dusk to dawn at the consulate . . . . Mrs. Kroch provided the money for the entire rescue mission. We bought huge sacks with bread, butter, and rolls, and she paid for it.’<sup>48</sup> Many other volunteers also brought food, tea, and milk to the consulate. Rabbi Shlomo Wahrman, who was 11 years old at the time, remembered being shocked at seeing his mother cooking and baking on Shabbat. But the rabbis had decided ‘that a situation of genuine pikuach nefesh existed at the consulate.’ According to Jewish law, the need to save lives can override religious principles, such as the observance of Shabbat. Therefore, Wahrman and his mother decided to deliver freshly baked cakes and challah.<sup>49</sup> Henry Musat remembers that he and other German Jewish youths brought mattresses and food to the Polish consulate, ‘a safe

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<sup>45</sup> Wahrman, *Lest We Forget*, p. 88; Wahrman’s parents, originally from Galicia, had lost their Polish citizenship and were, as stateless residents, not in danger of getting deported in the Polenaktion.

<sup>46</sup> Testimony of Hillel Shechter, YVA, 03.9059; Abraham Goldberg, *Erinnerungen aus Deutschland 1923–1938*, Leo Baeck Institute Archives (LBI), ME 1157. Abraham Goldberg from Altenburg also remarked on the tension between German Jews and Ostjuden, which he himself experienced: “The German Jews accused the Polish Jews that their orthodoxy and behavior (e.g. speaking with their hands) actually were the reasons for the ‘risches’ (antisemitism) of the German population.” When he collected donations for a Zionist organization, a German Jewish family did not invite him into their home and treated him – “little Polish Goldberg” – like a beggar.

<sup>47</sup> Kowalzik, *Wir waren eure Nachbarn*, p. 172.

<sup>48</sup> Rolf Kralovitz, interview by Katarzyna Weintraub, n.d., Polish Institute Leipzig.

<sup>49</sup> Wahrman, *Lest We Forget*, p. 85.

haven at the time.’<sup>50</sup> In the days following the expulsion of Polish Jews from Leipzig, the Association of Polish Merchants and Traders published, in what was to become the last newsletter of the Leipzig Jewish community, an official note of gratitude to Jewish individuals and organizations for their help and support. The association also related consul Chiczewski’s ‘personal thanks [to the Jewish community] for the aid provided’ during the difficult days.<sup>51</sup>

The Polish consul in Leipzig demonstrated extraordinary civil courage, not only by transforming the Polish consulate into a shelter for almost 1300 Polish Jews, but also by negotiating the safe return to their homes.<sup>52</sup> Although the German foreign ministry had expressed its disagreement with Chiczewski’s actions to the Polish embassy, the consul nevertheless formally requested that the German authorities protect the apartments, properties, and businesses of the Jews who had been deported to Poland.<sup>53</sup>

As difficult as the overcrowded situation in the Polish consulate was, the Polish Jews who did not manage to find protection there endured an even more dreadful fate. According to the Ministry of the Interior of Saxony, it was primarily Polish Jews from ‘affluent circles’ who were warned ahead of time about the imminent arrests. The well-to-do Stein family received a phone call from friends urging them to seek protection at the Polish consulate.<sup>54</sup> The members of the Kohs family, on the other hand, who were apparently not as well connected, were caught totally by surprise. Josef Kohs, a 38-year-old father of two sons and financial consultant, related the events of that fateful day, Friday, 28 October, in great detail, in his postwar recollection:

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Henry Musat (né Heinz Muscatblatt), Shoah Foundation, VHA, Code 1889: “In turn, during Kristallnacht we German Jews went to our Polish friends because the word was that they arrested only German Jews. My mother sent me across the street for safekeeping. My father and uncle were taken to Buchenwald.”

<sup>51</sup> “An alle jüdischen Glaubensgenossen,” *Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt Leipzig*, vol. 44, November 4, 1938, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Diamant, *Chronik der Juden in Leipzig*, p. 556.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from Felix Chiczewski to Minister of the Interior of Saxony, October 30, 1938, in *Chronik der Juden in Leipzig*, p. 559. <sup>54</sup>Diamant, *Chronik der Juden in Leipzig*, p. 556.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

At 6 o'clock in the morning I heard a loud knock on the door. Two policemen stood there and shined a flashlight into my face. They asked for my name and explained that we were to get ready. We were expelled. Our train was already waiting. I was not aware that I had done anything wrong and did not understand what was happening. It must be a misunderstanding. But the policemen showed me the order of expulsion and asked for my citizenship. I proudly presented my passport with the residence permit for another six months, which I had obtained the day before. But they were not impressed and reiterated that on this very day all Polish Jews were expelled. I was totally stunned. My wife started weeping and my two sons stood there with fear in their eyes, not knowing what to make of it.<sup>55</sup>

Many eyewitnesses recall the utter shock of being roused from their beds by policemen knocking on the door. Some were told that they were being sent 'back' to Poland; others remember that the police did not give any reason or referred to a 'formality' that would need to be clarified. Survivor Michael Barchash recounts in his Shoah Foundation interview the events of the Polenaktion, which he had witnessed as a 12-year-old:

[Long sigh] Two Gestapo men in plainclothes asked [us] to pack things in 30 minutes. Absolute confusion, panic, and fear in our household, but we managed to pack a few things, but could not take our little canary. We said to our Gentile nanny: 'We will see you soon.' One of the 'kind' Gestapo men replied: 'You will most certainly not.' We were taken by truck to the train station. The place was packed with people on suitcases. ... The state of confusion, anxiety, fear ... it is quite difficult to put into words.<sup>56</sup>

A fellow survivor from Leipzig, Marcel Rowen, who was about the same age as Michael Barchash and Josef Kohs' older son, narrates his memories of the Polenaktion with a sense of sarcasm:

[Ironic tone] – Knock, knock who's there?

– Police.

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<sup>55</sup> Josef Kohs, "Der 28. Oktober 1938," Tatsachenbericht über die erste Ausweisung der polnischen Juden aus Deutschland am 28. Oktober 1938, verfasst von Josef Kohs, Leiter der Historischen Kommission in Tirschenreuth, February 17, 1948, YVA, 1903/1753.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Michael Barchash, Shoah Foundation, VHA, Code 1133.

- What do you want?
- It's just a small formality to have your papers checked. You will be back home soon.

Lo and behold, we never saw our home again. Generations had accumulated wealth through hard work. Everything was taken from us. We had nothing.

We walked to the police station, but never got there. There was a bus waiting for us with Vergnügungsfahrten written on it. The 'pleasure trip' took us to the main railway station where the SS waited for us with fixed bayonets and machine guns. We were taken on a passenger train.<sup>57</sup>

A few hours after the Polish Jews in Leipzig, among them the Kohs family, were forced out of their homes, they were gathered in the gymnasium of the Jewish high school, Höhere Israelitische Schule, also known as Ephraim-Carlebach-Schule, on 7 Gustav Adolf Street. At about 9 am, the Polish consul and a representative of the Polish committee entered the gymnasium and assured the desperate detainees that the German authorities had made a 'mistake.' Chiczewski's reaction echoes the consternation amongst Polish diplomats in Germany who were convinced that the 'misunderstanding' would be rectified.<sup>58</sup> But at around 11 am, all the Jews gathered in the gymnasium had to board buses and were taken to the main train station in Leipzig. Consul Chiczewski assured the desperate detainees that the train would not depart. The mood changed from disbelief to hopelessness when representatives of the Jewish community, who had hurried to the train station to lend their support to the expellees, began to hand out money for the trip.<sup>59</sup> According to Martin Althertum, director of the Jewish welfare office, Rabbis David Ochs and Gustav Cohn wrote a check for over 10,000 Reichsmark to the

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Marcel Rowen (né Rauchwerk), Shoah Foundation, VHA, Code 3426.

<sup>58</sup> Aide-Memoire of Polish Foreign Ministry, October 27, 1938, in ADAP, D 5, Doc. 88, 97. See also Tomaszewski, *Auftakt zur Vernichtung*, p. 109.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.



Kroch bank.<sup>60</sup> The bank employees handed out two five-Reichsmark coins per person since expellees were not allowed to take more than 10 Reichsmark with them.<sup>61</sup> Despite the Polish consul's assurances, the train departed. Of course, Josef Kohs had no way of knowing that the consul had acted most honorably by sheltering almost 1300 Polish Jews in the consulate that day. Despite Chiczewski's negotiating skills, there was nothing he could do to prevent the expulsions.

#### Chased across the German–Polish border

Josef Kohs and his family were among the 410 Jews on the third 'special train' leaving the Leipzig train station at 12:32 pm.<sup>62</sup> The train stopped at the Dresden station, where another Polish consul greeted the expellees, again reassuring them that the train would return before the border. At this point, these well-meaning promises were beginning to sound like empty gestures at best and biting mockery of the disoriented and hopeless Jews at worst. After a day of uncertainty, disbelief, and fear, the horrible train ride experienced by the Kohs family and thousands of other expelled Polish Jews from Saxony ended two kilometers from the German–Polish border, at the train station in Beuthen. The SS humiliated the deportees and chased them through the dark and rainy night to Polish territory. After many hours of walking, the expellees reached the small town of Radzionków. Although Josef Kohs did not mention this in his recollections 10 years later, the day of their arrival in Poland was actually his older son's Heinz Dieter's 11th birthday. Little did they know that it would take seven more years before Heinz

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<sup>60</sup> While the German Jewish director of the bank, Hans Kroch, made sure that the Polish Jewish expellees received the minimal funds allowed on their deportation, his wife, Ella Kroch, organized the provisions at the Polish consulate. Hans Kroch was arrested during the November Pogrom and later escaped from Nazi Germany; Ella Kroch was murdered in the Ravensbrück concentration camp.

<sup>61</sup> Held, "Der Novemberpogrom," p. 196.

<sup>62</sup> Diamant, *Chronik der Juden in Dresden*, p. 373.

Dieter would celebrate his birthday in freedom. Isaac Giterman from the JDC office in Warsaw reported on the horrible situation in Radzionków, during what he called the ‘sinister days’:

Between 2 and 4 in the morning 2,500 persons have been driven across the frontier. They have been beaten with terribly cruelty and shot at on a way of 5–6 km in order to compel them to run ... I found several ill persons lying on the ground. Some of them had broken hands and legs when running into pits and holes. Many ill were still in the fields. The German police did not allow the luggage to be taken out of the railway cars.<sup>63</sup>

To escape these horrible conditions and lacking any other options, the Kohs family decided to seek out shelter with their relatives in Krakow.

The expulsion procedure in Chemnitz was similar to the one in Leipzig, but had begun in the early evening of 27 October. The Polish Jews there were arrested in their homes and businesses or, like 30-year-old Julius Rosenzweig, at a friend’s house. The policemen took Rosenzweig to Zweininger’s dance hall, ‘from which Jews had been banned and which now had become our prison.’<sup>64</sup> Both Rosenzweig and another eyewitness, 26-year-old Gerta Pfeffer, remembered their late-night arrival at the train station in Beuthen, where they saw other trains carrying expelled Polish Jews from Germany, presumably Josef Kohs and his family among them.

Unlike Zbąszyń, the main destination of the majority of expelled Polish Jews, the border town of Beuthen did not even have a refugee camp. The 5000–6000 Polish Jews who arrived in Beuthen were literally and violently chased across the border during the night, pushed through a stream, forced along railway tracks, and threatened by German SS officers on one side and

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<sup>63</sup> Isaac Giterman, Report “Jews exiled from Germany to Poland,” JDC Warsaw, enclosed in letter from Morris C. Troper to Joseph C. Heyman, December 1, 1938, JDC Archives, NY\_AR3344, Document 509804. 66Kohs, “Der 28. Oktober 1938.”

<sup>64</sup> Julius Rosenzweig to his sister Cilli, August 19, 1939, Warsaw, Cecylja Rosenzweig Collection 1939, Leo Baeck Institute Archives (LBI) AR 7128.

Polish border guards with dogs and guns on the other. They endured insults and rifle butts from both sides.

A comparison of eyewitness accounts from Beuthen is very revealing. While the narration of the events of that horrible night between 28 and 29 October is similar, the tone is quite different, depending on the time and circumstances of when the account was given. The letters written only a few months after the expulsion attest to the writers' trauma and despair, but also to their hope that they would soon be able to resume their normal life. Sadly, none of the letter writers quoted here, including Julius Rosenzweig, survived. In contrast to the letters, the survivor accounts carry with them the bitterness and distress over the losses of homes, friends, and family members. With the benefit of hindsight and having survived several camps, 10 years after the expulsion Joseph Kohs reflected on this traumatic experience: 'Our fate took a terrible turn. The deportation from Germany turned out to be much more disastrous than we could have imagined in our wildest dreams.'<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, two years after being deported, Gerta Pfeffer, a trained textile designer, reflected from the safety of her new home in England on the solidarity she experienced from strangers and among the group of expellees: 'Some people who helped us at the train stations cried. We no longer had any tears left ... maybe we had gotten used to our tragedy. We became a community on our train ride through Poland, united by the injustice we all had just been subjected to.'<sup>66</sup>

The expulsion of Polish Jews from smaller towns, such as Altenburg<sup>67</sup> and Plauen,<sup>68</sup> followed the same general course of events, including chasing people out of their beds in the

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<sup>65</sup> Kohs, "Der 28. Oktober 1938."

<sup>66</sup> Gerta Pfeffer, "My Life in Germany before and after Jan. 30, 1933," in Harvard University, Announcing a \$1000 prize competition of interest to all Germans and to all others who are well acquainted with modern Germany (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1940), 57M-203, bMS Ger91.

<sup>67</sup> Altenburg is about halfway between Leipzig and Chemnitz.

<sup>68</sup> Plauen is about 55 miles south of Altenburg.

early morning hours, not allowing them enough time to pack, and arresting them on the spot. In Altenburg, the shocked and frightened Polish Jews were detained for one day in the prison near the Brüder Church. Eyewitness accounts recall that the cantor, Israel Waldmann, sang from the prison, presumably in protest and for encouragement. His loud voice could be heard in the market.<sup>69</sup> After spending the day traumatized and disoriented in prison, about 50 Polish Jews were transported by train from Altenburg to nearby Leipzig in the early evening of 28 October. They gradually became aware of the magnitude of the Polenaktion, especially when they encountered the chaos at the Leipzig train station. Families were torn apart and had no idea where their relatives were. Salomon Rosenmann lost track of his two sisters for several days: one sister, Berta, was apparently sent back to Altenburg because her children's names were not listed in her passport; the other, Ida, was caught in the expulsion while visiting family in the Rhineland. She was ultimately put on a transport to Zbąszyń, together with the family members she had visited, and was forced to spend several months in the refugee camp there.<sup>70</sup> Fifty-three-year-old Josef Broniatowski, who had apparently moved from Leipzig to Plauen in the 1930s, wrote a heart-wrenching letter from Czenstochau (Częstochowa) to his sons, who were presumably living abroad, detailing his and his family's expulsion<sup>71</sup> and requesting that his account of the expulsion of 75 Jews from Plauen via Chemnitz and Dresden, which echoes many other eyewitness reports, be made public in newspapers and the synagogues without mentioning

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<sup>69</sup> Christian Repkewitz, 28. Oktober 1938: Endstation Beuthen (Altenburg: Kommunalpolitischer Ring Altenburger Land, 2013), p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> I am indebted to Christian Repkewitz for making Salomon Rosenmann's letter to his sister Lina Gotlibowski in Argentina available. The letter was written on November 30, 1938 in Lemberg and is likely the last sign of Rosenmann.

<sup>71</sup> Document 12-2: Letter by Josef Broniatowski, Częstochowa (Poland), n.d., USHMM Acc. 2000.30 (translated from German), in Jürgen Matthäus and Mark Roseman, *Jewish Responses to Persecution, 1933–1938*, vol. 1 (Lanham, MD: AltaMira, 2010), p. 345f.

his name. His hope that the tax certificate would arrive in time to get a visa for the US from the consulate in Warsaw, however, was dashed.<sup>72</sup>

At times of stress and despair, the construction of the ‘Other’ proves particularly powerful. Many of the expellees had resided in Germany for many years or had even been born there. Therefore, most did not speak Polish, which provoked the Polish border guards to treat them even worse, adding insult to injury.<sup>73</sup> Several accounts reiterate the dilemma of being mistreated by the Germans for being Polish, by the Poles for being Germans, and by both sides for being Jewish. Gerta Pfeffer summarized the expellees’ plight: ‘[We were] expelled from Germany and undesired in Poland.’<sup>74</sup> The bewilderment of Polish Jews after their expulsion to a country that they hardly knew and whose language and culture were unfamiliar reverberates both in their testimonies from that time and in the testimonies given years later. Julius Rosenzweig, a rug sales representative from Chemnitz, wrote a postcard and a letter from Warsaw to his younger sister several months after the expulsion, but before the outbreak of World War II. Although he was born into a Polish Jewish family, he was socialized, educated, and acculturated in Germany; therefore, he revealed his own bias against Poles and Ostjuden in a letter, commenting on several stereotypes, such as a lack of discipline.<sup>75</sup> In my opinion, Rosenzweig’s remarks do not reflect his ‘absorption of Nazi prejudices,’ as Sybil Milton argued.<sup>76</sup> Rather, they

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<sup>72</sup> Both Josef Broniatowski and his wife Sara are listed among the Victims of the Persecution of Jews under the National Socialist Tyranny in Germany 1933–1945, Memorial Book, Federal Archives, accessed March 12, 2017, <https://www.bundesarchiv.de/gedenkbuch/directory.html.en>.

<sup>73</sup> Gerta Pfeffer recalled her feeling of disgust when the Polish border guards shouted “German pigs” at the expellees.

<sup>74</sup> Pfeffer, “My Life in Germany.”

<sup>75</sup> Rosenzweig wrote about a “typical lack of Jewish discipline” at the baggage car in Beuthen, when exhausted and disoriented expellees were trying to fetch their bags. His term for the temporary shelter in an overcrowded Tarnowitz school was “typical Polish pigsty.” In August 1939 he also blamed the Polish government alone for the Jews’ expulsion from Germany. See Julius Rosenzweig to his sister Cilli, August 19, 1939, Warsaw, Cecylja Rosenzweig Collection 1939, Leo Baeck Institute Archives (LBI) AR 7128, transl. from German, UL.

<sup>76</sup> Sybil Milton, “The Expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany: October 1938 to July 1939 – A Documentation,” Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook 29 (1984), p. 178, Footnote 30.

highlight widespread and deep-seated stereotypes and a lengthy, complex history that long predated the Nazi regime. Similar to Rosenzweig, the Polish Jewish expellee Joachim Kalter from Leipzig, who was 15 years old at the time, remembered, years later, his and his family's arrival 'in the half-Jewish city of Tarnów. The dirt and disorder, which we found there horrified us. Our first desire was naturally to ... leave this Asiatic city.'<sup>77</sup> Yet the family had no other choice, but to stay and adjust to their new environment. Other survivors, such as Joseph Carver, recalled similar reactions. As a 10-year-old, he, along with his family, was expelled from Leipzig. In his testimony, he vividly recalls the 'primitive conditions' and utter poverty he observed in Łódź, as well as the rampant antisemitism he experienced at school and in the streets there.<sup>78</sup>

The fate of the Kohs and Rosenzweig families were representative of most expelled Polish Jews from Germany, specifically from Saxony. Josef Kohs was aware of the limited options, if any, for a family of four to emigrate from Germany with Polish passports and settle in foreign lands. After the brutal expulsion, he decided that he and his family should stay with relatives in Poland. Once the war broke out, the situation became increasingly difficult, and when the Krakow ghetto was established, the family escaped from Krakow to Dąbrowa. Kohs and his older son endured several ghettos, work camps, concentration camps, and a death march before being liberated by the US Army. Not having heard from his wife in years, Kohs listed his marital status until late 1946 as 'probably widowed.' Only later did he find out that his wife, Dora, was murdered in Bełżec and his younger son in the Dąbrowa ghetto.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Joachim Kalter, *Eine jüdische Odyssee: von Leipzig nach Polen abgeschoben und deutsche Lager überlebt; ein Bericht 1938– 1946* (Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre, 1997), p. 87f.

<sup>78</sup> Joseph Carver, formerly Zalel Schnitzer, Shoah Foundation, VHA Code 9262.

<sup>79</sup> Memorial Book, Federal Archives Germany, accessed November 21, 2016, <http://www.bundesarchiv.de/gedenkbuch/directory.html.en?result>.

Julius Rosenzweig speculated that the reason his sister Cecylja (Cilli) and her transport from Leipzig were turned away before reaching the border was ‘due to the fact that it was too late. Poland would not have admitted anyone who had not crossed the border by midnight of October 29.’<sup>80</sup> Rosenzweig was most likely not aware of the German–Polish negotiations, and Poland’s retaliatory action to prepare the expulsion of ethnic Germans from its territory. Cecylja was on the fourth transport from Leipzig to Beuthen, which left Leipzig at 8:02 pm and returned with all 407 passengers.<sup>81</sup> Cecylja went back to Chemnitz, and in January 1939, she auctioned off their household items before leaving for England.<sup>82</sup> In June 1939, her brother sent a heart-wrenching postcard from Warsaw to her new home in Suffolk, England: ‘Father and I were not well in the last 10 days. We did not even have money for postage.’ His inquiries about a shipping company and the clearance certificate of the tax office (Unbedenklichkeitsbescheinigung) indicate the family’s plans to join Cecylja in England. A few months later, the war broke out and all hopes for emigration were dashed. While Cecylja, who had originally been on a transport, was ultimately able to escape to England, her brother died in the Warsaw ghetto, and the fate of their parents remains unknown.

The writer of a postcard dated 15 November 1938, 39-year-old Leo Tenzer from Chemnitz, also confirmed the turning back of transports before the border. His words captured the difficult situation in Krakow:

The Committee [General Jewish Aid Committee for Jewish Refugees from Germany in Poland] provides room and board for us since we are entirely destitute. Our hope to go home soon, even just to liquidate our assets, has not [yet] been fulfilled. We are not sure when we will be able to get out of this mess. We are here and the

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<sup>80</sup> Julius Rosenzweig to his sister Cilli, August 19, 1939, Warsaw, Cecylja Rosenzweig Collection 1939, Leo Baeck Institute Archives (LBI) AR 7128, transl. from German, UL.

<sup>81</sup> Diamant, *Chronik der Juden in Dresden*, p. 373.

<sup>82</sup> Milton, “The Expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany,” p. 175, fn. 20.

parents are there in a desperate situation, and we hope for a solution. Wolf and family are able to stay at a safe place in Chemnitz. Only a few managed to do that.<sup>83</sup>

Little is known about what exactly happened to the Tenzer family in the following years, except that it is certain that they all were murdered in the Holocaust.<sup>84</sup>

Julius Rosenzweig's letter from Warsaw, Salomon Rosenmann's letter from Lemberg, and Leo Tenzer's postcard from Krakow describe their fears, worries, and distress in a situation of displacement, destitution, and bewilderment. Jewish aid organizations, such as the JDC and the General Jewish Aid Committee for Jewish Refugees from Germany in Poland ('Committee'), set up in November 1938, took care of the refugees' most basic needs such as housing, clothing, and food. The Committee helped Polish Jewish refugees pay for their train tickets and provided them with a minimal sum of cash. However, the emotional and psychological strain was often too much to bear. Traumatized and displaced in a matter of two days, many of the refugees tried to find short-term solutions to their plight. All at once, they found themselves looking for family members with whom they had lost contact during the expulsion and ways to make ends meet in Poland or to emigrate. Two months after the expulsion of Polish Jews, the Committee was forced to reluctantly agree with the thousands of refugees who remained in Poland and saw emigration as the only solution to their unsettling situation. The Committee even provided necessary funds to those who found a way to emigrate.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Postcard, Leo Tenzer to family members in Jerusalem, November 15, 1938, Jüdisches Museum Berlin, Archiv, 2012/293/0, transl. from German, UL, accessed November 23, 2016, <http://objekte.jmberlin.de/object/jmb-obj-489827>.

<sup>84</sup> The letter writer Leo Tenzer died in the last days of the war in Mühlendorf, a satellite camp of concentration camp Dachau. Sophie Tenzer was murdered in Auschwitz. The fate of Leo and Sophie's children, Alfred and Hannah, is unknown, accessed November 21, 2016, <http://www.bundesarchiv.de/gedenkbuch/directory.html.en?result>; in the Orthodox section of the Jewish cemetery in Chemnitz, Field G, a memorial for Sophie, Leo, Hanna, and Fredi Tenzer was erected in 1998. See Jürgen Nitsche and Ruth Röcher (eds.), *Juden in Chemnitz: Die Geschichte der Gemeinde und ihrer Mitglieder* (Dresden: Sandstein, 2002), p. 196.

<sup>85</sup> Report, Central Committee of Aid to Jewish Refugees from Germany in Poland, January 1, 1939, JDC Archives, NY\_AR19334, Document 509747.



Another concern for the refugees was the property they were forced to leave behind. Not knowing what the future would hold, one of their goals was returning to Germany to take care of financial and business affairs. Some expellees like Salomon Rosenmann were also concerned about family members who had stayed behind in Germany and gotten caught up in the November Pogrom (9–10 November 1938) shortly after the Polenaktion. Rosenmann's brother-in-law Samuel Wandstein, a stateless Jew from Galicia, was incarcerated during the November Pogrom in the Buchenwald concentration camp. Although Rosenmann's own situation as a refugee in Lemberg was difficult, he sent an agonizing letter to his sister Lina in Argentina, pleading that she send immigration papers to Wandstein immediately so that he could be released from the 'barbarism, misery, and torture' of the concentration camp.<sup>86</sup>

While thousands of expellees were stuck for up to 10 months under difficult conditions in old barracks, a former flourmill, stables, or a makeshift refugee camp in Zbąszyń, in Beuthen, there were not even barracks for shelter. Eyewitness accounts mention a dance hall where the exhausted refugees spent the night:

The innkeeper accepted German money and sold overpriced food and drinks. And now, being over-exhausted, several older people broke down and suffered heart attacks. We did everything to revive them. In the morning, all the men held a prayer service. Then we sat on our luggage and waited. At around 9 a.m., a Polish official came with two policemen ... . We found out that we were in the town of Rad[z]iu[o]nkow.<sup>87</sup> Around lunchtime, several big cars brought milk, bread, and butter for us. We ate and had to leave the pub ... . We thought that the customs officials were making fun of us by checking our luggage for declarable items ... In the evening, we were told to go wherever we wanted, but we would need to pay for our train tickets.

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<sup>86</sup> Salomon Rosenmann to Lina Gotlibowitz, Lemberg, November 30, 1938, Personal Archive, Christian Repkewitz, transl. from German, UL. Little is known about the ultimate fate of the Rosenmann family. While Samuel Wandstein was apparently able to escape to England, his wife Berta and their two children were murdered in 1942. Salomon Rosenmann and his mother Sima were also killed, presumably in the Lemberg ghetto. Ida Rosenmann was able to escape to England and then the U.S. Email from Christian Repkewitz to Uta Larkey, June 7, 2014

<sup>87</sup> Radzionków is about eight kilometers (five miles) north of Beuthen and 17 kilometers from Kattowitz.

The majority of Polish Jews forced across the ‘green border’ near Beuthen sought to find their way to relatives who had remained in Poland. While the Kohs family went to Krakow, Julius Rosenzweig and his group were taken to Tarnowskie Góry (Tarnowitz), about six kilometers north of Radzionków, where they could buy coffee and sandwiches in an old school building. On their way, they passed the pub from which ‘the people from Leipzig waved and called out to us.’<sup>88</sup> That may have been the pub in which Kohs and his family waited out the night. Despite hoping to get some rest after two sleepless nights, Rosenzweig and his transport were forced onto trucks and taken to a train station where they were handed tickets to destinations of their choice in Poland. The Rosenzweigs decided on Warsaw, where they arrived on Sunday morning, 30 October, and met up with relatives. The General Aid Committee for Jewish Refugees from Germany in Poland took care of accommodations and food for the refugees as well as they could.<sup>89</sup>

All eyewitness accounts mention the selfless help offered by the Jewish communities in Zbąszyń, Beuthen, and Katowice, which ‘worked efficiently all day long, even though it was Shabbat.’<sup>90</sup> A JDC report also commented on this enormous help: ‘The Jewish population of Poland rose magnificently to the emergency. Despite their own impoverishment the Jews of Poland eagerly and generously shared their small pittances with the deportees.’<sup>91</sup> In addition to local Jewish communities and the General Aid Committee in Warsaw, the JDC provided most of the funds for relief work.

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<sup>88</sup> Julius Rosenzweig to his sister Cilli, August 19, 1939, Warsaw, Cecylja Rosenzweig Collection 1939, Leo Baeck Institute Archives (LBI) AR 7128, transl. from German, UL.

<sup>89</sup> Emanuel Ringelblum worked for this Committee in the refugee camp in Zbąszyń and described the human tragedies in a letter to Raphael Mahler. He also commented on the Committee’s success in providing cultural activities and language classes in Yiddish and Polish. He concludes, “Zbąszyń has become a symbol of the defenselessness of the Jews of Poland ... a heavy moral blow against the Jewish population of Poland,” Documents on the Holocaust (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1981), p. 123f.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Troper, Summary report of JDC efforts.

## Conclusion

The expulsion of 2804 Polish Jews from Saxony differed in the three main locations: while in Dresden 90 percent and in Chemnitz 78 percent of the Polish Jews were deported, in Leipzig the rate was around 50 percent.<sup>92</sup> The main reason for this lower percentage was, no doubt, the courageous actions of the Polish consul there, who protected almost 1300 Jews by sheltering them at the consulate. The correspondence between the Polish consul and the German authorities in the months that followed highlights the utter confusion and unprecedented circumstances after the mass expulsion. The Polish consul in Leipzig tried to push back the attempts by the German authorities to shift the responsibility for 'Polish property and assets' to the Polish consulate. In response, Heydrich's deputy Werner Best instructed the minister of the interior in Saxony to take care of the apartments of expelled Polish Jews should the Polish consulate remain unwilling to accept the keys for safekeeping.<sup>93</sup>

The differences in the deportation rates were also due to the various reactions and actions of the respective police chiefs. While in Dresden the arrests were made starting the evening of 27 October, the police chief in Leipzig got caught up in bureaucratic minutia, later blaming the Stapo (state police) for the loss of valuable time. Apparently the printing of the expulsion orders, which were supposed to be handed out at the arrests, had not been completed before 6 pm. By the time they were distributed to the Schupo stations, it was 9 pm, which the police chief considered an 'inopportune time' for arrests: 'Four hours before, the Jews could have been arrested in their businesses and offices. But at 9 pm, most of them were still en route or in cafes and pubs. We had to give them time to return to their apartments.' Police Chief Stollberg also defended his decision to not interfere at the Polish consulate with potential 'undesired foreign

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<sup>92</sup> Tomaszewski, *Auftakt zur Vernichtung*, p. 133.

<sup>93</sup> Dr Best to Minister of the Interior of Saxony, March 1, 1939, in Diamant, *Chronik der Juden in Leipzig*, p. 575.

policy consequences.<sup>94</sup> Given the distress of the suddenly uprooted Polish Jews, the bureaucratic letter exchange between the police chief of Leipzig and the railway director is particularly disturbing. Determining that the police department had been overcharged for the transport of thousands of Polish Jews, Police Chief Stollberg tried to strike a bargain with the railway administration and was actually rewarded a refund of 1440.60 Reichsmark.<sup>95</sup> In his report to Himmler, the minister of the interior of Saxony expressed satisfaction with how it had all gone: 'The Aktion happened rather smoothly – apart from one death and several people who fainted and had nervous breakdowns. Due to the large-scale operation it could not have been kept secret, but there also was no public outcry.'<sup>96</sup>

The expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany was halted almost as suddenly as it had begun a few days prior. Initially, the Polish government was caught by surprise when the Gestapo and SS forced thousands of Polish citizens across the border. Perhaps the Polish foreign ministry misjudged the state of Polish–German relations or did not take Germany's warning seriously.<sup>101</sup> The lack of preparedness and planning was most obvious at the border, where the Polish border guards were left without orders regarding the thousands of expellees who showed up at the checkpoints. The Polish government, too, scrambled to find a political response to the mass expulsion of Polish citizens from Germany. One immediate step was to announce the expulsion of German citizens from Poland. The threat of this retaliatory action forced both governments to intensify their diplomatic negotiations. On 29 October, both sides came to the agreement that Germany would halt the expulsions and that Poland would not retaliate. The

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<sup>94</sup> Police Chief Leipzig to Kreishauptmann in Leipzig, November 26, 1938, Diamant, *Chronik der Juden in Dresden*, p. 375.

<sup>95</sup> Diamant, *Chronik der Juden in Leipzig*, p. 562f.

<sup>96</sup> Minister of the Interior in Saxony to Reichsführer-SS and Chief of German Police in Reichs Ministry of the Interior, Dresden, November 1, 1938, in Diamant, *Chronik der Juden in Dresden*, p. 367. <sup>101</sup>Tomaszewski, *Auftakt zur Vernichtung*, p. 146f.

transports carrying Polish Jews to the border later that weekend (29–30 October 1938) were returned to the train stations from which they had departed. Apparently the railroad administration and the police chief refused to transport the returnees back to their hometowns without valid train tickets. Thus, it became the responsibility of the Jewish communities and the Jewish Aid Committee for Jewish Refugees from Germany in Poland. The Jewish community in Beuthen provided funds for the return tickets, and the Jewish community in Leipzig for the tickets from Leipzig on to the respective hometowns of those Jews who were allowed to return for a brief period.<sup>97</sup>

The German–Polish negotiations regarding the next steps after the mass expulsion of Polish Jews began on 2 November and finally concluded in 24 January 1939. Both sides agreed to the short-term return (usually limited to four weeks) of 1000 Polish Jewish refugees, often individuals acting on behalf of their families, to their former residences in Germany. The case of Polish expellees from Saxony and the restricted number of reentry visas issued challenges the generalized claim that ‘many of those expelled were rapidly allowed back.’<sup>98</sup> The returnees received a transit visa to look after their business affairs, liquidate their assets, and pay their debts and creditors as well as their former employees.<sup>99</sup> Apparently the expulsion of Polish Jews had created economic hardship in some communities. The fur business in Leipzig suffered a great setback. Many non-Jewish employees of expelled Polish Jews were not paid.<sup>100</sup> Manufacturers in Chemnitz complained that they suffered considerable losses due to the expulsion of Polish Jewish businessmen and the closings of their stores.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>98</sup> Matthäus and Roseman, *Jewish Responses*, p. 342.

<sup>99</sup> Werner Best informed the Minister of the Interior of Saxony that permission of short-term return of Polish Jews, limited to two weeks would be revoked on July 31, 1939, in Diamant, *Chronik der Juden in Leipzig*, p. 579.

<sup>100</sup> Diamant, *Chronik der Juden in Dresden*, p. 368.

<sup>101</sup> Police Chief of Chemnitz to Kreishauptmann, November 14, 1938, in Diamant, *Juden in Dresden*, p. 371.

Gerta Pfeffer was able to obtain an immigration permit as a domestic worker in England. Therefore, she was allowed to return to Germany for four weeks in February 1939 to liquidate her family's assets in Chemnitz. She found the apartment untouched, but encountered a greedy property manager who tricked her into selling him her parents' home for a ridiculously low price.<sup>102</sup> In mid-July 1939, Joachim Kalter's father, Oskar, returned to Leipzig on a two-month visa. Before he could liquidate his textile business and other property, he received a telegram from his recently expelled family now living in Tarnow urging him to leave Germany as soon as possible, which he did.<sup>103</sup> Abraham Goldberg's family, originally from Altenburg, stayed with relatives in Stanisławow (now Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine). His father, Wolf Goldberg, the owner of a successful textile business, could not bear to leave his wealth behind and managed to return to Altenburg with the help of a smuggler. After witnessing the November Pogrom in Altenburg and Leipzig, violence against his relatives and their arrests, the burning of synagogues and attacks on Jews, he had himself smuggled back across the border to his family in Poland. He later returned to Altenburg and liquidated his business.<sup>104</sup>

Josef Kohs' father, Leon, had a small secondhand store in Leipzig. The police headquarters appointed the lawyer Hartwig Tetzner as the executor of Kohs' property. Tetzner offered to liquidate Kohs' assets swiftly, citing the Decree on the Elimination of the Jews from Economic Life.<sup>105</sup> It appears that he did not succeed with this plan in the short timeframe he envisioned since Leon's wife, Lea (Laura), was permitted to return to Leipzig for four weeks to

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<sup>102</sup> Pfeffer, "My Life in Germany," p. 56ff.

<sup>103</sup> Kalter, *Eine jüdische Odyssee*, p. 89.

<sup>104</sup> Goldberg, *Erinnerungen aus Deutschland 1923–1938*; see also Repkewitz, p. 9.

<sup>105</sup> Letter from Hartwig Tetzner to Chief Finance President, December 8, 1938, Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, Staatsarchiv Leipzig, 20206, Oberfinanzpräsident Leipzig, no. 484.

liquidate the store, arriving, apparently without her husband, on 14 April 1939.<sup>106</sup> Both Laura and Leon were later killed in the Holocaust.<sup>107</sup>

The exact number of Polish Jews who were first expelled from Germany and then murdered in the Holocaust is not available, but the Federal Archives in Germany can verify the names of 7000 Polish Jews, among them Julius Rosenzweig, Leo Tenzer, Salomon Rosenmann, Josef and Sara Broniatowski, Laura and Leon Kohs, and many of their relatives.<sup>108</sup>

Many expellees who remained in Poland or who were forced back to Poland after a brief stay to settle their business affairs in Germany became victims of the Nazi invasion and genocidal policies. Their chances of survival were slim. Josef Kohs and his older son Heinz Dieter, Abraham Goldberg and his father Wolf, and Joachim Kalter and his brother Herbert did survive ghettos, work camps, concentration camps, death marches, and, in Goldberg's case, a Soviet forced labor camp, as well.<sup>109</sup>

Highlighting Saxony as one example, in this article I have shown that the brutal mass expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany was not only an unprecedented act of mass violence and viciousness against Jews in Germany, but also became a precursor, a 'test case,' for subsequent mass deportations. The Security Service of the Reichsführer-SS and the Main Office of the Security Police most likely did not have fully developed plans for mass deportations ready in October 1938. However, the Nazi authorities could draw on their experiences during the

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<sup>106</sup> Einwohnermeldeblatt Lea Kohs, Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, Staatsarchiv Leipzig, 20031 Polizeipräsidium Leipzig, PP-M 3300.

<sup>107</sup> With the approval of their grandson, Dr Henry Fishel of New York (1924–2016), the author of this article led the initiative to have memorial stones placed in front of Laura and Leon's former residence in Leipzig: <http://www.stolpersteineleipzig.de/index.php?id=307>, accessed September 14, 2017.

<sup>108</sup> Ellen Bertram, a local historian, calculated that 1200 Polish Jews from Leipzig were murdered in the Shoah, following their expulsion in October 1938; see Ellen Bertram, "Abgeschoben und verschwunden? Auf den Spuren jüdischer Leipziger in Polen," *Leipziger Blätter* 63 (2013), pp. 62–63. I am indebted to Ellen Bertram for providing her article and other useful information.

<sup>109</sup> Goldberg was denounced as a "German spy" and had to work in the coalmines of Stalino (today Donetsk, Ukraine), administered by the NKWD, for several months.

Polenaktion with regard to logistics, coordination of administrative steps and offices, panic control, intimidation, and brutality. These measures set the stage for the arrests and mass transports during the November Pogrom not even two weeks after the Polenaktion and for mass deportations during World War II.

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