Excerpts from the Warsaw Diary of Ghetto Leader Adam Czerniaków (1942)

Abstract

Adam Czerniaków (1880–1942), a Polish Jew, was the head of the Jewish Council in the Warsaw Ghetto. These excerpts come from his diary which he kept from a few days after Poland's invasion by the Wehrmacht until the day he died. His diary was first published in 1979.

As the head of the Jewish Council, Czerniaków frequently acted as the liaison between German authorities and the Jewish population in Warsaw. In these excerpts, Czerniaków writes of the rumors of imminent deportations. The panic of the situation is clear as he describes racing between the German authorities and his fellow Warsaw residents, trying to understand the true nature of these rumors. Czerniaków confronts the moral dilemma of maintaining a cooperative relationship with the German authorities and the respect and trust of his people. In trying to reassure the Jewish community about the expected deportations, he sadly writes, "I am trying not to let the smile leave my face." When the rumors became reality in July 1942, Czerniaków sought to negotiate with the Germans to save the lives of Warsaw's orphans. When his attempts failed, Czerniaków decided to take a cyanide capsule. He died in the midst of the deportations on July 23, 1942, shortly after writing the final entry in his diary.

Source

July 17, 1942—At 7 o'clock in the morning, a list of condemned prisoners, etc., was brought to my apartment for discussions with Schmied.

In the morning at the Community. Miss Glass from the *Kommissar's* office telephoned saying that today we must empty the Synagogue of the refugees. The building is to be at the disposal of the SS. 1 dispatched First to Brühl Palace in this matter. The day has started badly. Fortunately it turned out that the Synagogue is needed for foreign Jews. I must empty it today to make room for the emigrants to America, etc.

Two Germans came at 11 A.M. and offered a barter transaction: if we supply shoes, etc., we will be permitted to purchase rye flour and some prisoners will be released. In a conference with Gepner, Sztolcman, Rechtman, and Altberg, the main points were agreed upon. Maybe on Monday the matter will be definitely settled. I will make an appointment with the *Kommissar* tomorrow. The evacuation of 1,700 of the German Jews from 109 Leszno Street took place in an orderly manner. Sixty or more apartments were taken for that purpose.

July 18, 1942—In the morning with Lejkin to Brandt and Mende. A day full of foreboding. Rumors that the deportations will start on Monday evening (All?!) I asked the *Kommissar* whether he knew anything about it. He replied that he did not and that he did not believe the rumors. In the meantime panic in the Quarter; some speak of deportations, others of a pogrom. Today and tomorrow we are to empty the Synagogue for the foreign Jews to move in.

When I was sitting in Mende's office a Polish girl, 16 or 18 years old, came in and reported that a converted Jewish woman has been living in her house.

July 19, 1942—In the morning at the Community. Incredible panic in the city. Kohn, Heller, and Ehrlich are spreading terrifying rumors, creating the impression that it is all false propaganda. I wish it were so. On

the other hand, there is talk of about 40 railroad cars ready and waiting. It transpired that 20 of them have been prepared on SS orders for 720 workers leaving tomorrow for a camp.

Kohn claims that the deportation is to commence tomorrow at 8 P.M. with 3,000 Jews from the Little Ghetto (Sliska Street?). He himself and his family slipped away to Otwock. Others did the same.

A Czerniakow, allegedly a relative of mine, is a "fixer" [a small scale influence peddler] in the Labor Department where he used to work for a long while. I ordered that he be put in prison.

Because of the panic I drove through the streets of the entire Quarter. I visited 3 playgrounds. I do not know whether I managed to calm the population, but I did my best. I try to hearten the delegations which come to see me. What it costs me they do not see. Today I took 2 headache powders, another pain reliever, and a sedative, but my head is still splitting. I am trying not to let the smile leave my face.

July 20, 1942—In the morning at 7:30 at the Gestapo. I asked Mende how much truth there was in the rumors. He replied that he had heard nothing. I turned to Brandt; he also knew nothing. When asked whether it *could* happen, he replied that he knew of no such scheme. Uncertain, I left his office. I proceeded to his chief, *Kommissar* Böhm. He told me that this was not his department but Hoeheman [Höhmann] might say something about the rumors. I mentioned that according to rumor, the deportation is to start tonight at 7:30. He replied that he would be bound to know something if it were about to happen. Not seeing any other way out, I went to the deputy chief of Section III, Scherer. He expressed his surprise hearing the rumor and informed me that he too knew nothing about it. Finally, I asked whether I could tell the population that their fears were groundless. He replied that I could and that all the talk was *Quatsch* and *Unsinn* [utter nonsense].

I ordered Lejkin to make the public announcement through the precinct police stations. I drove to Auerswald. He informed me that he reported everything to the SS *Polizeiführer*. Meanwhile, First went to see Jesuiter and Schlederer, who expressed their indignation that the rumors were being spread and promised an investigation.

I returned to the Community and found Dr. Schmied. The barter deal, shoes, etc., for rye is being concluded (1,250,000 zlotys).

Today I discussed with the *Kommissar* the problem of children in the detention center. He ordered me to write him a letter for their release, on the condition that they be placed in reformatories and that a guarantee would be given that they would not escape. I suggested that the prisoners' aid committee be charged with the care of the children. The *Kommissar* demanded a person be designated who would be responsible for guarding them. It is to be someone from the Order Service.

I talked this over with Kaczka, the manager of a transit center on Dzika Street. Some of the children would be placed there. I am also planning to complete alterations in a building at Ceglana Street (the baths) to provide additional accommodations. It appears that about 2,000 children will qualify for reformatories.

July 21, 1942—In the morning at the Community. Just before noon officers of the S.P. ordered me to detain in my office those Councilors who were present in the Community building. Besides, they asked for a list of the remaining councilors. Soon the members of the Council in my office were arrested in groups. At the same time the senior officials of the Provisioning Authority, with Gepner heading the list, were also seized. I wanted to leave with those arrested but was instructed to stay in the office. In the meantime others reached my apartment looking for my wife. They were told that she was at the Children's Home at Wolnosc Street. They left only to return to the apartment with an order that my wife should be home by 3 P.M. Some of the Council members were freed today.

I contacted Brandt who told me that everyone would be released tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. I interceded with Auerswald on behalf of Gepner and his colleagues of the Provisioning Authority. He promised to see to it tomorrow morning and asked who exactly was involved. I had the impression that he hesitated about Gepner. I stressed that Gepner was the heart and soul of the Provisioning Authority.

I decided to stay at the Community until 6 P.M., having brought my wife there earlier. The evening was quiet. During the night, deaths.

July 22, 1940 [sic]—In the morning at 7:30 at the Community. The borders of the Small Ghetto surrounded by a special unit in addition to the regular one.

Sturmbannführer Höfle and associates came at 10 o'clock. We disconnected the telephone. Children were moved from the playground opposite the Community building.

We were told that all the Jews irrespective of sex and age, with certain exceptions, will be deported to the East. By 4 P.M. today a contingent of 6,000 people must be provided. And this (at the minimum) will be the daily quota.

We were ordered to vacate a building at 103 Zelazna Street for the German personnel who will be carrying out the deportation. The furniture was kept where it was. As the Council staff with their wives and children are exempted from deportation, I asked that the JSS personnel, crafts-men, and garbage collectors, etc. also be excluded. This was granted.

I requested the release of Gepner, Rozen, Sztolcman, Drybinski, Winter, Kobryner, which was approved. By 3:45 P.M. everyone but Rozen is already back in the ghetto.

In the afternoon Lejkin sent a message that a piece of glass had allegedly been thrown at a police car. They warned us that if this were to happen again our hostages would be shot.

The most tragic dilemma is the problem of children in orphanages, etc. I raised this issue—perhaps something can be done.

At 5:30 one of the officials Forwort (?) drove in and demanded that Jozef Ehrlich should be named Lejkin's deputy. Ehrlich is already wearing 3 stars.

Sturmbannführer Höfle (*Beauftragter* [plenipotentiary] in charge of deportation) asked me into his office and informed me that for the time being my wife was free, but if the deportation were impeded in any way, she would be the first one to be shot as a hostage.

July 23, 1942—In the morning at the Community. Worthoff from the deportation staff came and we discussed several problems. He exempted the vocational school students from deportation. The husbands of working women as well. He told me to take up the matter of orphans with Höfle. The same with reference to craftsmen. When I asked for the number of days per week in which the operation would be carried on, the answer was 7 days a week.

Throughout the town a great rush to start new workshops. A sewing machine can save a life.

It is 3 o'clock. So far 4,000 are ready to go. The orders are that there must be 9,000 by 4 o'clock. Some officials came to the post office and issued instructions that all incoming letters and parcels be diverted to the Pawiak [prison].

Source of English translation: Raul Hilberg, Stanislaw Staron, and Josef Kermisz, eds., *The Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniakow: Prelude to Doom.* New York: Stein and Day, 1979, pp. 381–85. Available online: https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/bib247

Recommended Citation: Excerpts from the Warsaw Diary of Ghetto Leader Adam Czerniaków (1942), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/nazi-germany-1933-1945/ghdi:document-5194> [October 07, 2026].