The Catastrophic Position of the Judenräte: Self-Serving Collaborators or Honorable Martyrs?

Meghan Kerry Waldow

University of Southern Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: https://aquila.usm.edu/masters_theses

Recommended Citation
https://aquila.usm.edu/masters_theses/618

This Masters Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu.
THE CATASTROPHIC POSITION OF THE JUDENRÄTE:
SELF-SERVING COLLABORATORS OR HONORABLE MARTYRS?

by

Meghan Kerry Waldow

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts

Approved:

Dean of the Graduate School

May 2010
ABSTRACT

THE CATASTROPHIC POSITION OF THE JUDENRÄTE: SELF-SERVING COLLABORATORS OR SYMPATHETIC RESISTORS?

by Meghan Kerry Waldow

May 2010

During the Holocaust, the Nazis appointed a select group of Jewish leaders to carry out their demands and orders throughout the ghettos of Eastern Europe. These influential men made up the Judenräte. From the beginning of the ghettos until their tragic demise, these Jewish leaders were responsible for executing difficult, and at times immoral, orders from the Nazis. With little time, money, and resources, somehow these Jews were to establish a system of government within the small boundaries of their quarantine. Put in an unfathomable position, these specially chosen men received power and influence during a time that removed both from their people. Their decisions and actions during the course of their leadership have elicited various degrees of controversy. Some see them as collaborators who cooperated with the Nazis in order to secure their own safety. Others view them as martyrs, who used their power to better the lives of the Jews, even at the cost of their own safety. While there may not be a consensus regarding the role of these men during the Holocaust, one cannot overlook the extreme complexity of the position they were in. Although the Judenrat leaders in various ghettos endured similar environments and circumstances, their fate, as well as the fates of their residents, varied tremendously.
DEDICATION

To the residents of the Warsaw, Lodz, and Vilna ghettos,
Your plight has not been forgotten, and your stories continue to inspire and awe.

acknowledgements

The writer would like to express her thanks to her graduate committee, Dr. Michael Neiberg, Dr. Jeff Bowersox, and Dr. Brian LaPierre, for their indispensable advice, suggestions, and encouragement. I would also like to express my profound appreciation for fellow graduate students Timothy Hemmis, Kaeti Lazenby, and Nancy Nicholls, who have been of most impossible without the financial support of the Department of History at the University of Southern Mississippi, and I am very thankful for their assistance. I would also like to thank Kyle Herrington for his seemingly endless supply of patience and encouragement throughout the long and stressful process of thesis writing.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer would like to express her thanks to her graduate committee, Dr. Michael Neiberg, Dr. Jeff Bowersox, and Dr. Brian LaPierre, for their indispensable advice, suggestions, and encouragement. I would also like to express my profound appreciation for fellow graduate students Timothy Hemmis, Kaci Lazenby, and Nancy Nicholls, who have volunteered their time to help edit, offer advice, and most importantly, for their continual support and enthusiasm. This thesis would have been impossible without the financial support of the Department of History at the University of Southern Mississippi, and I am very thankful for their assistance. I would also like to thank Kyle Herrington for his seemingly endless supply of patience and encouragement throughout the long and stressful process of thesis writing.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. PREFACE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE GHETTO AS A CITY UNTO ITSELF</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. ALLIANCES AND ENEMIES</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. RESETTLEMENT TO THE EAST</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

PREFACE

"You who were not there will never understand." - Elie Wiesel

Jacob Gens was torn, but he did not know what to do next. As the chief of police in the Vilna Ghetto, he was responsible for creating lists of Jews for deportation, and understood that his selections would send people to their deaths. He knew that he alone held the power of life and death over the people under his charge in Vilna. While he understood the weight of his position, he struggled continually to justify the role forced upon him to those who lived under his authority. He faced pressure not only from the Nazis but also from the rabbis within the ghetto, who condemned him for accepting and using such a power over his fellow Jews. With the passing of each day, Gens became overwhelmed with the pressure of his role, and sought to clarify the margins of his position. In a speech given to the people of the Vilna ghetto in November of 1941, Gens pleaded for understanding:

I, Gens, lead you to death, and I, Gens, want to save Jews from death. I, Gens, order hideouts to be blown up, and I, Gens try to get certificates, work and benefits for the ghetto. I render the account of Jewish blood and not the account of Jewish honor...When they ask me for a thousand Jews, I hand them over; for if we Jews will not give them on our own, the Germans will come and take them by force. Then they will take not one thousand, but thousands. With hundreds, I save a thousand. With the thousands that I hand over, I save ten thousand. I will say: I did everything in order to save as many Jews as possible...to ensure that at least a remnant of Jews survive.  

---


Content that he was performing his role to the best of his ability, Gens trudged on. There was work to be done.

The legacy of the Judenrätte is extremely controversial in Holocaust historiography, and is among the most contentious and divisive topics facing historians of the Shoah. As members of the Nazi-appointed Jewish Councils throughout the ghettos of Eastern Europe, both survivors and historians disagree on how to understand and judge the role of such men. Officially, the Judenrat was a governmental body within a Jewish community appointed by the German authorities. It was responsible for enforcing all Nazi orders and administering to all affairs concerning the welfare and functioning of the Jewish community. The behaviors and actions of most of these councils have elicited both condemnation and praise. The legacies of these men in light of their actions encompass the broad spectrum of two basic historiographic categories: collaborative or resistant. Their most vocal critics argue that the members of the Judenrätte collaborated with the Nazis in exchange for the safety of their lives and that of their families. The most sympathetic viewpoints concerning the Judenrätte claim that these men used the authority of their position to better the lives of the residents they served, to the best of their ability. There are also a contingent of scholars whose standpoint falls somewhere in the middle of the historiographic spectrum, arguing that the members of the Judenrat cooperated with the Nazis in order to save Jewish lives.

This thesis analyzes the images of the three most powerful Polish Judenrat leaders during the Second World War: Adam Czerniakow of Warsaw, Jacob Gens

---

3 “Shoah” is the Hebrew term for the Holocaust.
4 “Judenrat” refers to a single Jewish Council. Judenrätte refers to many councils.
of Vilna, and Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski of Lodz. Each leader has left behind a controversial legacy within the history of the Judenräte. This study will reevaluate the judgments and criticisms cast upon these men’s legacies and through a close examination of their leadership, offer a more nuanced interpretation of their success within the ghetto. The following will argue that the various goals set by each leader for the management of their ghetto determined the longevity of its existence, as well as the standard of living for the inhabitants under their charge. There was no universal “Holocaust experience,” and this thesis will show that while the residents of Warsaw, Lodz, and Vilna faced the same horror, their standards of living varied tremendously due to the leadership ability of their respective Judenrat leaders. These men had the ability to aid, comfort, and sustain the physical and emotional well-being of their residents through the horrors and devastation of life under Nazi rule.

The following will show that Adam Czerniakow chose to run the Warsaw ghetto with the same code of ethics and morality that he prided himself upon prior to the outbreak of the war. While refusing to succumb to the corruption and brutality of the Nazis, he also hoped that compliance with German demands would ensure that Jews lived with as little Nazi interference as possible. This thesis will show that Czerniakow’s inability to adapt to the devastating circumstances around him ensured that he was unable to ward off the chaos and catastrophe that were synonymous to Nazi occupation. As a result, the Jews of the Warsaw ghetto lived in an almost continual state of suffering and devastation.

Jacob Gens’ motto for heading the Vilna ghetto rested upon his desire to show the
Nazis that the Jews were a self-reliant community that would tolerate and respect Nazi demands. Because of this, he exerted an authoritative control over the Jews in his ghetto, with the idea that self-governance would allow for a degree of independence and freedom for the Jews of Vilna. In turn, he believed that proving the worth of the Jews to the Nazis would result in saving Jewish lives. Due to Gens' leadership style, he was able to create an environment where his position of authority became almost as powerful as the Nazis, and allowed for the smallest degree of Nazi intervention in the ghetto. Mordechai Rumkowski approached his leadership position in the ghetto with the motto that the Jews of Lodz would prove their worth to the Nazis through their establishment of a productive work force. Rumkowski's belief in a "salvation through labor" policy was highly successful in Lodz. Due to his creation of a vast manufacturing hub within the ghetto, he was able to prove the worth of the Lodz Jews to the Nazis. His motto was so effective in Lodz that his ghetto was the last one liquidated by the Nazis, in August 1944.

In order to understand the context of these assertions in light of the historiography, it is imperative to understand just how history remembers these figures individually.

Adam Czerniakow was the leader of the Warsaw Judenrat. He committed suicide in July 1942 when the Nazis ordered him to prepare deportation lists, and upon his knowledge that such lists would send the Jews to their deaths in Treblinka.⁶ His suicide notes reveal that he did not have the strength to turn over innocent children to their deaths. He argued that his act was not one of cowardice, but....

---

but that of a man who felt entirely helpless regarding his predicament. Historians have treated him kindly, typically viewing him as a man of honor who became a martyr for his people. Czerniakow’s suicide has resonated historically as the ultimate act of resistance against Nazi oppression. Adam Czerniakow was the only Judenrat chairman to commit suicide upon learning that the deportations from the ghetto would result in the deaths of the Jews, and thus historians applaud his selfless act. Even historians who view the actions of the Judenrāte negatively have generally conceded that Adam Czerniakow’s suicide was the ultimate act of honor, and that his death redeemed any misfortunes his ruling style enabled. However tragic his suicide may be, his death resulted in the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, thus contradicting his goal for a ghetto free of Nazi intervention and brutality. This work will highlight the actions and behaviors of Czerniakow in order to show that his suicide was not the ultimate manifestation of a selfless rule, but rather an act that ultimately harmed the future of the ghetto.

The ruling style and leadership approach of Jacob Gens could not contrast more with Czerniakow’s. Originally the Vilna ghetto’s chief of police, he was responsible for carrying out Aktions against selected “useless” Jews. Gens became so powerful and influential within the ghetto that the Nazis declared him the head of the Jewish Council in Vilna, as well as the director of several smaller

---

7 Ibid.
surrounding ghettos early in 1942. As such, when Gens became the head of the Vilna Judenrat, he was under no false pretenses regarding the severity of Nazi intentions towards the Jews. He rationalized that the only way to keep Jews alive was to prove their usefulness to the Nazi war machine. Similar to Rumkowski’s logic, Gens adopted the now infamous policy of “salvation through work” and made great strides to prove the necessity of the Jews in Vilna to the Nazis. His self-described ruling technique rested upon “Labor, Discipline, and Order,” and he refused to tolerate insubordination and non-cooperation of any kind. Gens believed that the only way to save the majority of the Jews of Vilna was to sacrifice the older and weaker remnants of ghetto society. Although evidence shows that Gens was visibly remorseful at having to sacrifice some to save others, he stuck by his policy that the strongest and most productive Jews in Vilna would outlast their fate. His active participation in the selection and deportation of the Jews has helped to seal the fate of Gens’ legacy in the historiography of the Judenräte.

Another reason as to why historians have considered Gens a cruel and unjust leader concerns his public policy of negotiation with the Nazis. The leader of the Vilna ghetto was more than willing to fulfill the Nazis’ demands, all the while believing that cooperation would delay the liquidation of the ghetto. Additionally, his relationship with and use of the Jewish ghetto police has marred

---

15 Ibid., 280.
his image. Under the command of their former leader, the police were a powerful authority on the streets in the ghetto and proved to be able and strong enforcers of the will of Jacob Gens.¹⁶ Scholars have also chosen to blame the leader for his lack of cooperation with the underground resistance movements throughout Vilna. Under the threat of ghetto liquidation, the Gestapo forced Gens to turn in the head of the United Partisans Organization, and that action has left him permanently condemned throughout Holocaust historiography.¹⁷

While Jacob Gens’ great power and authority within the Vilna ghetto may elicit concern over his motivations regarding the lives of the Jews, his relationship to the Jewish police and his knowledge that the Nazis slaughtered deported Jews are not enough to warrant such a negative history. As this research will demonstrate, the reactions of various Judenräte after they understood the truth behind the deportations varied tremendously, but the knowledge or ignorance of such information did nothing to change the fate of the European Jews. The loss of Jewish life during the Holocaust rests solely on the actions of the Nazis, and this tragedy should not cast blame upon the men who found themselves in this catastrophic position.¹⁸ It is the hope of this work to show that, while Gens’ tactics may not have been conventional, he did succeed in establishing a ghetto that for a long time operated under Jewish authority alone, with little interference from the Nazis or German authorities. In that way, Gens was able to provide a quality of life in the Vilna ghetto that was unattainable in ghettos that lacked such

¹⁶ Ibid., 279.
an authoritative leader. His ability to provide the Jews in Vilna with a semblance of normalcy for the remainder of their lives is an important fact that historians need to consider before they pass historical judgment.

In past and present scholarship on the role of the Judenräte within the ghettos of Poland, one man continually stands above the rest, Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski of the Lodz ghetto. Arguably the most powerful and authoritative of all of the leaders throughout the Polish ghettos, Rumkowski was a man of numerous contradictions and various flaws. Victims and scholars alike have charged Rumkowski with abundant acts of treason, child molestation, Nazi collaboration, and murder—to name a few. He ruled the residents of the Lodz ghetto with an iron fist. The man who willingly provided Jews for deportations was the same man who kept his ghetto around longer than any other ghetto, and thus saved more lives than any other leader.

There is no denying that Rumkowski was power-hungry, fierce, and headstrong; both people who knew him and people who have studied him have critiqued his actions. Nevertheless, considering the context, Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski was an effective leader. He had personal character flaws, and this work does not seek to prove otherwise. However, despite his faults, his motto of “salvation through labor” endowed him with the ability to save more Jews during the Holocaust than any other ghetto leader throughout Europe.

Rumkowski set out to show the Nazi regime that the Jews were valuable resources to the German army and he succeeded. Lodz had superb resources—schools,

---

hospitals, factories, and welfare systems—compared to other Polish ghettos, and his organization of these various institutions within the ghetto was one of the main reasons why he was able to establish absolute authority. Ultimately, his tighter-grip over production determined the longevity of the ghetto. Throughout his four-year “reign” in Lodz, Rumkowski was able to prove the necessity of Jewish lives through the output of production to a degree unattainable in any other ghetto, under any other leader. This reassessment of his legacy hopes to demonstrate that his harsh personality and his willingness to please the Nazis were character traits that allowed him, within the confines of the ghetto, to become more than a leader to his people—to become the savior he believed himself to be.

The following chapters seek to explore the various successes and missteps of each leader’s ruling style within his individual ghetto. Chapter 2 will explore the organizational structure of the ghettos, including the various administrative, judicial, and economic agencies that each leader established and controlled. By highlighting the cultural and educational facilities that flourished under each man’s direction, this thesis will show how successful each leader was in utilizing the resources under his charge, and fulfilling his motto for sustaining the longevity of the ghettos. Adam Czerniakow’s inability to exert total authority, coupled with his failure to manage his administrators, led to a highly corrupt and ineffective administration in Warsaw. Jacob Gens’ close relationship to the Jewish police in Vilna ensured that all of his orders and demands were promptly and effectively carried out, thus leading to a tightly run ghetto government. Mordechai Rumkowski’s dictator-like control over all of the departments,
agencies, and establishments within his ghetto ensured that his residents were loyal and obedient, and that his authority went unquestioned. Through the establishment and success of these ghetto institutions, one can see how productive each man was in creating a quality of life that made ghetto residency bearable.

The third chapter will examine the relationships that each leader built both in and outside of the ghetto with various groups, in order to aid his leadership efforts. Memoirs, diaries, and journals of ghetto residents, provide a glimpse of each leader's interactions with "his" Jews, as well as with Nazi authorities. A close relationship to the Nazis could incite rage in the hearts of the residents, while, at the same time, afford small luxuries and advantages to the ghetto. By attempting to grasp an understanding of his relationship to the politically active and those who held influence within the ghetto, it is easier to comprehend just how powerful each leader was. If a Judenrat leader felt threatened by the existence of political groups or resistance coalitions, then it is likely that his authority within the ghetto was not exclusive, and such a fact could contribute to the waning of his influence. The relationships that each leader was able to cultivate both with his superiors and with the residents are vital to understanding not only the way that he viewed his position and power, but also the way that he was able to manipulate or benefit from those carefully proctored relationships.

The final chapter will look into each man's decisions surrounding the *Aktions* and deportations within the ghetto. Most of the controversy regarding these mens' leadership comes from their responses and reactions to learning that deportations were synonymous to death. Before history can judge these figures, it
is imperative to understand exactly what information they knew regarding the deportations. It is then crucial to try to understand their frame of mind when confronted with the ominous task of delivering human quotas to the Nazis. Why did some leaders choose to go through with delivering Jews to their deaths? Why did others refuse to acquiesce to German demands? Different Judenrat leaders' reactions varied because each had differing concepts of the Nazi plans for the Jews left behind in the ghettos. For example, Rumkowski offered to send away the sick, the elderly, and the children, because he believed that they were of no use to his manufacturing center in the ghetto. He believed that by sending some to their deaths, he would be able to save others, the "productive" members of ghetto society. In contrast, Jacob Gens refused to send the children away, because he believed that they were necessary to procuring and populating a healthy and able Jewish nation after the war. Czerniakow was so horrified at the thought of sending Jews to their deaths that he committed suicide, perhaps believing that if the Nazis would not spare even the children, that there was no hope for the rest of the population.

The Judenräte have elicited a variety of responses from Holocaust historians, ranging from fury to disagreement to sympathy. The benefit of hindsight has enabled both historians and survivors to cast judgment on the lot of these men. Comparative analysis with other leaders and the longevity of various other ghettos has further invited harsh judgment and unfair criticism of their leadership. As stated earlier, the historiography of the Judenräte comprises three schools of scholars: those who claim the Judenrat was a collaborative enterprise, those that believe that Judenrat did all in its
power to resist the Nazi onslaught, and those that fall somewhere in the middle—believing that the Judenrat collaborated with the Nazis in order to save as many Jews as possible.

The oldest and most staunch attacker of the men of the Jewish Councils was historian Phillip Friedman. Immediately after the end of the Second World War, Friedman sought to highlight the injustices and hardships experienced by ghetto Jews because of the decisions and actions taken by their so-called “leaders.” He argued that the term “leader” should not apply to members of the Jewish Councils. Friedman claimed that since they “attained their status and jobs because of peculiar circumstances, they must not be placed on the same rank as elected leaders recognized by the community.”

He vehemently argued that members of the Judenrāte were “... a bunch of extortionists, smugglers, gangsters, and hoodlums who knew how to exploit the abnormal situation created by the Nazis.” Furthermore, Friedman argues that members of the Judenrāte stayed in their positions because they were motivated by “delusions of grandeur.” He claims that these men felt themselves to be crucial to the orchestration of the ghetto government, without which the Jews of the ghetto would be doomed. For Friedman, these false visions of self-righteousness and glory brought members of the Jewish Councils to “the lowest moral depths.” While Friedman’s analysis might seem particularly harsh, his views formed the foundation of the complex and sensitive historiography regarding these men.

21 Ibid., 96.
22 Ibid., 95.
23 Ibid.
Solomon F. Bloom also belongs to the school of thought that considers the members of the Judenräte to be Nazi collaborators. He claims that the leaders of the Jewish Councils were opportunistic men who used their newfound positions of authority for the betterment of themselves and their families. He claims that these men were “… self-seeking and opportunistic leaders, guided by circumstances circumscribed by individual need, concern or even ambition, determined to survive and to “inherit riches.”  

Bloom argues that the majority of these leaders took advantage of their positions and used their power to dominate and control all aspects of their individual ghetto’s existence. He contends that they never missed a chance to benefit and flourish amidst the horror of the reality of life around them. He even argues that these leaders were especially manipulative when it came to controlling the ghettos finances. He claims that tax collection in particular became a venue for the leaders to engage in acts of robbery, extortion, and blackmail, amidst varying other degrees of authoritative abuse. 

Bernard Klein also offers a negative view of the role and actions of the Judenräte. While not as unforgiving as the previous historians, he still admonishes the men of the Jewish Councils for being naive. He claims that the majority of the Judenräte throughout Eastern Europe believed everything that the Nazi officials told them and thus worked hard to meet their demands. While he acknowledges that it is wrong to label the entirety of the Judenrat institution as Nazi collaborators, he admits that most of them were too quick to fall for the promises of the Gestapo. Even when it became clear that the Gestapo would not follow through on its guarantees, the Jewish Councils continued to obey their demands blindly. In this way, unquestioned obedience clouded the members’

---

25 Ibid., 75.
ability to search for other options and solutions to the vast amount of growing problems they faced on a daily basis. Subsequently, the Judenrat became a most compliant tool for the Germans.27

Hannah Arendt brought the issue of Jewish leadership to the forefront of Holocaust historiography in 1963. While covering the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Israel in 1961, Arendt repeatedly echoed the sentiment that there was much truth concerning Eichmann’s description of Jewish cooperation throughout the course of the Final Solution.28 In *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Arendt argues that the Judenräte “almost without exception” cooperated with the Nazis for a variety of reasons and in a variety of different formats.29 She further claims, that while the Jewish people in general behaved honorably, albeit tragically, throughout the course of their plight, their leaders failed them miserably.30 The striking poignancy of her arguments is evident in her infamous claim: “The whole truth was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery, but the total number of victims would have hardly have been between four and a half and six million people.”31 Arendt is clearly arguing that the Nazis were only able to commit atrocities on such a large scale due to the actions of the Judenräte. Her arguments further propelled research into the catastrophic and controversial roles of the members of the Jewish Councils.

27 Ibid., 31.
29 Ibid., 125.
30 Ibid., 284.
31 Ibid., 129.
Typically linked with Arendt concerning the role of the Jewish Councils, Raul Hilberg has similarly argued for the large Jewish role in their own demise. He claims that subservient cooperation of the Judenräte with the Nazis only hastened the speed of the Jewish destruction process.  

In *The Destruction of the European Jews*, originally published in 1961, Hilberg argues that the Jewish Councils put the fate of the Jews on the course of complete and utter compliance and cooperation with Nazi officials. He argues that the reason for the overall lack of resistance on behalf of ghetto residents was due to the subservience of the Judenrat and the effect that such a relationship had on the actions of the ghetto residents.  

A focus on the complicity and collaboration has predominated in the historiography of the Judenräte, but Isaiah Trunk attempted to usurp the condescending histories that followed the war. Published in 1972, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under the Nazi Occupation*, conducted the most comprehensive study of this large and complicated Nazi institution to date. In his groundbreaking work, Trunk clarifies and contextualizes the position of these men in relation not only to their failures, but also to their accomplishments and successes. He sought to objectively tell the tragic story of men put in a seemingly impossible position and to highlight the numerous agencies, bureaucracies, and laws that flourished under their charge. He argued that historians were too quick to label the intentions of these men and to forever mar their legacies without fully understanding the complications of their role in history. Trunk claimed that researchers were too quick to generalize concerning this complex historical

33 Ibid., 200.
34 Ibid.
element, and that the actions of these men as well as their attitudes towards their jobs need to be taken into consideration.\footnote{35} He was the first to take such a comprehensive look at the reality of the hardships and horror that faced these men on a daily basis, and he helped to reassess their image amidst the flurry of negative historiography that dominated the field.

Jacob Robinson also argues that it is important to understand the reality of the difficulties these men faced before one is able to aptly judge or label their role in the destruction of European Jewry. Robinson claims that while the council members’ predicament was highly tragic, their role in history should still be carefully considered. The various actions of these men upon learning that deportations mean death can reveal much about their character and, subsequently, about their leadership.\footnote{36} Ultimately, however, he argues that whether the Council members actively participated in the deportations of the Jews or not, the outcome would not have changed. He contends that the result of the Holocaust would have been the same regardless of the participation or non-participation of the members of the Judenräte.\footnote{37}

Aharon Weiss argues that the Jewish inhabitants of the ghetto were in a position to use their Judenrat in order to strengthen their chances for survival. He asserts that historians should also consider the fact that the councils were sometimes misused and abused by the people they served.\footnote{38} While he acknowledges that the councils were indeed


\footnote{36} Jacob Robinson, introduction to Trunk, 	extit{Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation}, xxx.

\footnote{37} Ibid., xxxv.

useful tools of the Germans, their intentions were noble, and although their outcomes were tragic, their legacies should reflect their merit. He claims that the Councils acceded to German demands in order to increase their indispensability and thus bolster their chances at survival. He argues that these leaders were focused on gaining time, and were willing to do whatever it took in order to delay the inevitable. The following argument by Weiss best summarizes the revisionist camp regarding the role and legacy of the tragic men who served the Judenräte:

It does seem, on the basis of the data in our possession, that many of the Judenrat did stand up to the test of Jewish honor—perhaps even more so than is generally believed. This is not meant as an apologetic commentary; it is based on facts, and remains valid even when we apply the severest of moral criteria.

The arguments of this thesis fall into the revisionist school regarding the role of the Judenrat throughout history. This work does not attempt to argue with Hannah Arendt concerning the fact that the majority of Judenrat leaders did cooperate with the Nazis. Most did, believing that their “collaboration” would keep the residents of their ghettos safe. However, contrary to the arguments of Solomon F. Bloom and Phillip Friedman, the majority of these leaders detested their position, understanding that, no matter what they did, they would never be able to save all of their people. Most grasped the complexity of their role in the ghetto and resigned themselves to making decisions that would benefit the ghetto as a whole, accepting the realities of the losses they would inflict on some.

The role of the men who served on the Jewish Councils in the ghettos of Eastern Europe has elicited enormous controversy and disagreement among historians of the Holocaust. This thesis will reassess the controversial images of

39 Ibid., 203.
40 Ibid., 217.
the three most prominent Judenrat leaders in Poland during the Holocaust. In the process, this thesis acknowledges the difference between reassessing a man’s image and casting judgment. Given the unfathomable position of the Judenräte, historians need to be careful in walking the line between objective research and bias condemnation. The tendency of many historians to use hindsight in order to chastise and judge historical figures adds nothing to the understanding of the horror of the Holocaust.

Historian Yehuda Bauer has aptly expressed the difficulties and tribulations faced by historians who attempt to unlock the mystery and intrigue of the role of the Judenräte:

Have we a moral right to consider this subject? Is there not an insufferable pretentiousness in our discussion which pronounces judgment, gives a verdict on these Judenrat Councils which existed under conditions which, as has already been said, cannot be compared to any other conditions in our history in particular, and in the history of other nations generally.\(^4\)

The goal of this thesis is not to judge the role of these men in light of the horrendous conditions in which the Nazis placed them. Rather, it is to highlight the success or ineffectiveness of each man in fulfilling the goals and standards that he established, upon assuming his position of authority. Contrary to the historiography that has painted these men in certain lights based upon their behaviors in particular situations, this thesis will highlight the leadership ability of each man based upon his decisions and actions in a broad spectrum of venues.

This chapter began with a heartfelt plea from Jacob Gens to the members of the Vilna ghetto. He petitioned his people to understand his

conundrum. He also asked that they remember all of the good things that he has
done for them. He reminded them that he was the one who established a work
force within the ghetto and that it was he who was able to secure food and
benefits for the Jews of Vilna. The following chapter will analyze the various
bureaucratic agencies that each leader created in order to serve the Jews in the
ghetto. Like Gens, Rumkowski and Czerniakow also heard the cries of their
people and made strenuous efforts to create institutions that would both work with
and for the good of the Jews. Chapter 2 will detail the extent of the success of
those agencies and in turn provide an understanding of the leadership style of the
men they reflected.
CHAPTER II

THE GHETTO AS A CITY UNTO ITSELF

Our Father, who art in heaven...
This prayer was carved out of hunger and misery
Our Daily bread.
Bread.

-From the Diary of Janusz Korczak in the Warsaw Ghetto

The situation seemed hopeless. In charge of over 400,000 Jews in Warsaw, Czerniakow’s hands were tied when it came to administering healthcare for the sick and feeble in his ghetto. There were simply too many people, not enough doctors, and most definitely not enough funds to cover the costs of their care. Due to various administrative oversights, employees in the ghetto hospital had not been paid for months. Tensions were high, tempers exploded, hunger mounted, and sickness prevailed. Residents flocked to Czerniakow’s office daily to confront the leader, and he heard the pleas of the sick and the anger of the hospital employees. There was a lot of work to do to fix the problems that seemed to multiply in the hospital, but little time and not enough money by which to do it. Czerniakow often felt helpless when it came to running his ghetto. When he could turn to no one for help, he confided in his diary, as he did on 18 July 1941:

I received a letter from Milekjowski [head of the health department] from the hospital informing me that he had been kept captive there, and would not be released until the employees receive their back pay... though nobody knows out of what funds. I replied that I would not do it under duress. Tomorrow however, we will have to pay out over 100,000 zlotys.

---

42 Janusz Korczak, Ghetto Diary (New York: Holocaust Library, 1978), 188.
The situation in the ghetto was so unstable that Jews were holding each other ransom in order to elicit attention and aid from the Judenrat. Czerniakow’s nerves were getting the better of him. When would this end? When would the shackles of this position free him? He sighed, closed his diary, and got up from his desk. The hospital would have to wait. There were other departments to attend to.

In order to show that the policies of Rumkowski and Gens concerning the management of their ghetto led them to be effective leaders, and the refusal of Czerniakow to emulate the Nazis authoritative leadership style resulted in a highly mismanaged and ineffective ghetto administration, it is vital to understand the vast impromptu governments that they oversaw. This chapter will outline the important administrative units that each leader organized throughout their ghetto and analyze the efficiency and success of each bureaucracy. Through a closer examination of the departments and agencies each leader set up, it is easier grasp an understanding of how well each man softened the hardships of Nazi rule, and provided comfort and stability to the Jews amidst the chaos of Nazi occupation. Although the outcome for each ghetto remained the same, the quality of life in the interim is of vast importance. Since the goal of the Nazis was to murder all of the Jews, the longer they were able to survive, the more they were able to resist the Nazis. The longer the Jews were able to maintain lives resembling normalcy, the longer their refusal to succumb to the Nazi dehumanization process. Retaining their health, going to school, participating in cultural events—these were all activities that prolonged Jewish life, which in turn became a source of spiritual resistance against the Nazi onslaught.
Each man was responsible for establishing departments that catered to the growing needs of the Jews under his care. These agencies had four responsibilities: food, social welfare, labor and culture. Each flourished or faltered due to the style of leadership under which it operated. Because Gens and Rumkowski exerted an authoritative and controlling hold over the bureaucratic agencies in Vilna and Lodz, they were able to provide a better quality of life for the ghetto inhabitants than those in Warsaw. Their almost singular control over the ghetto institutions allowed for the smallest interference from the Nazis. The longer the Nazis directly avoided contact with the ghetto Jews, the better the quality of life was for the Jews. Czerniakow’s unwillingness to exert absolutely authority over the ghetto administration allowed for corruption, power struggles, and bribery, not only throughout the administration but also among the civilian population.

The establishment of each ghetto institution and its success or failure is a reflection upon the style of leadership and the policies that each man established upon gaining his position.

Prior to becoming the leader of the Warsaw Judenrat, Adam Czerniakow was an industrial engineer. He was highly assimilated and identified more with Polish causes than with Jewish ones. Nonetheless, he still took on leadership roles within the Jewish community in order to promote his assimilationist viewpoints. On 7 October 1939, the Gestapo took over the governing of Warsaw and appointed existing Jewish community leaders to the Judenrat. When Mayrycy Mayzel, the chair of the Jewish community council, fled Warsaw, Mayor Stefan Starzynski nominated Czerniakow as chair of the

---

Judenrat. As a previous member of the Jewish Advisory Council in Warsaw, Czerniakow emulated his previous leadership tactics in his new role as Chair of the Warsaw Judenrat. He set about ensuring that the members of the Judenrat consisted of fellow Polish nationalists with assimilationist backgrounds. He believed that the Germans would be more respectful to an assimilationist Judenrat.

For Czerniakow, becoming the head of the Warsaw Judenrat meant that he was responsible for publicizing German orders and relaying transmissions from the Nazis to the Jews of Warsaw. He believed that he had no discretionary power beyond his role as the Nazis’ voice. His governing philosophy reflected his belief that it was his job to publish Nazi demands but that it was beyond his control to enforce them. Although he was the head of the Judenrat, the idea of declaring absolute authority over the ghetto did not appeal to him, while it was at the forefront of the strategies of both Gens and Rumkowski. He instead remained a figurehead and was content to allow parallel groups and individuals within the ghetto to develop power.

His ruling style and his understanding of his authority highly influenced the running of the ghetto, especially concerning its most important issue: food.

The German invasion of Warsaw was catastrophic for the Poles, but the closing of the ghetto on 6 November 1939 proved fatal for Warsaw’s Jews. Adam Czerniakow and his Judenrat were responsible for the livelihoods of over 400,000 Jews within a cramped and poverty-stricken section of the city of Warsaw. His first priority was the ghetto’s

---

47 Tushnet, *The Pavement of Hell*, 82.
48 Ibid., 83.
49 Ibid., 120.
50 Ibid., 118.
51 Ibid., 110.
food supply, but Czerniakow and the Judenrat had no funds with which to purchase or administer relief. The Chairman of the Judenrat negotiated with various banks in Warsaw where wealthy Jews had accounts to secure loans and provide food for the ghetto.\(^{53}\) Various loans, as well as income taxes and indirect taxation on necessities throughout the ghetto, allowed Czerniakow to organize some measure of public relief for the beleaguered ghetto inhabitants.\(^{54}\)

Throughout the chaos and disorder of the early days of the ghetto, Czerniakow established soup kitchens that catered to over 60 percent of the population. At the height of social welfare efforts in the ghetto, there were 145 public kitchens and forty-six children’s kitchens that served an average of 135,000 meals a day.\(^{55}\) However, these soup kitchens only served meals containing 170-200 calories, and most of the lower and middle classes depended on this ration alone for survival.\(^{56}\) Even with the kitchens providing some sort of need to the poor, the welfare institution was unable to take care of everyone.\(^{57}\) At least initially, Czerniakow designed the kitchens as a temporary solution until the Judenrat could establish a systematic labor and food organization.

In order to remedy the food situation in the ghetto, Czerniakow established an official rationing system as well as monthly taxes on the ration cards to provide administration funding.\(^{58}\) Residents purchased the allotted items on their individual allowance cards from stores in the ghetto. However, the caloric value of the rationed foods in the ghetto barely met 10% of the minimum daily caloric requirements.\(^{59}\)

\(^{53}\) Tushnet, *The Pavement of Hell*, 86.
\(^{54}\) Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945*, 156.
\(^{59}\) Isaiah Trunk, “Epidemics and Mortality in the Warsaw Ghetto, 1939-1942,” 92-93.
food that was available for purchase came from various businesses in the ghetto. Unlike Vilna and Lodz, the Warsaw ghetto adopted a laissez faire economic policy in regards to private establishments within the ghetto. The Judenrat exerted no control over businesses, the most important of these being restaurants, groceries, and bakeries. Although residents had the ability to purchase extra food from these various shops in order to supplement the meager allotment allowed by the ration cards, few could do so. The hunger within the ghetto and the reign of the free market drove food prices so high that most residents turned to smuggling in order to survive.60

Smuggling became a crucial way of life for those within the Warsaw ghetto’s walls. With almost half a million people under his charge and without the resources to change their lots, Czerniakow looked the other way when it came to smuggling food into the ghetto from the Aryan side. 61 At one point, over 80% of the food in the ghetto came by means of smuggling.62 Isaiah Trunk argues that had the Judenrat in Warsaw outlawed smuggling as it had in Lodz, and to a certain extent in Vilna, the ghetto’s Jews would have quickly died.63

The decision by Adam Czerniakow to allow private enterprises to dominate the economy of the ghetto had severe consequences for the Jews of Warsaw. Although he established an official rationing system, Czerniakow did not control cost and allotment, as he allowed private industry to manage that important aspect of ghetto life. The subsequent necessity of smuggling only further increased the price for food and led to starvation and death among the lower classes and to the growing poverty rates among the

60 Tushnet, The Pavement of Hell, 100.
61 Ibid., 101.
63 Trunk, “Epidemics and Mortality in the Warsaw Ghetto, 1939-1942,” 93.
upper classes. By 1942, between 500 and 600 Jews died daily of starvation in the
ghetto. Although the number of deaths from hunger alone was staggering, starvation
also induced epidemics that swept through the ghetto at an alarming rate and further
depleted the ghetto population. While Czerniakow could not have foreseen the
devastating consequences of his decisions, the results of his ruling style were ultimately
catastrophic for the livelihood of the Jews in Warsaw.

In Vilna, the organization of the ghetto was vastly different from that in Warsaw,
the striking contrast was a direct result of variations in leadership. Jacob Gens was a
Lithuanian army officer prior to his appointment as chief of police in Vilna. He was well-
educated and respected in both military and intellectual circles. He was married to a non
Jewish Lithuanian woman and considered himself a Revisionist Zionist, which meant that
he was sensitive to the plight of the Jews in their desire to return to Palestine. Although
not overtly religious, he identified with the politics of Zionism and still considered
himself sympathetic to Jewish causes, although he did not practice the religion. Due to
his military background and leadership experience, he was a prime candidate for a
position of authority when the Germans invaded Lithuania.

While the rest of Poland struggled with the Nazi occupation from 1939, Vilna was
spared from German brutality for two years, until 22 June 1941. The Nazis established
the Vilna Judenrat on 4 July 1941 and placed under its charge roughly 39,000 Jews.
Originally, the Nazis established two ghettos in Vilna in September, one ghetto for the

---

64 Tushnet, The Pavement of Hell, 123.
66 Ibid.
67 The Holocaust Education and Archive Research Team, “The Vilnius Ghetto”
“productive” elements of society and the other for the elderly and sick. Jacob Gens was not a member of the Judenrat at this time; he was the chief of police in Vilna and was responsible for several smaller surrounding ghettos as well. However, within a few months Gens proved to be an organized and highly efficient police chief and impressed the Nazis with his tireless work ethic. In July of 1942, the Nazis dissolved the entire Vilna Judenrat and made Jacob Gens the sole leader over the ghetto. The Nazis believed that Gens would be better able to carry out Nazi demands, as he had already proven himself through his actions as chief of police. Gens employed the same strict, non-apologetic, and brutal leadership style as the head of the ghetto as he did as the head of the police. After attaining his new position, he addressed his administration, “I am the ghetto...I alone am responsible for the ghetto and what goes on in it. Whoever opposes me will be expelled from the ghetto.” All of his decisions and actions as head of the Vilna ghetto reflect his controlling and dominating personality.

As was the case in all of the Eastern European ghettos, food was always at the forefront of problems facing the Judenrat. Unlike the Warsaw ghetto, there were no private enterprises in the Vilna Ghetto. All workshops and industries came to fruition to meet the needs of the ghetto residents from within, and operated under the control of the ghetto administration. The food situation that became so catastrophic in Warsaw never occurred in Vilna. Because Gens and his administration were in total control of the food rationing system, there were no outlandish inflation issues or unstable smuggling.

---

71 Tushnet, The Pavement of Hell 172,
operations. As will be further explored later, Gens' labor policy privileged the employed over the unemployed by allowing them more food. At the same time, soup kitchens provided meals for the unemployed and to children enrolled in the ghetto schools.\textsuperscript{72}

Income taxes as well as taxes on cultural events and various administrative fees within the ghetto helped finance welfare establishments in Vilna.\textsuperscript{73} Gens took great strides to make sure that every resident received food and health care upon request. He established various social welfare institutions, including soup kitchens that catered specifically to the Kosher as well as non-Orthodox Jews in the ghetto.\textsuperscript{74} As noted by various historians, there were \textit{no} deaths from starvation in the Vilna ghetto under Gens' command, as opposed to the famines experienced in Warsaw and, to a lesser extent, in Lodz.\textsuperscript{75}

Gens' ability to ward off starvation in Vilna had much to do with his policies on smuggling. Gens was a strict ruler who expected his commands to be obeyed and executed upon will, and used his Jewish police to aid in carrying out his orders and demands. Because Gens and his police had developed an unapologetic and brutal reputation among the masses, the Nazis respected their presence and authority in Vilna.

The Nazis assigned Gens' police the responsibility for guarding the ghetto gate without Nazi oversight. Because many residents of the ghetto worked outside the walls, there was constant traffic in and out of the ghetto, all regulated by the strict Jewish police. Gens knew that many of the laborers from the ghetto were smuggling large quantities of food into the walls. At times, he would have his police confiscate the foodstuffs in order to

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 166.
\textsuperscript{73} Trunk, \textit{Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation}, 238.
\textsuperscript{74} Yitzhak Arad, \textit{Ghetto in Flames} (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1980), 311.
\textsuperscript{75} Tushnet, \textit{Pavement of Hell}, 165.
redistribute them to his soup kitchens and welfare institutions. At other times, Gens allowed the smuggled goods into the ghetto for the personal use of individual residents. He established six large bakeries and twenty-eight smaller ones in the ghetto to make use of smuggled items alone. He also imposed special taxes on food smugglers and speculators to increase the social welfare budget for the ghetto. For the most part, smuggling went unnoticed by the Nazis, and Gens managed to both impress them with his ferocity while at the same time aiding the poorer elements within his ghetto.

Jacob Gens was able to procure food for the residents under his command due entirely to the tight control he inflicted over all aspects of the ghetto. By outlawing private enterprise within the ghetto, the attainment of food rations depended entirely upon the administration, which in turn helped to encourage a productive labor force within the ghetto. With Gens and his administration in charge of food distribution, there was no chance of inflated food prices and no starving residents. His authoritarian ruling method earned the Nazis' respect and trust. Due to his relationship with the occupation forces, he was able to sneak and deceive the Nazis and use his trickery to better the lives of his residents.

Jacob Gens was not the only ghetto leader to benefit from a close relationship with the Nazis. Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski also attributed most of his success to the cooperative relationship he nurtured with the Nazis. On 19 October 1939, roughly a month after Germany invaded Poland, Rumkowski became the Elder of the Jews in the city of Lodz. Prior to his appointment, Rumkowski was an advocate for orphaned

---

77 Tushnet, *Pavement of Hell*, 166.
78 Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 295.
79 Ibid., 305.
children in Lodz. He was a widower with no children of his own, and thus he worked tirelessly on the behalf of orphans and always held their needs and concerns close to his heart. In the 1920s and 1930s, he also unsuccessfully attempted to get involved in Jewish political life, particularly in various Zionist movements in Poland. When Germany invaded Poland, Rumkowski was a man in no particular position of authority, but with every desire to get there.

On 12 September 1939, the Lodz Kehilla (Jewish community) nominated Leizer Plywacki as their representative to the German occupiers, and Rumkowski became his chief deputy. However, on 21 September, Plywacki fled Lodz for the east, leaving Rumkowski the highest ranking Jewish official in Lodz. During the early days of the Nazi occupation, around October of 1939, the Nazis also appointed an advisory council to aid and assist Rumkowski in the organization and running of the Lodz ghetto. The council consisted of very influential and powerful Jews who held prewar positions of authority within the city of Lodz. However, on 7 November 1939, only a month after their appointment, all but two of the members of the early council were seized by the Gestapo and taken to prison camps, where they were later murdered. The reasons why the first council was destroyed are still unclear, as are the whereabouts of the remaining survivor of the group. On 5 February 1940, Rumkowski established a second council to assist him with his overwhelming responsibilities. This second advisory council consisted

---

81 Ibid, 130.
of less educated Jewish men, as most influential and educated Jews either evacuated east or were murdered, and thus Rumkowski had a small group to choose from. 84

The Nazis dismissed all existing Jewish public agencies and institutions and declared that they be reconstituted under Rumkowski’s jurisdiction. 85 From the start, the Nazis granted Rumkowski an incredible amount of power to execute future demands and orders. Crucially, the Germans authorized him to impose and collect taxes in order establish various institutions and carry out Nazi demands. 86 By the time the ghetto in Lodz was sealed in May 1940, there was no doubt over who was in charge of Jewish Lodz.

In order to prevent diseases stemming from starvation, the issue of food rationing was continually at the forefront of Rumkowski’s problems. He established a strict food system to ensure that everyone received enough to survive. Initially, Rumkowski followed a typical German provisioning policy that took into consideration the various needs of workers and non-workers. For example, people who worked in the ghetto factories would receive more rations than those who by their own choice were not working. 87 Children who went to the ghetto schools also received extra food, as did patients in the hospitals and the elderly in the nursing care facilities. Although the system was designed to help those who helped themselves (by working), Rumkowski still had the authority to manipulate the rationing system to his choosing. Sometimes he gave people he liked extra rations, and, at times, he took food away from his enemies. 88

84 Ibid.
86 Trunk, Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation, 9.
88 Ibid.
A significant aspect crucial to understanding the importance of the rationing system was the outlawing of smuggling. Unlike Czerniakow in Warsaw and Gens in Vilna, Rumkowski refused to tolerate smuggling of any form. He believed that if people found other ways to get food, then they would be less likely to earn their keep in the factories, and thus his salvation-by-labor methodology would fail. In an official report to the authorities on 12 June 1940, Rumkowski outlined his stance on smuggling:

I employed the severest measures to stop the smuggling that was going on and, thereby, to keep prices from being driven up. It was difficult to catch the small groups of smugglers, who operated secretly and were helped by people outside the ghetto, who supplied them with foodstuffs and so on at black market prices. 89

Rumkowski’s openness and honesty with the authorities, in his opinion, would help to establish a trust between both parties that would benefit himself and the ghetto in the future.

From the earliest days of the ghetto until its demise, food was the number one priority. As previously shown, the Judenrat leaders were aware that without a proper food distribution structure, their time in the ghetto would be short. Their next move was to further aid the people left destitute from the rushed ghettoization process. While soup kitchens helped to ease the transition into ghetto life, further actions on behalf of the Judenrat were imperative to ensuring a happy and healthy ghetto population. A healthy ghetto population was synonymous with a productive population, which in turn helped the ghetto to thrive.

Adam Czerniakow faced the greatest challenges as a Judenrat leader, as he was responsible for the largest ghetto population throughout Poland and Eastern Europe.

After establishing his food rationing system, his next focus was on healthcare within the ghetto. Epidemics were rampant throughout Warsaw due to the lack of food and prevalent malnutrition, and thus a health care system was vital to ensuring longevity within the ghetto. The new boundaries of the ghetto did not include the original Jewish Hospital in Warsaw, so the Nazis forced the Jews to move the hospital to two smaller buildings within the ghetto. They forbade the Jews to transfer the expensive medical equipment into the ghetto so they were only able to procure small amounts of medicines and vaccines and only took primitive equipment. The ghetto hospital even lacked quilts and linens.\(^90\) The hospital was overcrowded and understaffed, and patients seeking medical attention sometimes waited for days in the hospital before being seen by doctors. Ghetto resident Emmanuel Ringelblum noted that patients either died very quickly from lack of nourishment in the hospitals or from the diseases that brought them there.\(^91\) The ghetto hospital slowly became Jewish Warsaw’s morgue.

However, by September of 1941, the Health Department of the Judenrat was able to establish two hospitals, three outpatient clinics, one sanitary commission of physicians, eight disinfection units, four bath houses, and three places of quarantine.\(^92\) They also built nineteen pharmacies, including one that catered strictly to the poor by administering free medicines. At times, over 25,000 people were served by a single pharmacy.\(^93\) By 1941, over 28 percent of the Judenrat’s budget went to medical care.\(^94\) Although the previous appears to be a considerable success within the confines of the ghetto and the

\(^{90}\) Trunk, “Epidemics and Mortality in the Warsaw Ghetto, 1939-1942,” 101.
\(^{92}\) Trunk, Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation, 159.
\(^{93}\) Ibid., 158.
\(^{94}\) Ibid., 159.
administrative budget, the health care system was not able to cope with the reality of sickness and disease that abounded throughout the ghetto. Although most health care administrators did the best they could with limited resources, the ineptitude and corruption of many proved catastrophic for its neediest residents.

In 1940, there were 1,758 reported cases of typhus in the ghetto. By 1941, there were 15,449 admitted cases, but in reality estimates show that for every reported case of typhus, an average of eight existed. Upon the acknowledgement of typhus and other contagious diseases, the ghetto administration demanded that the infected parties be quarantined and that their homes be blockaded to allow time for disinfection. The inconveniences that quarantines and home blockades caused incited many people to bribe their way out of such demands. The Jewish Police as well as the Health Department were always accepting monetary bribes in order to turn a blind eye to violations of disinfection standards.

Disinfection brigades, whose sole purpose was to sanitize infected peoples and their homes, also accepted bribes for certificates of clean health. Extortion and blackmail became a part of everyday life, and diseases continued to spread because they were not properly treated. Historian Isaiah Trunk argues, “The tragic situation in the hospital was in no small measure due to the helplessness of the administrative management which often resulted in organizational chaos; the unsocial atmosphere prevalent in the hospital made it possible for abuses to develop such as graft, exploitation, and plain thievery.”

From 1939 to 1941, approximately 85,000 people died of contagious diseases in the

---

95 Ibid., 158.
96 Ibid., 85.
97 Ibid., 107.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., 103.
Warsaw Ghetto. To give you an idea of just how staggering that number was, it is helpful to note that from May 1940 to July 1944, twice the time period as in Warsaw, the Lodz Ghetto lost 43,743 people to health related issues. The inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto who were both sick and poor did not stand a chance of survival.

The health of the residents of the Vilna ghetto was much better than those living in Warsaw’s ghetto. Although the Healthcare Department of the Judenrat was established prior to Jacob Gens’ promotion as head of the ghetto, upon assuming his new position he introduced strict sanitary and hygienic measures in order to keep the population as healthy as possible, and to ensure the stability of a productive work force. The Jewish hospital in the ghetto had numerous departments, including, “surgery, gynecology, internal diseases, pediatrics, infectious diseases, children diseases, larynology, eye diseases, neuropathology, and radiology.” The hospital was staffed by 150 doctors, nurses, and technical assistants. Gens’ most important medicinal measures revolved around preventing contagious diseases. Since his police chief duties took him to surrounding ghettos, he was no stranger to the realities of epidemics, and was determined to make every effort possible to ensure that his ghetto remained healthy.

The leader in Vilna allocated most of his health care budget to sanitary and epidemiological initiatives. On 1 August 1942, Gens declared that bread rations only be given to people who were able to prove that they had taken disinfecting baths. The sanitation division of the Health Department set up public baths and disinfection centers

---

100 Ibid., 119.
101 Ibid., 154.
102 Rachel Konstanian-Danzig, Spiritual Resistance in the Vilna Ghetto (Kaunas, Lithuania: The Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, 2002), 42.
103 Arad, Ghetto in Flames, 315.
104 Trunk, Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation, 163.
that catered to the public. Attendance at these baths was mandatory, and bribery and evasion were not tolerated in Vilna as they were in Warsaw. The police in Vilna thoroughly enforced Gens’ regulations regarding health, even going so far as detaining and arresting people for violating the cleanliness regulations.\(^\text{105}\)

Yitzhak Arad, the official historian of the Vilna ghetto, stresses the importance that Gens placed on educating the public on how to prevent contagious diseases. Gens published informative brochures, arranged lectures, and organized discussions on hygienic requirements and the combating of contagious diseases. With the help of his police, he employed strict supervision over restaurants, public kitchens, and bakeries.\(^\text{106}\)

The Health Department also ensured that individuals and homes were thoroughly checked and treated for lice and bed bugs. Gens also established laundry centers to purify clothing, and barbershops to prevent the spread of lice.\(^\text{107}\)

Due to his fervent pursuit of hygiene, the Vilna ghetto did not experience a single epidemic of contagious disease throughout its existence.\(^\text{108}\)

It is difficult to determine why Jacob Gens’ Vilna ghetto was able to withstand the epidemics that plagued Adam Czerniakow’s Warsaw ghetto. Although Gens was dealing with a much smaller population, the Jews in Vilna endured the same living conditions as did the Jews of Warsaw. However, Gens’ dictatorial and steadfast control over the Health Department ensured that every resident of his ghetto was disinfected and healthy. Czerniakow’s willingness to delegate orders to his administrators resulted in loopholes within his authority structure. The abundant poverty in the Warsaw ghetto made it easier


\(^{106}\) Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 317.

\(^{107}\) Tushnet, *Pavement of Hell*, 156.

\(^{108}\) Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 318.
for ghetto administrators to accept bribes in relation to health care. The Vilna police
force's close relationship with Jacob Gens ensured that no bribes of any kind were
tolerated within the ghetto, and thus a controlled health care system flourished. The
different ruling styles of each leader had enormous impact on the operating and
functioning of the various departments under their control.

The success of the Health Department in the Lodz ghetto fell somewhere in
between that of the Warsaw and Vilna ghettos. While Rumkowski was proactive in
establishing numerous health and wellness centers in the ghetto, he was not as successful
as Jacob Gens in keeping epidemics out. Rumkowski was the sole authority figure in the
Lodz ghetto, and his obsession with precision was not lost in the construction of a health
unit within his ghetto. By January 1941, Rumkowski, along with various doctors and
medical professionals in the ghetto, helped to establish seven hospitals, five clinics, and
seven pharmacies. 109 The Health Department also included a gynecological unit, two
emergency aid stations, one disinfection plant, one antituberculosis station, and a station
for insulin treatment. 110 There were even separate nursing care facilities for elderly
patients, and clinics that catered specifically to the needs of children. 111

The clinics in the Lodz ghetto saw approximately six thousand patients a month,
and hospital doctors saw between ten and twelve thousand patients in any given month. 112
Numerous Jewish doctors and nurses worked tirelessly to limit the spread of diseases,
including the effects of hunger on their patients and contain tuberculosis, scurvy, and

110 Trunk, Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation, 156.
111 The Holocaust Education and Archive Research Team, “Lodz Ghetto”
112 Ibid.
bone decalcification. In 1941, an estimated 75 percent of the ghetto population was tubercular, and deaths caused by hunger were 13 times their prewar number. While the ghetto environment caused diseases that were not an issue prior to the war, the health care establishment was able to quarantine such breakouts. No epidemics occurred throughout the entirety of the ghetto’s existence. The establishment of an effective health care system was vital to the health and safety of the infected as well as for the preventative care of the healthy in Lodz.

Rumkowski’s vast health care system was short-lived, however. After the deportations of September 1942, he transformed most of the health care facilities into productive workshops and factories. When it became clear to him that the Jewish place in German Lodz was not secure, he turned his focus towards making the ghetto a more productive enterprise. That meant transforming all unnecessary space into industrial shops. He left two hospitals running within the ghetto in order to help productive Jews get well so that they could go back to work. Rumkowski’s number one goal as leader of the Lodz ghetto was to establish a productive work force, and he removed anything that stood in its way.

After food and healthcare, establishing a labor force was the most vital component on the agendas of all Judenrat leaders. Raul Hilberg stressed the importance of a labor system within the ghetto communities for both short-term and long-term survival: “In as much as the ghettos were economic units, they had to trade something for the meager supply of food and fuel, and to the extent that ghetto production was essential

---

113 Trunk, Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation, 147.
115 Trunk, Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation, 156.
to the Germans, it might save the inmates from destruction. Not surprisingly, therefore, Rumkowski and Gens strove to turn their ghettos into factories...”\textsuperscript{116} And yet the question remains; why was Adam Czerniakow not also influenced by this rationale?

According to Judenrat historian Isaiah Trunk, there were generally two reasons for the establishment of industry in the ghetto. The first reason was based on the need for a substitute source of income for the large number of employees who had previously honed skills in industry, trade, and crafts.\textsuperscript{117} The second reason was the determination of the Jewish Councils and of Jewish economic leaders to prove to the Nazis that the Jews were willing and able to establish a productive workforce in the ghetto.\textsuperscript{118} Czerniakow followed the first line of reasoning and Gens and Rumkowski were proponents of the second. The following will outline the ways in which Czerniakow’s informal ruling strategy determined his creation of a free market ghetto economy. It will also show how Gens’ desire to keep Nazi intervention to a minimum resulted in the creation of a largely self-sufficient ghetto economy in Vilna. In Lodz, the creation of a viable manufacturing hub was Rumkowski’s greatest obsession and biggest accomplishments.

Adam Czerniakow’s economic policy in the Warsaw ghetto was to allow capitalism to flourish. The Nazis in Warsaw preferred private capital rather than direct management of production by ghetto authorities, and Czerniakow willingly adopted such a policy and quickly implemented it into the ghetto structure.\textsuperscript{119} Businesses in the ghetto were privately run and, aside from paying taxes to the Judenrat, were under no ghetto authority. These private establishments conducted business with a variety of consumers.

\textsuperscript{117} Trunk, \textit{Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation}, 75.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 76.
both inside and outside of the ghetto. Czerniakow exerted little control over the Warsaw ghetto industry, as the free market economy determined employment, production, and wage levels. Because there were was no standard wage rate, most skilled workers were not paid enough to afford sufficient food outside of their ration cards, and to maintain rent, household expenses, and miscellaneous items.\textsuperscript{120}

Czerniakow believed that a free market would encourage people to willingly seek out employment to raise their ration allotments. While there was a certain logic to this policy, as historian Leaonard Tushnet argues, Czerniakow was so obsessed with establishing capitalism that he was oblivious to the needs of the suffering—those whose needs could not be met under such a system. He goes on to claim that Czerniakow even requested permission to allow private entrepreneurs to open stores to sell tobacco and liquor, all the while thousands had no bread to eat.\textsuperscript{121} In the early days of the ghetto, Nazis would both ask for volunteers for forced labor outside of the ghetto, as well as kidnap men and boys in the street for labor exploitations.\textsuperscript{122} Because of such a policy, Jews were hesitant to make themselves available for ghetto employment. The voluntary status of employment in ghetto industry accounts for the small percentage of workers in the early days of the Warsaw ghetto. The wealthy ghetto residents lived off their hoarded riches, and smugglers had no need to work when they could obtain food through outside connections. In June 1941, out of a population of 435,700 people, only 36,198 people were registered employed, and 76,102 people were registered unemployed.\textsuperscript{123} The rest

\textsuperscript{120} Trunk, “Epidemics and Mortality in the Warsaw Ghetto, 1939-1942,” 95.
\textsuperscript{121} Tushnet, The Pavement of Hell, 108
\textsuperscript{123} Browning, “Nazi Ghettoization Policy in Poland: 1939-1941,” 326.
starved or were dependant on communal support to survive.\textsuperscript{124} The plight of the unemployed, although tragic, is not Czerniakow's fault alone, however, his \textit{laizze faire} attitude toward ghetto labor made it difficult to ease the hunger of the poor and destitute.

As time went by in the Warsaw ghetto, hunger and starvation enticed many desperate inhabitants to seek employment at record levels. By June 1942, the total number of employees in the ghetto reached 88,000.\textsuperscript{125} Although that is still out of a population of 400,000 it does show a steep increase from earlier estimates.\textsuperscript{126} Desperation throughout the ghetto was so intense that German manufacturers who opened factories in the ghetto found hundreds of employees willing to work for nothing but a hot lunch of soup and bread.\textsuperscript{127} However, Warsaw ghetto survivor Alexander Donat argues that it was not until the coming of the large deportation of July 1942, that the residents of the ghetto made strenuous efforts to seek employment. As noted by Donat, "The situation was a gold mine for every speculator and swindler. Not only were work certificates made up and sold to prove employment in non-existent business, but bona fide work certificates were sold and resold several times over."\textsuperscript{128} Because swindlers duplicated certificates at such a high rate, the possession of one came to be worthless in the eye of the Nazis, who were privy to the duplicity scheme that occurred within the ghetto. Again, the corruption of ghetto officials proved disastrous to the desperate people of the Warsaw ghetto.
Unlike Czerniakow, Gens believed that the entire existence of the Vilna Ghetto rested upon the motto of “work, discipline, law, and order.”\textsuperscript{129} As such, he saw to it that he employed every able resident of the ghetto under his jurisdiction. Men, women, children, and the elderly were all given work so that all would be considered equally useful and beneficial to the German economy.\textsuperscript{130} In one of his first speeches regarding ghetto labor after accepting leadership of the ghetto, Gens declared to the masses:

The basis of existence of the ghetto is labor, discipline, and order. Every resident fit for work constitutes a pillar on which our existence is based. We must not have amongst us people who recoil from labor, behave improperly, or commit varied offenses...I shall not shrink from taking the gravest measures against criminal elements as soon as they appear.\textsuperscript{131}

Herman Kruk, a librarian in Vilna who officially chronicled the existence of the ghetto noted, “...unemployed people will not be tolerated at all in the ghetto...not only able bodied males but also able bodied woman capable of working.”\textsuperscript{132} Yitshkok Rudashevski, a young boy growing up in the ghetto, recalled the comfort he felt upon Gens’ stringent focus on ghetto production, “Now the ghetto has set as its goal the gathering of all working forces because we owe our existence solely to our work...Many institutions have been opened and perfected. Our commander hopes and is certain that we shall live to see happy times.”\textsuperscript{133} Such a focus on production was beneficial not only for the lifespan of the ghetto, but also for the morale of the employed.

\textsuperscript{129} Tushnet, \textit{The Pavement of Hell}, 173.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 163.
\textsuperscript{131} Jacob Gens quoted in Glass, “Two Models of Political Organization,” 282.
In contrast to most of Warsaw and all of Lodz, a large proportion of Vilna residents found employment in labor camps outside of the ghetto---in the surrounding Lithuanian forests.\textsuperscript{134} The factories and workshops within the ghetto of Vilna were typically for use by the residents, and proved the self-sufficiency of the Jews in Vilna—thus fulfilling Gens strategy for sustaining his ghetto’s longevity. Under Gens’ command, the Jews built a disinfection plant for sewage and water maintenance, a large-scale mechanical laundry, and factories for the production of vitamins and food.\textsuperscript{135} The ghetto administration also established tailoring, shoemaking, and carpentry shops. All of the shops in the ghetto were administrative agencies as opposed to private enterprises, as was the case in Warsaw. Gens’ obsession with creating a viable labor force in Vilna made an impact on Herman Kruk, who noted in his diary:

\begin{quote}
Ghetto workshops are built and developed. Units are enlarged. New units are created. The Vilna Ghetto is striving to attain a labor force of 14,000...all spaces are turned into ghetto workshops...All other workshops are enlarged and their staff is constantly growing. Masses of apprentices are taken into all workshops, etc...everything for ghetto production!\textsuperscript{136}
\end{quote}

Gens repeatedly stressed to his people the importance of productive labor in the ghetto. Whether it was through participation in the outdoor labor camps or by toiling within the ghetto industries, he argued that communal contributions to the ghetto economy were vital for the security of the Jews. In June 1943, Gens addressed the people of the ghetto with a speech that pleaded for the continued output of effort into ghetto industry:

\begin{flushright}
A rad, \textit{Ghetto in Flames}, 333.
\textsuperscript{134}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{135}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{136}
\end{flushright}
While working for ghetto industry or for the Kommandos outside the ghetto, we have, contrary to the trite opinion that we are poor workers, shown that we are very useful and irreplaceable. Under present war conditions, work in general and work for the Wehrmacht in particular is the command of the hour...It is urgent that we make changes to increase the output of the workers and thus enhance the justification for our existence. ¹³⁷

Under his watch, the amount of workers in the Vilna ghetto increased from 3,000 to 14,000. ¹³⁸ By 1943, over 75% of the residents in the Vilna ghetto held jobs either in the ghetto or in outside labor facilities. ¹³⁹

Part of Jacob Gens' success in turning Vilna into a productive ghetto was due to his honesty with the masses. He made many public announcements concerning the need for productive Jews within the ghetto, as he could not help those who were unable to prove their worth to the Nazis. The more he learned of the fate of the Jews the harder he pushed for labor productivity. Towards the height of the production in the ghetto Gens observed:

The ghetto is a death chamber which holds men, women, and little children. The death sentence has already been pronounced but not yet carried out, and the final date is not known. I want to postpone that date, postpone it with all my potential, with all my strength, as much as I can. ¹⁴⁰

A combination of Gens' insistence on a successful production output combined with his reassurances that such production meant life—were crucial to understanding the striking increase in ghetto employees under his leadership.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 283.
¹⁴⁰ Tushnet, The Pavement of Hell, 185.
Yitzhak Arad argues that there are four reasons as to why Gens was so instrumental in changing the economic status of the ghetto: 'The demand by the German administration for manpower and products rose, the belief of ghetto Jewry that their labor guaranteed them survival, the efficient organization of ghetto manpower by the administrative body headed by Jacob Gens, and the success in creating social conditions favorable to the utilization of that manpower.'\textsuperscript{141} While ghetto industry initially began to meet the needs of the residents, as time went by, the Nazis began to utilize the workshops and factories in the ghetto for their own needs.\textsuperscript{142} Nazi production demands increased and thus the Vilna residents began to understand the importance of employment. That said, Jacob Gens understood that it was only a matter of time before the Nazis closed down the Vilna ghetto. However, he believed that while he was in charge of the ghetto, he would determine just how much time it had left.

Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski's historical legacy has revolved around his extensive labor policy in the Lodz ghetto. He firmly believed that if the Germans could spare the Lodz Jews, they could make a significant contribution to the German economy or to the Nazi war machine.\textsuperscript{143} Historian Gordon J Horowitz perfectly sums up the logic behind what was to become Rumkowski's obsession with labor: "For Rumkowski, labor offered the prospect of generating the income he needed to feed his people. Achieving that, surely he would succeed in establishing 'total calm' and securing the people's 'trust.'"\textsuperscript{144} Like Gens, he believed firmly that the Jews could save themselves through work; salvation through labor. Even in the early days before the deportations and rumors

\textsuperscript{141} Arad, \textit{Ghetto in Flames}, 338.
\textsuperscript{142} Trunk, \textit{Judenrat: The Jewish Councils of Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation}, 76.
\textsuperscript{143} Unger, \textit{Reassessment of the Image of Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski}, 47.
of murder, Rumkowski was vehement about establishing a reliable work force within the ghetto.

Rumkowski set out to turn the Lodz ghetto into a successful manufacturing hub in Litzmannstadt. Within a few weeks of the closure of the Lodz ghetto, on 13 May 1940, Rumkowski took a census and created a list of laborers for the Nazis. He submitted a letter to the German authorities letting them know that he had roughly 15,000 men available for manual labor. He also said that he and his men were able to create over 70 articles of clothing within the ghetto at that time, and asked for further orders. He evaluated the potential manufacturing capabilities of the ghetto and set about making those a reality. He created numerous positions for a wide variety of professionals in food production, metalwork, paper distribution, construction, commerce, and health care. The largest and most successful workshops produced clothing. The Jews in Lodz proved to be great tailors and Rumkowski did not overlook their value.

Lodz was the only ghetto that was able to establish such extensive machinery for material production. Rumkowski was able to save many of the machines that remained in the ghetto area prior to the Nazi confiscation of valuables. He also asked, and later demanded, that all materials necessary for production be turned over to him and redistributed amongst the factories. In 1942, the Lodz ghetto began receiving large shipments of clothing and sewing machines to aid in the production process. By 1943, 117 factories and workshops were running, employing over 73,000 of the ghetto’s

---

145 Trunk, Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation, 78.
146 Adelson and Lapides, Lodz Ghetto: Inside a Community Under Siege, 55-56.
147 Trunk, Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation, 84.
Inhabitant's. By 1944, roughly 67,000 people (about 92.8%) of the population in the Lodz ghetto held jobs.\textsuperscript{148}

In Lodz, anyone, including women and children, could find employment within the ghetto. The success of the labor economy within the ghetto was a great source of pride for Rumkowski, and was his driving motivator when battling starvation, low morale, and callous Gestapo officers. Believing labor was the key to survival, he never missed an opportunity to stress to his residents the meaning behind their long days of toil.

In one of his more passionate speeches, he proclaimed to his residents that:

\textit{The award for distinguished workers will not be in the piece of paper or some little toy they will be given, but in the proud heritage they will bequeath to future generations...Our children and children's children will proudly remember the names of all those who contributed to the creation of the most important Jewish achievement in the ghetto: the labor opportunities which granted justification to live.}\textsuperscript{149}

The establishment of food, health care, and labor agencies within each ghetto proved integral to the physical welfare of ghetto inhabitants. While the previous bureaucracies ensured that people were employed, fed, and cared for, life in the ghetto still remained tumultuous and catastrophic. The devastating emotional turmoil induced from the dire change in circumstances for ghetto residents led to depression, mental illness, and instability within the ghetto walls. Equally as important for the health of the inhabitants of the ghetto, each ruler sought to establish cultural activities in order to placate plummeting morale and increased feelings of hopelessness. The creation of various theaters, schools, libraries, and other educational and entertainment institutions was crucial for the emotional well being of the residents in the ghetto. If the leaders were

\textsuperscript{148} Ibid, 88.
\textsuperscript{149} Rumkowski quoted in Trunk, \textit{Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation}, 90.
able to provide a continuation of pre-war Jewish life, than the residents under their charge would be happier, healthier, and more productive.

No leader better grasped the importance of high morale in his ghetto than Jacob Gens. Prior to the war, Vilna was known as the “Jerusalem of Lithuania,” not only due its large population of Jews, but also for the high number of synagogues, yeshivas, and Jewish institutions that flourished within the city limits. After the ghetto was established, Gens yearned to retrieve some of the past glory of Jewish Vilna and immediately set forth to reinstall the cultural milieu that made Vilna unique among Jewish society. Not only did Gens succeed in creating cultural institutions that helped the morale and psychology of ghetto residents, but his establishments flourished and superseded all residential expectations. As Isaiah Trunk notes, “Of all the ghettos, cultural manifestations in the Vilna Ghetto were the most intense, engulfing the ghetto inmates of all walks of life, and comprising an important part of the official task of the council.” As Gens understood it, a calmer and happier population would ensure explicit obedience and trust in his leadership.

The establishment of schools was of vast importance throughout the ghettos of Eastern Europe. Schools provided spiritual support for the ghetto’s children, boosting their emotional welfare and helping to shield them from the demoralizing influence of ghetto life. The presence of schools was also beneficial to parents and other ghetto residents, who embraced the existence of any institution that gave them some sense of normalcy. Gens created three schools within the ghetto in order to educate both

152 Ibid., 215.
elementary and high school aged children. He also established two orthodox schools and a Yeshiva in the ghetto to attend to the needs of the religious residents. The ghetto school curriculum included lectures on Yiddish, Hebrew, arithmetic, basic sciences, geography, and history courses both on Jewish history and Lithuanian history. The curriculum of the ghetto school system was made in such a way as to meet the ideological needs of the various sects living the ghetto: Hebrew speakers, Yiddish speakers, Zionists, Socialists, and even Communists. Administrators responded to the concerns of all types of residents within the ghetto. The schools also included adjacent reading and recreation centers that catered to children outside of class hours. Former resident Mark Dvorjecki recalls that “They offered a wide variety of services: a library, reading room, study circles, dramatic groups which presented plays by distinguished writers.” A music school was also opened that educated those seeking classes on art, dance, and gymnastics as well. By the beginning of 1943, Jacob Gens declared that children between the ages of five and thirteen were required to attend these ghetto schools.

The children of the Vilna ghetto welcomed compulsory education. The boost in morale, the extra rations, and the comradeship felt from time spent amongst peers in a peaceful setting, were all traits that were not easy to come by in the ghetto. Yitshok Rudashevski reflects the joy that his ghetto classes brought to him and the happiness he felt at being able to attend school again, in his diary:

---

155 Ibid., 212-213.
157 Ibid., 62.
159 Ibid., 34.
Today we go to school. The day passed quite differently. Lessons, subjects... There is a happy spirit in school. Finally, the club too was opened. My own life is shaping up in quite a different way! We waste less time, the day is divided and flies by very quickly... Yes, that is how it should be in the ghetto, the day should fly by and we should not waste time.\(^\text{160}\)

The effects on morale for the schoolchildren were tremendous. An education system in the ghetto not only provided employment for residents, but also encouraged students to make the most out of their predicaments, and to not feel trapped or constrained by their current environment. Vilna resident Mark Dvorjecki recalled, "Very often the children came to school about an hour early. They eagerly waited for their teacher, who would tell them stories about an imaginary world where there were no ghettos and no actions."\(^\text{161}\) Herman Kruk, the librarian in the Vilna ghetto noted in February of 1943 that Gens had established three schools with attendance levels averaging over 1,245 students. He had also created a day care center, an orphanage, a children’s psychological clinic, a technical school, boy and girl boarding houses, and various sports teams.\(^\text{162}\) A look at a random sample of recovered posters from the Vilna ghetto highlights the continual advertisements for academic lectures, concerts, sporting events/contests, library activities, art exhibits, medical advice panels, and numerous literary and musical events.\(^\text{163}\) There was plenty to distract the residents of Vilna from the hardships and torture of life under Nazi rule.

\(^{160}\) Rudashevski, _Diary of the Vilna Ghetto_, 65.


\(^{162}\) Kruk, _The Last Days of the Ghetto of Jerusalem of Lithuania: Chronicles from the Vilna Ghetto and the Camps_, 1939-1944, 469.

\(^{163}\) The Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum, _Vilna Ghetto Posters_ (Vilnius, Lithuania: Inter Nos, 1999).
While Vilna's education system flourished under Gens' watch, the ghetto theater was his pride and joy. Jacob Gens established the theater in Vilna in December of 1941, while he was still the chief of police. His goal was to stimulate morale and allow the temporary luxury of forgetfulness. In fact, the theatrical activities of the ghetto were so well received that Germans even patronized many of the performances. Theatrical performances were also prevalent in Warsaw and Lodz and became one of the main sources of spiritual resistance in the Nazi ghettos at large. As Michael Balfour suggests, "...through their performances they were able to create a dramatic space in which they commanded power denied them in reality. A sense of dignity and self-worth was thereby momentarily preserved." The role of the theater was instrumental in helping to placate the emotional and psychological toll of daily life in the ghetto. Throughout the course of its tenure, the theater was typically in operation every day or every other day. In October of 1942 alone, there were sixteen performances. These performances included choruses, plays, symphonic concerts, and operas. Throughout 1942, the Vilna Ghetto Theater held 120 performances before more than 38,000 people, helping to relieve or distract from the residents' pain and misery.

Establishing a semblance of cultural life within the Warsaw ghetto was harder for Czerniakow than it was for Gens. Czerniakow always had a soft spot for children and

164 Kostanian-Danzig, Spiritual Resistance in the Vilna Ghetto, 87.
167 Trunk, Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under the Nazi Occupation, 226.
168 Kostanian-Danzig, Spiritual Resistance in the Vilna Ghetto, 94.
exerted his greatest efforts as Judenrat head in order to better the lot of the children in his ghetto. Although the Nazis had outlawed schooling in the ghetto (for fear of spreading diseases), Czerniakow was successful in reestablishing a small education system within Warsaw in the spring of 1941. 169 In the fall of that year, the School Commission opened sixteen schools that taught an estimated 10,000 children. However, less than 20% of all school-aged children enrolled in these ghetto schools, mostly due to parental fears over the spread of disease. 170 The horrific economic and epidemic conditions of the ghetto made it difficult to institutionalize education. As such, many private political, communal, religious and other groups within the ghetto took it upon themselves to educate the children in their company. These private classes and lectures were held in secret, outside of the authority of the Judenrat, and without the permission or knowledge of Adam Czerniakow. Czerniakow wanted the ghetto children to attend the schools that he established, so the existence of other schooling measures within the ghetto had to remain private.

Amidst the devastation of starvation, unemployment, and disease in the Warsaw ghetto, a small semblance of cultural life managed to eek out an existence. Most cultural establishments in the ghetto were privately owned and operated, a continuation of the free market economy that existed within the ghetto limits. The Warsaw ghetto contained five theaters, two Yiddish and three Polish. Because the theaters were run as private enterprises, they were all continually in competition with one another and only catered to specific audiences in the ghetto. 171 The wealthy residents of the ghetto also typically

170 Ibid., 199.
171 Fass, “Theatrical Activities in the Polish Ghettos During the Years 1939-1942,” 63.
hired unemployed actors to come to their homes to entertain them. 172 Numerous small “cafes” were set up throughout the ghetto that turned into mini stages where food and entertainment catered nightly to the upper classes. Historian Moshe Fass argues that, “The fact that most of these clubs were opened with the help of the Gestapo or Judenrat members strengthens the impression that the Germans were interested in encouraging the cheaper levels of entertainment in order to promote demoralization in the ghetto.”173 Because these cafes only entertained the wealthier members of ghetto society, their existence opened the door for further demoralization of the lower classes. While the Judenrat as a whole was unable to interfere in private business, independently wealthy members of the administration were able to invest or participate in various business ventures, all “secretive” of course. In some cases, Jews and Germans became business partners in the various nightclubs and theaters throughout the ghetto. 174 Any attempts to offer entertainment to the masses came from private welfare groups, most prominently the Jewish Self-Help Organization. As was to become the case in all aspects of ghetto life in Warsaw, the upper classes lived entirely different lives from that of their poorer neighbors.

Overall, the largest ghetto in Poland contained the smallest amount of cultural departments. Again, the dominance of private industry shaped the makeup of the “entertainment” field within the ghetto, and as such, the middle and upper classes benefitted the most. However, the plight of the failed schooling efforts in the ghetto was out of the control of Czerniakow, who made numerous efforts to push for the re-establishment of public schools in the ghetto. In the end however, due to the power and

---

172 Ibid., 54-55
173 Ibid., 57.
174 Ibid., 68.
influence of the wealthy residents, cultural and educational establishments remained in the hands of private groups and organizations. The Warsaw ghetto was too large and too mismanaged in order to organize and construct institutions to care for not only the physical needs of its residents, but also for the psychological demands as well.

If Czerniakow’s lack of complete authority in Warsaw harmed his ghetto’s cultural life, then Rumkowski’s sole influence in Lodz helped his flourish. There is no denying that Rumkowski had a talent for organization and preparation. The departments and committees he formed with little money or outside help were impressive and did much to aid and benefit the residents under his care. Somehow, he was able to establish schools, post offices, orphanages, courts, and surprisingly enough, a summer camp. Because no one was sure how long the ghetto would last, Rumkowski was adamant that the Judenrat should make life within the ghetto as comfortable and as normal as possible.

As stated previously, Rumkowski had a soft spot for children and refused to allow their schooling to suffer due to conditions in the ghetto. He created the Ghetto School Department, which helped to organize and coordinate an educational system within the ghetto that would aid and cater to all children. Rumkowski was intent on incorporating numerous aspects of Judaism into the curriculum. Various Jewish subjects were taught everyday in the ghetto schools including Yiddish, Hebrew, Torah, and “Jewish” history, all taught in the Yiddish language. For Rumkowski, it was important for the Jews to stay connected to their faith, even amidst this time of struggle, and hence his focus on the use of Yiddish. At the height of the ghetto’s existence, there were forty-seven schools to which sixty-three percent of children attended. In order to encourage their attendance,

Rumkowski granted children who went to school incentives such as extra food rations and medical care during the school day.\(^{176}\)

Since the reality of life in the ghetto was so dire, Rumkowski always looked for ways to distract his residents from the hardships and sadness all around them. He designed one of his committees to establish cultural institutions within the ghetto walls. Keeping Jewish culture alive was a major part of Rumkowski’s plan to keep life within the ghetto as “normal” as possible. On 1 March 1941, Rumkowski created the House of Culture, which was responsible for helping artistic, musical, and religious life thrive within the ghetto. The House of Culture put on performances by symphony orchestras and theater groups, sometimes as often as twice a week.\(^{177}\) There were also dance and art studios established in the ghetto, where artists were sometimes even paid for their work. At one point, the thriving cultural life within the ghetto even boasted of a series of college level lectures on such topics as math, psychology, pedagogy, chemistry, and physiology. In the early days of the ghetto, there were also organized sports clubs and recreational activities.\(^{178}\) Writers of the *Chronicle*, the official ghetto newspaper, continually cited the emotional benefits such performances had on the morale of the ghetto residents.\(^{179}\)

Adam Czerniakow, Jacob Gens, and Mordechai Rumkowski all assumed the position as the head of their ghettos for a variety of reasons and under a multitude of circumstances. However, once in power, each of these men operated from a strikingly different vantage point. Czerniakow believed himself to be a figurehead, the

---


\(^{177}\) Ibid, 225.


communication vessel for the Nazis, who refused to allow his morals to wane under the influence of the corruption and brutality that were prevalent in the ghetto. By analyzing his role in the food, health care, labor, and cultural departments under his charge, it is clear that his hands-off approach to leadership negatively affected the people under his watch. While his intentions were noble, he ruled over a largely corrupt administration and did little to change the behaviors of the men under his charge. As a consequence, epidemics became rampant throughout the ghetto, starvation continued to increase, and the wealthy controlled not only the ghetto economy, but the very heart and soul of life within the confines of the wall.

Jacob Gens did not face the same issues that Czerniakow did upon accepting control over the entire Vilna ghetto. The very reason the Nazis promoted him was due to his callous attitude and dictatorial approach to managing life in Jewish Vilna. His personality ensured that corruption was nonexistent under his watch, and the agencies that flourished under his charge were reflections of that ruling strategy. His previously established relationship to the police force ensured that all of his measures were enforced and followed, no questions asked. As a result, he was able to ensure that the Nazis had little interference in the everyday lives of the ghetto residents, which was his plan from the start.

Mordechai Rumkowski established himself as the sole authority figure in Lodz from the beginning of the ghetto until its demise. As a self-admitted dictator, he believed that unquestioned devotion and obedience to his authority would grant him the power to change and better the lot of the people under his charge. That ruling foresight allowed him to turn his ghetto into a large manufacturing hub that proved to the Nazis the worth
of the Jews in Lodz. While working in a devastating environment, he made the most of
the meager resources he had to ensure that the residents of Lodz were cared for. His
relationship to the Nazis in Lodz helped him to better the lot of his people.

While this chapter has highlighted the various successes and failures of
bureaucratic planning in the Warsaw, Vilna, and Lodz ghettos, the next chapter will
explore the personal relations established by each man in his position of authority. One
cannot fully understand the reasons why some leaders were able to barter with Nazi
demands and why others blindly did as demanded, without insight into established
networks between the Judenrat chair and the masses. Comprehension of the ghetto
administrator’s relations to various classes among the population can offer insight into
the way he was viewed and the type of leadership style he employed. The leaders’
relationship with the Jewish Police, laborers, resistance groups, and most importantly,
with the Nazi officials, all influenced and reflected the individual styles of leadership that
each man implored.

Help me... Only one thing can save us—a collective acceptance of a
productive life, in an atmosphere of utter calm. Intensive work and
this is the order of the day. There is absolutely no place here for
whatever, except one: Jews of the Ghetto! I have only one
improve our lot. For this, there must be a calm and healthy

6Mordechai Ramkowskw quoted in Horowitz, Ghettostadt: Lodz and the Jews of Lodz.
CHAPTER III

ALLIANCES AND ENEMIES

"Dictatorship is not a dirty word. Through dictatorship I earned the Germans' respect for my work." - Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski

The workers were starving. Most laborers survived their grueling twelve-hour shifts in the Lodz ghetto factories on nothing but watery turnip soup and weak coffee. They were continually overworked and undernourished, underappreciated, and defeated. Attempts at lashing out and opposing their treatment were in vain; their protests went unrecognized and the cast of their lots remained the same. Attempts at labor reform typically resulted in the loss of jobs and ration cards, courtesy of the Elder of the Jews. They tired of hearing of the importance of their work, of how their labor would save their lives. As of right now, work was the biggest threat to their lives. Mordechai Rumkowski did understand the plight of his workers, however. He knew that they performed strenuous labor for little reward. On the other hand, he also knew of the deportations occurring in other ghettos, and he was aware of what was happening to Jews who were of no use to the Nazis. He understood their fate all too well and refused to allow his residents to fall into the same trap. Amidst the flurry of strikes and protests of the laborers in his ghetto, Rumkowski addressed his residents:

Help me. . . Only one thing can save us—a collective acceptance of a productive life, in an atmosphere of utter calm. Intensive work and calm: this is the order of the day. There is absolutely no place here for any part whatsoever, except one: Jews of the Ghetto! I have only one interest, to improve our lot. For this, there must be a calm and healthy atmosphere. I

Mordechai Rumkowski quoted in Horowitz, Ghetostadt: Lodz and the Making of a Nazi City,

180.
will attack every symptom of corruption with the greatest severity. I will not rest until I succeed, even at the price of my own life. 181

The residents of Lodz would work.

In order to establish the various departments and agencies that were integral for the running of the ghetto, Judenrat leaders developed and maintained good relationships with influential people both inside and outside of the walls. Such contacts could either help or hinder the execution of Judenrat orders and decrees. As much as good relations with the masses could help the leaders, sour relations with various groups, such as the Nazis or the resistance coalitions, could slow or thwart Judenrat progress. These associations were not only vital for ghetto functioning, but were also integral to maintaining morale. For some leaders, a close relationship to the police allowed for the quick execution of all orders and demands. For others, a positive relationship with the intelligentsia within the ghetto helped to boost morale among the masses. Perhaps most importantly, understanding the relationship between the Nazi official in charge of the ghetto and the Judenrat chair is essential to comprehending the leadership style that each man employed.

Adam Czerniakow and Nazi Kommissar Heinz Auerswald shared a friendly and peaceful relationship, filled with constant reassurances on Auerswald’s behalf for the safety and security of the Warsaw ghetto. Czerniakow thus remained optimistic and nonpulsed by the gradual unfolding of horror around him. Mordechai Rumkowski’s constant willingness to please and his readiness to cooperate with Kommissar Hans Biebow granted him various incentives, including the ability to use the Gestapo for his

own policing within the ghetto when necessary. Jacob Gens’ close relationship to his loyal police force assured the prompt execution of his demands and orders.

This chapter highlights the relationships established by each Judenrat head to show how these associations either promoted faith and trust in their leadership, or condemned them in the eyes of the residents. The Nazis, the Jewish police, the ghetto administrators, and the ghetto laborers were arguably the most important factions to which the Judenrat reached out. Each leader had his own policy toward dealing with particular groups, and thus each faced various successes and setbacks when it came to politics within the ghetto. The previously established leadership strategies of each man continued to shine through in their associations within the ghetto. The relationships that Czerniakow cultivated undermined his power and led to increased competition for his position. In Lodz, Rumkowski’s close relationship to the Nazis helped to strengthen the power of his autonomous hold over the ghetto, and ensured the quick overthrow of any opposition to his authority. Jacob Gens’ close associations with the Nazis in Vilna helped to secure him a level of freedom and independence in running the ghetto, thus largely excluding the presence of the Gestapo. The actions and decisions of each of these men had enormous consequences on the lives of the people who depended on them.

For many Judenrat leaders, the nature of their connection to the Nazis in charge of their ghettos determined the extent of the success of their leadership. Gens established unquestioned authority over the ghetto because of his relationship to the Nazis. His promotion from police chief to head of the ghetto stemmed from the impression that his fierce ruling style made on the Nazis. Prior to Gens’ official appointment to head of the ghetto, the original leader of the Jewish Council was Anatol Fried, who confessed to a
friend, “Gens is the ruler of the ghetto, and he has good connections with the German administration and the Security Police.”\(^{182}\) Franz Murer, the Nazi in charge of Jewish affairs in Vilna, trusted Gens’ leadership tactics and granted him freedom to carry out orders as he saw fit. Gens alone was responsible to “implement the orders of the Gebietkommisar without reservation . . . [take] control over complete compliance with orders . . . and [take] personal responsibility in the event of non-implementation.”\(^{183}\) The former police chief understood the enormity of the responsibility of his position, and his devoted police force ensured the execution of all German orders. With the help of his police force, he set out on a course to negotiate with his German superiors in order to buy time for the Jews of his ghetto.

The experience of his own promotion informed Gens that maintaining a civil relationship with Franz Murer could only help the livelihood of the ghetto. Leonard Tushnet argues that Gens spared nothing to show Murer that he was a faithful and reliable leader of the ghetto, “He [Gens] partied with them, he invited them to ghetto musicals, in every way acting as though he were the ruler of the ghetto, on a par with them.”\(^{184}\) As long as Gens remained on decent terms with the Nazis, he had a much higher chance of successful negotiating when it came to the health and welfare of Vilna’s Jews. His goal was misunderstood by some of his residents, however, who were at times flabbergasted to see their leader and the Nazis on such good terms. As observed by ghetto librarian Herman Kruk, “. . . the chief’s arrogance towards everyone consists of the fact that the chief has good contacts with the German military authorities [Murer, et al.], and the Germans, seeing the brutal way the police treat the population, placed great

\(^{182}\) Anatol Fried quoted in Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 286.

\(^{183}\) Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 289.

confidence in the chief.”

Gens was not alone in his attempts to maintain a close working relationship with German officers, and Rumkowski and Czerniakow also followed a similar pattern.

Most Jewish leaders believed that if the Nazis respected them, then they would grant allowances and privileges that were otherwise unattainable. Again, such rationale was lost on the majority of the residents, who were unable to see the calculating politics behind such actions. Yitshkok Rudashevski also had heated words for the ghetto leader, “Insult and misfortune have reached their climax. Jews dip their hands in the dirtiest and bloodiest work.” However misleading the relationship between Gens and Murer appeared to the residents of the ghetto, Gens staunchly defended their association. His strict control over all aspects of the ghetto and his fierce use of the ghetto police encouraged Murer to grant him a level of independence. Gens understood only too well the importance of such an act. To the critics who condemned the brutality of his police force, he stressed that if the Jews were unable to police themselves, then the Germans would take their place, and the consequences of Nazi policing would be treacherous.

Jacob Gens’ relationship to the Jewish police in Vilna both aided in establishing centralized authority and condemned him in post war-history. As the previous commander of the police force, he maintained a close and personal relationship to the men, who remained loyal and obedient to him after his promotion. No order from Gens was too great for the police. As time passed in the ghetto, certain demands included the removal of Jews selected for deportations, as will be detailed in the next chapter. The

---

185 Kruk, The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania: Chronicles from the Vilna Ghetto and the Camps, 1939-1944, 262.
186 Rudash evski, The Diary of the Vilna Ghetto: June 1941-April 1943, 70.
brutality and ruthlessness of the force in the eyes of the residents became synonymous with the brutality of the German occupiers. The people of Vilna began to fear and loathe the police force. Rudashevski again noted in his diary, “They march smartly by in unison. An unpleasant feeling comes over me. I hate them from the bottom of my heart, ghetto Jews in uniforms, and how arrogantly they stride in the boots they have plundered!”

He further observes, “Everyone feels the same way about them and they have somehow become such strangers to the ghetto. In me they arouse a feeling compound of ridicule, disgust, and fear.” The efforts of the police force ensured that the ghetto operated smoothly, but in turn isolated the residents it was supposed to protect.

The young were not the only ones who were disgusted by the actions of the Jewish police in Vilna. Resident Samuel Esterowicz ruthlessly argued, “... mitigating circumstance is completely offset by the disgraceful methods which Gens had so shamelessly employed. ... Gens in no way resembled the leader who, with pain in his heart, sacrificed a few in order to save many of the people entrusted to him—as he is described by some of our historians.” Similarly, Avraham Tory recalled, “For all practical purposes he acted as the representative of the Germans. He introduced a regime of terror into the ghetto. ...” While most residents shared the negative reputation of the Jewish police, ghetto memoirs note that there was a distinction between Jacob Gens as head of the ghetto and Jacob Gens as former police chief in the eyes of the Vilna residents. Ghetto survivor Dr. Mark Dworzhetzki remembers, “The ghetto hated the

---

189 Ibid., 79.
Jewish ghetto police but it wanted to see in its commandant an honest man... They wanted to persuade themselves, justly or unjustly, that at the head of the ghetto stood an energetic Jew whose concern was always for the welfare of the ghetto, for its defense and security.”192 Similarly, Zelig Zalmanovich argued that the ghetto was lucky to have Gens as its leader, even with the knowledge that Gens was personally responsible for creating deportation lists: “Blessed be the God of Israel, who sent us this man. The ghetto police have accepted this dreadful duty... If this had been the work of strangers, 2,000 would have perished, God forbid.”193 No matter the residents’ opinions of Gens’ relationship to the police and the Nazis, his background influenced the daily operations of the ghetto.

The presence of the police force was prevalent in all aspects of ghetto society. The association of Gens with the police was one that Herman Kruk found disturbing and catastrophic: “As soon as the commander appears they shout in chorus: Good morning Mr. Commander! The commander, the simple primitive man with his military character, smiles, is satisfied. Thus, militarism intrudes into all corners of our filthy ghetto life.”194 Whether the Vilna residents connected the ruthlessness of the police with Gens’ character or not, their close relationship allowed for much of the success of his rule. Because the Judenrat administration dissolved with the chief’s promotion, the leader and his loyal force were the only authority figures in Vilna.

A closer look at crime and punishment within the ghetto allows for a greater understanding of just how important a reliable policing unit was in Vilna. As argued by Leonard Tushnet, “They [police] used their authority to the utmost, they cursed, they

194 Ibid., 297.
beat, they made arrests... At no time was crime a problem in the ghetto as it was in Lodz." In contrast to the corrupt officers in Warsaw, the police in Vilna were untouchable. Their actions increased the success and productivity of the various departments and agencies created under Jacob Gens’ rule. For example, in June 1942, a murder occurred in the ghetto, and the police apprehended the perpetrators. Gens sentenced the murderers to death for their crime, an event unprecedented in the ghetto. The residents were aghast that in a time of such tremendous horror, Jews would have the gumption to kill one another. The subsequent plummet in morale throughout the ghetto inspired Gens to reach out to his people and proclaim:

Of 75 thousand Vilna Jews, 16 thousand remain. These 16 must be good, honest, and hard-working people. Anyone who is not will end the same way as those who were sentenced today. We will punish every such case and will even kill with our own hands. Today we carry out an execution of six Jewish murders, who killed Jews. The sentence will be carried out by the Jewish police, who protect the ghetto and will go on protecting it. The police will carry out the sentence as its duty. We begin.

While Gens understood the sadness his sentences provoked in the ghetto, he refused to allow public opinion to soften his policies. As argued by Yitzhak Arad, “He used threatening language toward criminal elements that might resist his policy so that the amnesty he would grant must not be interpreted as weakness.” This unapologetic stance ensured the cooperation of the residents with their leader and in turn allowed for the success of the ghetto departments addressed in Chapter 2. As argued by Isaiah Trunk, there were no documented cases of active, organized, mass demonstrations against Gens, mentioned in the previous chapter.

197 Arad, Ghetto in Flames, 330.
which stood in stark contrast to the unrest that occurred in Warsaw and Lodz.\textsuperscript{198} The influence and authority of the police became so great that the Gestapo personally handed over Jews who had committed violations while working outside of the ghetto to the Jewish police. The verdict of Gens and the police was final in all arrests and sentencing.\textsuperscript{199}

Gens’ personal experience and connection to the police force encouraged his promotion to head of the ghetto, and in turn solidified his associations with the Nazis in Vilna. Mordechai Rumkowski secured the same type of relationship to the Nazis due to his zest for labor and production within his ghetto. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the advisory council that Rumkowski established was mostly for show. Rumkowski still had the final say on all decisions and orders required to keep the ghetto running. In reality, the council members served as pawns to show the residents of the ghetto that there was more than just one man in charge of their lives. Rumkowski’s main support system was his beloved Jewish police, and at times, his managers in the factories. When Rumkowski learned how to work with the personality and needs of Hans Biebow [the head of the Gettoverwaltung], he was able to manipulate the man for the good of the ghetto. Rumkowski attempted to work \textit{with} and not \textit{against} the Nazis in order to create the best environment for the Jews of Lodz.

Rumkowski calculated in securing personal relationships to the Nazis—Hans Biebow in particular. Biebow and Rumkowski met daily to discuss various aspects of the ghetto, such as production, food quality, and disease control. Horowitz claims that Rumkowski constantly believed that a strong, working relationship with the Nazis, based

\textsuperscript{198} Trunk, \textit{Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation}, 545.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 482.
on dutiful cooperation and a record of accomplishment, would afford him a positive hearing when it came to future proceedings.\textsuperscript{200} To a degree, Rumkowski was accurate. As detailed in the previous chapter, Rumkowski was successful in establishing an extensive list of ghetto organizations and institutions, and most came to fruition with assistance from Biebow. Ghetto manufacturing was so successful under Rumkowski’s jurisdiction that Biebow granted him increased provisions for his laborers, based not only upon the workers success, but also due to Rumkowski’s persistence and cooperation.\textsuperscript{201} Gordon Horowitz even reports circumstances where Biebow looked into Rumkowski’s complaints regarding German brutality, and favored the Jewish leader over his own subordinates.\textsuperscript{202}

In the following years, his relationship to Biebow would help him bargain for more food for the ghetto, and when negotiating the number of requested Jews for deportation. Another reason Rumkowski gained the “respect” of the Nazis was his ability to internally police the ghetto, and thus not rely so much on German security. His ability to crush protests and any sort of internal strife demonstrated to the Germans that he was capable of restoring order and peace within the ghetto on his own.\textsuperscript{203} Rumkowski relied heavily on his police force, more than on his advisory councils or on his factory managers. They became for him an “indispensable instrument” for the success of his ghetto. Without order, organization, and regulation, Rumkowski could not have carried out his goals and policies for the ghetto.\textsuperscript{204} As was his strategy from the beginning,

\textsuperscript{200} Horowitz, \textit{Ghettostadt: Lodz and the Making of a Nazi City}, 125.
\textsuperscript{201} Trunk, \textit{Lodz Ghetto: A History}, 112.
\textsuperscript{202} Horowitz, \textit{Ghettostadt: Lodz and the Making of a Nazi City}, 83.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid., 116.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid., 241.
Rumkowski’s leadership ability succeeded in allowing only small degrees of Nazi presence within the ghetto.

If Jacob Gens’ most important relationship in the ghetto was with the Jewish police, then Rumkowski’s most crucial associations in Lodz were with the ghetto laborers. Rumkowski firmly believed that the ghetto would only last as long as the Jews inside it proved to be an immeasurable addition to the German economy. Therefore, he devoted all of his energy and efforts into making the ghetto one large manufacturing unit. As such, his relationships with the men who worked these factories were crucial for securing the safety of all residents. That said, many of the foundations for the negative allegations plaguing his history lie in his relationships with his factory managers and his laborers. He was quick to squelch worker protests and strikes, and was strict concerning his workers’ productivity level in the factories. For this reason, he placed his Jewish police in charge of overseeing production within the workshops and factories. Workers in the factories were not allowed to leave at the end of the day without being frisked by the police in order to prevent robbery. Laborers toiled long hours and worked in cramped and miserable conditions. Rumkowski placed many people in tiny work areas, in order to employ and help as many residents as possible.

However, the long hours and the unsanitary working conditions weighed heavily on the souls of the residents, and Rumkowski was aware of their suffering. He understood the exhaustion and weariness that accompanied such long days, and he knew the hardships that were compounded by a meager diet. He was unable to alleviate the pain and suffering of all ghetto residents. However, he insisted that by proving to the Germans that they were heavily reliant upon Jewish labor, Biebow and his superiors would find it

—Trunk, Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation, 90.
in their best interest to give him the resources he needed to stabilize and somewhat improve the daily life of the ghetto residents.\textsuperscript{206}

The way Rumkowski treated his residents was synonymous to the way he treated his laborers in the ghetto factories, as he considered them the same. Placing more than 300,000 Jews into a dilapidated section of the city of Lodz made living conditions extremely harsh. Working conditions were no better, especially considering the fact that Rumkowski established more than 100 workshops in a limited amount of space. Laborers worked on top of one another, which proved quite dangerous in certain workshops, specifically the metal ones. Many of the factories within the ghetto employed several hundred workers each, with one tailor shop reported to have employed upwards of 1,200 laborers.\textsuperscript{207} Since there were so many workers in such close quarters, the workshops were often unsanitary and became havens for disease.\textsuperscript{208} There were also several complaints within the ghetto of how factory managers mistreated workers. Laborers complained that they were unable to take a lunch break, and others argued that managers beat them for not working fast enough.\textsuperscript{209} Rumkowski ignored these complaints, as he would not address anything that might sabotage the production level of his beloved workshops.

However harsh the conditions in the workshops might have been, they remained a source of pride for Rumkowski. The ghetto produced large quantities of material for the Germans, and was clearly showing that it was a vital asset to the Nazi war machine. In 1942 alone, the products built in the ghetto earned the Nazis more than 27 million

\textsuperscript{206} Horowitz, \textit{Ghettostadt: Lodz and the Making of a Nazi City}, 129.
\textsuperscript{207} Trunk, \textit{Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation}, 88.
\textsuperscript{208} Trunk, \textit{The Lodz Ghetto: A History}, 163.
\textsuperscript{209} Ibid., 162-163.
Reichsmarks.\textsuperscript{210} In order to increase the financial success of production, Rumkowski increased the length of the workday from ten hours to twelve hours, six days a week.\textsuperscript{211}

Again, the success of the ghetto economy outlined in chapter two is due to the way that Rumkowski pushed his workers. True to his ruling philosophy, nothing would stand in Rumkowski’s way concerning ghetto production and worker output.

Working such long hours in miserable conditions angered the workers, however, who desired an improvement to their situation. The first major demonstration against Rumkowski occurred in August 1940. Workers were unsatisfied with the amount of food allotted by the rationing system, given the length and exertion of their work. The laborers held mass meetings, demonstrations, and general protests against the famine that struck the stomachs of the ghetto. The residents got so unruly that a special police detachment called the \textit{Oberfallskommando} was created within the Jewish police for the sole purpose of quelling any strikes, demonstrations, and disturbances aimed at Rumkowski and his administration.\textsuperscript{212}

In August 1940, the Jews of Lodz were still not accustomed to life within the ghetto and could not understand the lack of food available to those who worked hard to earn it. The situation was so bad within the ghetto that Rumkowski called upon the Nazis to disperse the protestors.\textsuperscript{213} Although using the Nazis as a measure of crowd control was uncharacteristic of Rumkowski, this decision, designed to show the workers that he would not tolerate extensive opposition to his leadership, proved an invaluable resource.

Another demonstration occurred in September of that year, and smaller movements

\textsuperscript{210} Trunk, \textit{Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation}, 89.

\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., 91.

\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 480.

\textsuperscript{213} Ibid., 540.
continued through January 1941. Protestors challenged the harsh working conditions in
the factories, the unfair extra rations for laborers, and the overall dissatisfaction with
ghetto leadership. At this point, Rumkowski was worried about potential damage to his
reputation in the eyes of the Germans—one he had worked so hard to build.

In order to solve the problem of massive protests, the Jewish police arrested the
most aggressive strikers. Rumkowski also shut down several soup kitchens run by
political opponents in order to scare the protestors off their platform. Tushnet points out
that, “Rumkowski placed a commissar in each factory to keep productivity high. Their
weapon, besides actual physical force, was the ration card, which they could reduce as
they wished for any infraction of labor discipline.” 214 The most effective weapon that
Rumkowski could use to dissuade protestors was to fire them. All residents desired
factory positions, and once lost, they were almost impossible to regain. In addition, with
the men now out of work, they were unable to collect their rations and thus they and their
families slowly starved to death. 215 After the initial disturbances caused by strikes, The
Chronicle noted in January 1941 that there had not been a single case of disturbing the
peace in the ghetto since September. 216 It is clear that Rumkowski was unafraid to use
brutal tactics to enforce cooperation from his residents, all the while believing a
productive and collaborative ghetto would impress the Nazis and benefit the residents.

As much as Rumkowski wanted to help his residents, those that went against him
suffered tremendously. In a time of such hardship, he had little patience for those he

---

215 Unger, Reassessment of the Image of Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, 34.
216 Oskar Rosenfeld and Oskar Singer. 1941. Street Demonstrations, in The Chronicle of the Lodz
perceived as ungrateful. Dawid Sierakowiak, a teenager living in the ghetto, noted in his
diary, “The sadist-moron Rumkowski is doing horrible things. He fired two teachers,
Communists from their jobs... The overt reason: they organized resistance among
teachers against the installation as commissioner-Superior Principal-of Mrs.
University Press, 1996), 102.} Dawid’s diary entries have granted Holocaust historians numerous
insights into the emotions that Rumkowski stirred up in his residents. Dawid wrote
another entry concerning the firing of laborers who demanded better working conditions,
“The sixteen workers from the tailor workshop who demanded the introduction of the
two seven hour shifts have been moved by Rumkowski to collect feces, which means a
quicker end for them.”\footnote{Ibid., 164} Laborers who worked for the sanitation department spent most
of their time carting barrels of human fecal matter to depositories outside of the ghetto.
These workers typically contracted dysentery and other diseases shortly after exposure to
the feces and died. For this reason, the job served as a death sentence for those
Rumkowski deemed unworthy.

While it would appear counterproductive for Rumkowski to punish his residents,
no matter how unruly they were, he stopped at nothing to ensure that this authority went
unquestioned throughout the ghetto. As this thesis argues, Rumkowski was determined
to exert supreme authority over all aspects of ghetto life, no matter the moral lines he
crossed, or the anger he stirred up in his residents. No matter how successful he presumed
himself to be as the leader of the Lodz ghetto, especially regarding his manufacturing
successes, he was continually battling his residents and the Nazis for acceptance of his
supreme authority. As Gordon Horowitz points out, “Overriding all criticism,
Rumkowski did his best to ensure that the community as a whole recognized him as the ghetto's indispensible guide and master of great achievements." He vehemently believed that the ghetto would be unable to survive without his leadership. Rumkowski thought that he alone had the ability to negotiate with the Germans—be it with persuasion or bribery—in order to guide the ghetto through times of crisis, hardship, and even danger.

Rumkowski's confidence that he was the savior of the people of Lodz was evident even in the early years of the ghetto. On 17 May 1941, Rumkowski visited Adam Czerniakow in the Warsaw ghetto to tour the organization and setup of the ghetto. He concluded his visit with a speech to the residents of Warsaw outlining the glory of life in Lodz. His visit aimed to compare the Warsaw ghetto under the leadership of Czerniakow with the conditions in his own ghetto. He also sought to bring back the former residents of Lodz who had fled east in the early days of the occupation. The Nazis initially collected Jews who fled Lodz to escape the occupation and sent them to the Warsaw ghetto. Rumkowski was so confident in his leadership abilities that he wanted his former residents to return to their home, under the safety and protection of his guidance and leadership:

"Just overnight I erected factories and created a working-town. My Beirat know only how to talk. I myself have carried out my tasks alone, by force. Dictatorship is not an ugly word at all, and by the way of dictatorship I earned the respect of the Germans for my achievements. And whenever they say 'Litzmannstadt Ghetto' I reply to them 'Sas ist kein Ghetto sondern eine Arbeitsstadt (this is not a ghetto but a work-town)'."

---

219 Horowtiz, Ghettostadt: Lodz and the Making of a Nazi City, 125.
In the same speech, he bragged about his status in the eyes of Biebow and the Germans,

"The strictest autonomy rules in the Ghetto, no one of the Germans will ever dare to
touch my prerogatives and I shall never let any. So in conclusion, I made quiet and order
prevail in the Ghetto." 222 Rumkowski used his time in Warsaw to observe various
aspects of the quality of life within that ghetto and compare them to his own. He was
clearly unimpressed with the way that Adam Czerniakow was running the ghetto, and this
only fueled his own arrogance. In his diary, Czerniakow recorded various tidbits about
the Elder of Lodz's visit: "... he is replete with self-praise, a conceited and witless man.
A dangerous man too, since he keeps telling the authorities that all is well in the
preserve." 223

No matter the ferocity of the tactics Rumkowski employed towards his laborers
and residents, one cannot overlook his success in achieving his initial goals for ghetto
leadership. Continual praise from Biebow and the Nazis only further tightened
Rumkowski's influence throughout the ghetto. Leonard Tushnet even points out that
German officials, "had nothing but praise for his [Rumkowski's] operations and
recommended that delegations from other ghettos be sent to see how a ghetto should
really operate." 224 Although Rumkowski's approach towards leadership was brutal and
harsh for the most part, his relationship to Biebow only encouraged the continuation of
such demeanor. Rumkowski was steadfast in his belief that labor could save his ghetto,
and encouragement from the Nazis only hastened this resolve. Rumkowski's laborers also
believed in his motto: at one point, 85 percent of Lodz residents worked in industry,
while 60 percent of these same workers had tuberculosis! Even disease could not keep the

222 Ibid., 298.
224 Tushnet, The Pavement of Hell, 43.
Lodz workers from performing their industrial duties. A speech made by Rumkowski on 1 November 1941 best summarizes his relationship to the Nazis and the working motto that such an association garnered:

As I began successfully to organize work, the authorities gradually began to deal with me and to count on me more and more... These factories have been visited by the highest representative of the authorities on many occasions and they been amazed... they had never realized that Jews were capable of productive work!  

Rumkowski was able to establish the ghetto institutions outlined in the second chapter due to the advantages that his relationship to Biebow granted him, as well as through the dictatorial leadership ethic he promoted. He cared not for the way his residents and laborers viewed him, as long as they obeyed him and labored in his factories. His relationship to Biebow and his workers, although strained at times, was the reason he became so successful in accomplishing his tasks.

Gens' important relationship to the Vilna police force yielded unquestioned devotion and loyalty. The ghetto experienced no strikes, protests, or demonstrations—strife within the ghetto remained private or the police squashed it before it began. This relationship allowed Gens to rule his ghetto with as little Nazi interference as possible, as was his hope from the beginning. His strict ruling tactics combined with his continual police enforcement, allowed him to turn the Vilna ghetto into a self-reliant community, in no need of German presence. In Lodz, manufacturing became the basis for the existence of the ghetto. As such, Rumkowski pushed his workers hard, and most spent their days toiling for long hours in less than ideal environments. When anger broke out among the masses,

225 Ibid., 42.
the Jewish police quickly put down protests. Rumkowski was an excellent manipulator, and knew that by threatening his workers with the removal of their ration cards or their jobs he could ensure that such opposition be short-lived. His relationship to the Nazi authorities only pushed him to expand his manufacturing enterprises within the ghetto and to stay the course of maintaining Jewish labor. As this thesis argues, Rumkowski’s authoritative rule allowed for the success of the ghetto economy, which in turn increased the longevity of his ghetto—his goal from the start.

Adam Czerniakow lacked the close relationships to the Jewish police and to the Nazis that Gens and Rumkowski relied upon for the success of their ghettos. Nonetheless, for the leader who was responsible for the largest ghetto in occupied Europe, his relationships to the numerous people that made up his large administration are the most important elements to understanding his leadership ability. Czerniakow believed himself to be the vessel through which the Nazis would publicize their various demands and initiatives concerning the ghetto residents. While Gens and Rumkowski were practically the sole rulers of their ghettos, Czerniakow was the head of an administrative system that numbered 6,000 men at its height.227 Yisrael Gutman claims that, “Czerniakow adopted a system of mediation by appealing to logic and humane feelings, but his approach succeeded only rarely.”228 Attempts to incorporate logic and rationale in a period that was anything but, proved ineffective in managing the ghetto administration.

228 Ibid., 81.
Czerniakow’s rule in Warsaw was less successful than that in Vilna and Lodz in part because he chaired the Warsaw Judenrat with a code of ethics that had lost its meaning in wartime. He expected his administration to be honest and forthright with him concerning bureaucratic affairs, and demanded respect and loyalty out of his workers. As this thesis argues, Czerniakow believed that leadership based on reason and logic would ensure a peaceful stay in the ghetto. While these leadership traits were qualities that normally make great leaders, in a time of such extraordinary dehumanizing oppression these same qualities appear naïve and ignorant of the reality in which they reside. Gutman argues that, “strategies that centered on bribery, illegal business dealings, and pandering to the personal ‘style’ or idiosyncrasies of the officials and policemen who served in the area proved far more efficient.” 229 Along those same lines, Rumkowski had no qualms with overworking his laborers or removing their ration cards when they protested, and Gens and his police force personally selected Jews for deportations. The manner in which the leaders in Vilna and Lodz acted appear cruel and unnecessary; however, they contributed to a successful ghetto society. This thesis argues that a “successful” ghetto society is one in which leaders established a managerial style that allowed for a decent quality of life for residents, as well as increased longevity for the ghetto. Leonard Tushnet best summarizes Czerniakow’s leadership principles,

At a crucial time, when cheating, deception, lying, pretense, and lawbreaking were literally vitally necessary for the survival of the Jews, he refused to compromise and held fast to the old principles of honesty, hard

229 Ibid.
work, and straight forwardness. Principles that had lost all meaning in the walled slaughterhouse of the ghetto. 230

Czerniakow's unwillingness to sacrifice his ethics proved detrimental to the establishment of a “successful” ghetto society.

Czerniakow was a man of honor and high moral integrity, but such qualities did not translate into good leadership principles during a time of unimaginable horror and catastrophe. His unwillingness to adopt a ruling strategy, aside from his hope that compliance would result in little Nazi interference, allowed him to retain his ethics and morals throughout his leadership, in contrast to the harsh and brutal personalities that Gens and Rumkowski took on. In Vilna, and especially in Lodz, the Judenrat believed in a “salvation through labor” policy of which the Jews would prove their worth by becoming productive elements of the Nazi economy. Czerniakow did not adopt the same strategy in Warsaw. According to Yisrael Gutman, “One gets the impression that the Warsaw Judenrat lacked any definitive or consistent policy... Czerniakow wanted both to meet the stringent demands of the Germans and to prevent, as much as possible, their intervention in the internal affairs of the ghetto.” 231 If Czerniakow had a policy at all, it was to retain the daily status quo within a situation he expected to be short-lived.

The striking difference in Czerniakow’s ruling strategy, compared to the similar vein shared by Gens and Rumkowski, can be traced back to his relationship to Heinz Auerswald, the German Kommissar of the Warsaw Ghetto. Auerswald, although a member of the Nazi party, was a civil administrator who

lacked the ferocity and brutality of the SS and the police. For the entirety of the
lifespan of the Warsaw Ghetto, Czerniakow and Auerswald met almost daily.
Auerswald continually reassured Czerniakow that his treatment of the ghetto
community would be reasonable and objective, and that there would be no hostile
feelings towards the Jews of Warsaw on his behalf.232 As time went by in the
ghetto, Czerniakow began to cling more and more to the encouraging words of
Auerswald, and the two developed a cordial relationship. Gutman points out that,
“on occasion Czerniakow approached Auerswald on a personal basis and spoke to
him in a way that deviated from the accepted manner of behavior between a Nazi
official and a Jew.”233 Czerniakow believed what Auserwald told him concerning
the future of the ghetto. Whether or not the Judenrat leader was clinging to false
hope for his own comfort or if he actually believed the Nazi official, one only had
to step into the ghetto to realize that Auserwald was not being honest. If
Auserwald really did want to treat the Jews humanely, then the Nazi
administration would have made drastic efforts to aid in the starvation and
contagious disease epidemics that plagued the entirety of the ghetto. No matter
the reason for Czerniakow’s lack of foresight concerning his relationship with the
Nazis, those same associations influenced the way he ran his administration and
treated the men who were working “under” him.

Czerniakow’s willingness to maintain the status quo in the ghetto was the
reason he refused to declare absolute authority over his administration, and thus
expected little out of them. He believed that these men would do the best they

232 Ibid., 99.
233 Ibid.
could to aid the omnipresent suffering of their people, and that there was no need for him to micro manage his subordinates. As such, there was a high level of corruption and bribery amid the administrators. These men held a high degree of power and were answerable to no one, faced no repercussions for their behavior, and were in dire situations themselves. A combination of those elements led to corruption and dishonesty among the segment of men designed to “help and better” the lowliest of ghetto citizens. The most corrupt of these officials were the Jewish police of the Warsaw ghetto.

The fraudulent activities of the Jewish police were also associated with the members of the Judenrat. Czerniakow, loyal to his assimilationist roots, appointed Josef Szerynski as the head of the Jewish Police. Although born Jewish, Szerynski was a Catholic convert who had been an officer in the Polish police. Czerniakow believed that Szerynski’s background would make him a highly effective police chief, and one who could use connections with the police to benefit the Jews of the ghetto. Unfortunately for Czerniakow, Szerynski’s previous connections did indeed make him a powerful and formidable leader throughout the ghetto. In fact, Szerynski began to accompany Czerniakow to meetings with Auserwald and the German authorities. In time, his growing power overwhelmed both Czerniakow and the Judenrat to which it was previously answerable. Under Szerynski’s leadership, the Jewish Police grew to be a fearsome and independent force within the ghetto, out of the jurisdiction and control of Czerniakow. Gutman points out that the Jewish police, “regarded themselves as superior to the common masses in the ghetto and exploited the opportunity to enjoy special privileges, pursue a

234 Ibid, 88.
lifestyle that contrasted sharply with the grim realities of life in the ghetto, and cast their shadow of terror over all." Their influence encouraged the Gestapo and the S.D. to pass orders directly to Szerynski at times, bypassing the authority of the Judenrat altogether.

Because the Jewish police became such a powerful element in the ghetto, they were able to blackmail the ghetto residents in order to extract valuable items for their own benefit. The corruption of the Jewish police became such an issue that the Oneg Shabbat, the official archive established in the ghetto, began to publish daily memos regarding the latest corruption tactics of the police to warn the masses. One such memo by Yehiel Gorny states, “They [the Jewish police] started by taking money from the bakers for baking illegal bread, from shopkeepers for trading in forbidden items, then entered into partnerships with gendarmes for the purpose of smuggling, and took bribes for releasing captives during the razzias for labor in the camps...” Political group Gordonia also admonished the Jewish police in its underground newsletter, “Jutrzenka.” On 14 March 1942, it stated that the Jewish Police were, “a tool in German hands, traitors who will yet receive their well-earned punishment.” The police, as well as corrupt members of the Warsaw Judenrat, typically worked together to secure comfort and stability for themselves and their families at the cost of the less fortunate.

---

235 Ibid., 89.
236 Ibid.
Although the Jewish police and Judenrat officials were the instigators behind the corruption in the ghetto, Czneriakow also played an active role in the mismanagement of Jewish Warsaw. His system of taxation helped to initiate such corruption in the ghetto. As noted in the second chapter, each resident in the ghetto was responsible for paying the same amount of taxes, which meant that every person, regardless of socio-economic status, was responsible for owing the equivalent amount of zlotys. This taxation method increased the divide between the classes and incited much unrest and anger from residents in poverty due to such a system. Those that were unable to bribe officials or police officers typically found themselves in devastating living conditions.

Surviving tax records from 1941 showcase the unjust taxation system established by Czerniakow, and highlight the reasons that the Warsaw ghetto has such a big class divide. In that year alone, the Judenrat collected 805,000 zloty in taxes from the wealthy classes and roughly 4.5 million zloty from the poor/impoverished classes. The lower classes were well aware that they carried the greatest responsibility for financing the operations of the ghetto. A.M. Rogowoj, an Orthodox journalist living in the ghetto angrily reported:

One can see that we are constantly rotating in a vicious circle of social injustice. Our entire welfare system is based on injustice and wrong doing...our entire welfare system operates in such a way as to burden not the rich or those making a living, but the hungry, the swollen beggars, the customers of the soup kitchens.  

---

239 Zlotys are Polish currency.
Czerniakow’s attempts to be fair and just with his residents by establishing an
equal taxation system only further depleted the meager resources of the poor. This
unfair system resulted in securing an environment where corruption thrived, as
honest and just interactions would no longer ensure survival. Money talked, and
only those who had enough of it managed to secure comfortable and stable lives
for themselves in the ghetto.

The corruption of the Judenrat was not a secretive occurrence in the
ghetto, and numerous political organizations publicized the wrongdoings of the
ghetto administration in their underground publications. A chronicler of the Oneg
Shabbat recorded his frustrations with the upper classes of the ghetto society,
“...The spendthrifts, gorgers, card-players lack nothing. They have open access to
all night entertainment-places abounding in the ghetto, drinking and consuming
goes on just as in the past, in the days of peace. The pillars of our community
protect and guard these people.”

Joseph Kermish points out that, “The monied
classes succeeded by various means-mainly by bribes and privileges—to evade
forced labor, as the Judenrat usually gave exemptions against special payment.”

The Jewish police and the Judenrat administrators allowed the desperate and
helpless residents to manipulate their control over various ghetto departments for
the right price. Corruption became so problematic that various underground
political groups wrote Czerniakow alerting him of the misdeeds occurring
throughout his administration. On 23 May 1942, the underground newsletter,

---

242 Committee of 8 Commissioners. 1941. Deliberations, in To Live with Honor and Die with
243 Kermish ed., To Live With Honor and Die with Honor: Selected Documents from the Warsaw
Ghetto Underground Archives, 290.
“Dos Fraye Wort” alerted Czerniakow of the actions of his staff: “To the Warsaw Jewish Council- Corruption and rot that have eaten away at the Council from the start... keep increasing daily... The Jewish population was openly robbed of the little coal that the Germans allocated and it was put on the black market...”

Czerniakow had succeeded in opening a door that he could no longer close.

The corruption of the administration became so prevalent that Czerniakow began to consider serious actions to halt the sleaze that flourished everywhere.

Joseph Kermish points out that Czerniakow considered establishing committees to handle the barrage of corruption that not only physically harmed the ghetto, but psychologically as well. He notes:

The violent disapproval of the Judenrat’s activities, which were hostile to the common people... influenced Czerniakow. He consented to create communal committees, within the Judenrat’s special departments, whose opinions would be taken under advice by the directors of the departments.

Czerniakow designed these committees to monitor and correct the flaws that were so prevalent in the administration, in order to improve the deteriorating relationship between the Judenrat and the masses. As expected, these “oversight” committees did not last long. The efforts made to correct the severe ethical issues within the various Judenrat administrations were in vain, as the web of corruption within the leadership ranks was too vast and too intricate.

Kaplan, a Hebrew teacher who kept a diary during his stay in the ghetto noted, 

---

244 Dos Fraye Wort. 1942. Excerpt from article “To the Warsaw Jewish Council.” In Trunk, Judenrat: The Jewish Councils of Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation, 538

245 Kermish ed., To Live With Honor and Die with Honor: Selected Documents from the Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives, 293.

246 Gutman, The Jews of Warsaw, 83.

247 Kermish ed., To Live With Honor and Die with Honor: Selected Documents from the Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives, 293.
"The Judenrat and its shameful deeds are now celebrated in song. Outraged and frustrated, the people are making up songs denouncing Czerniakow and his clique."248 No matter the intentions of the Judenrat administration when it first began, poverty, sickness, and hunger in the ghetto only increased with Czerniakow's ruling strategies, leading to flourishing corruption and unfair treatment of the masses.

Czerniakow's inability or unwillingness to exert total control over his administration allowed its individual workers to make their own rules and guidelines concerning the residents they were working to "aid." Unlike the brutal and ruthless tactics that the Vilna police employed to secure order, or the formidable and relentless reputation that Rumkowski developed for punishing his laborers, there were no repercussions or consequences for inappropriate behavior in Warsaw. Czerniakow's decision to trust in individual moral guidelines to police the actions of his men failed miserably. The ghetto was filled with sick, hungry, and hopeless people—to expect these people or the men in their charge to follow the same ethical code that guided them in normal times was naïve, at best.

The severe corruption of the Jewish police and of the Judenrat left Adam Czerniakow vulnerable to attacks on his authority. Aside from his decreased position of power due to the influence of the police chief, he was also constantly competing against a group in the ghetto labeled The Thirteen. The Thirteen was a group of roughly 300-400 men with power parallel to the Jewish police in the ghetto. Under the leadership of Abraham Gancwajch, their job was to combat

usury and profiteering in the ghetto. They developed a reputation of being Nazi collaborators who worked as informers for the Gestapo in return for pocketing contraband. Their actions within the ghetto were similar to those of the police and Judenrat, but their seemingly legitimate connection to the Nazis differentiated the two. Gancwajch and his group were continually locked in a power struggle with the Judenrat and with Czerniakow for total control and authority over the ghetto.

Gancwajch built his influence on the wealth and stature he attained through his German connections, and was in a viable position to usurp Czerniakow’s authority and revamp the governing of the ghetto. For various reasons, most still unknown to historians, Gancwahjch was unable to stage a coup d’état. Nonetheless, his actions and intentions show that men of influence in the ghetto understood how weak and fragile Czerniakow’s authority position was, and were not against attempting to overthrow him. As Gutman notes, “The influence of the Judenrat’s top man steadily declined, while those who were close to the Germans grew more and more powerful.” The power struggle between The Thirteen and Adam Czerniakow reflect that a lack of moral consciousness was key to establishing and maintaining power within the ghetto. Although Czerniakow chose to hang on to his virtues, he was well aware that the only way for him to exert more power and control over this administration was through an adoption of the same morally flawed characteristics as the men around him. As this thesis argues, instead of adapting to the catastrophic environment of which he

250 Ibid., 81.
was in charge, he chose to maintain his integrity, and unfortunately, the residents of the Warsaw ghetto suffered in turn.

Chapters 2 and 3 have shown that creating and maintaining various relationships within the ghetto had the ability to aid or hinder the progress of development under each Judenrat leader. Jacob Gens’ relationship to the Jewish police was his most important association in the Vilna ghetto. His term as chief of police was impressive enough to elicit respect and esteem from the Nazis and resulted in his promotion to head of the ghetto. While in charge of the Vilna Jews he was careful to maintain a close relationship to Murer, in order to justify the worth and existence of the Jews. In Lodz, Rumkowski’s most carefully tilled relationships were with his laborers and the Nazis. Because the workers provided the very essence of the existence of the ghetto, Rumkowski pushed them hard, and was at times quite harsh and unforgiving. He believed that the ghetto would not exist without a productive labor force, thus all of his efforts went to ensuring that the laborers understood the importance and extremity of their contributions to the ghetto. In Warsaw, Czerniakow’s inability to exert his authority over lower ranking administrators helped to encourage corruption and bribery in all aspects of ghetto bureaucracy. Perhaps thrown off by the reassurances of Auerswald, Czerniakow believed if the status quo could be maintained, then the Jews would be able to hold on long enough to see the end of the war. If “holding on long enough” meant that some people engaged in criminal acts to survive, then so be it.

This thesis has argued that the various ruling philosophies adopted by each leader influenced both the longevity of their ghetto and the quality of life experienced by their residents. Each man’s personality, ability, and resources played a crucial role in
establishing ghetto institutions, maintaining relationships with the Nazis, and ensuring a “normal” quality of life. Through examinations of each man’s success in Chapters 2 and 3, it is evident that the adoption of a cruel and sometimes sadistic attitude was key to ensuring the execution of orders—thereby allowing for less Nazi intervention and a better quality of life. Such personality traits were crucial when it came time to face the deportation and resettlement demands of the Nazis. The following chapter will highlight the actions of each leader in light of understanding the meaning behind the resettlement deportations. The individual actions of each man concerning the selection and deportation of the Jews to their deaths has aided in the pronouncement of their legacy throughout history. Gens and Rumkowski believed that sacrificing some would lead to the salvation of others, while Czerniakow, horrified by the Nazi demand, committed suicide.

Jacob Gens’ wife begged him to leave the ghetto. She could not understand why he chose to remain in his gated quarantine while she and their daughter lived peacefully in an “Aryan” Vilna. Mrs. Gens was not Jewish, and so the Nazis allowed both her and their daughter to live a quiet and peaceful life outside of the ghetto. Initially given the same opportunity to live outside of the ghetto walls, Gens refused, believing his place to be with his people in their time of need. Mrs. Gens pleaded constantly with him to join her and their daughter and flee war-torn Lithuania. Gens could not find the strength to leave the Jews of the ghetto. He wrote to his wife, “I hope you understand that I cannot abandon the ghetto at a time when my people are suffering so much. I must stay and try to do the best I can for the Jews of the ghetto.”

Throughout the course of his two-year stay in the Vilna ghetto, Gens turned down numerous offers from family, acquaintances, and underground organizations to escape. He rebuked the idea of leaving behind his people, who needed him in their time of desperation. Such thoughts of self were unfathomable in a time of such communal horror and chaos, but Gens knew that if anyone could save the Jews of Vilna, it was him.

---

CHAPTER IV

RESETTLEMENT TO THE EAST

My Parents are dead. They died in concentration camps or, betrayed by their fellow citizens, on a city street. I shall never know how, or when, or exactly where it happened and where they were buried. There will be no tomb sheltering their remains. This whole country is a tomb, the whole earth a vast grave, and somewhere, they are a part of it.

— Janina David, Warsaw ghetto survivor. 251

Jacob Gens’ wife begged him to leave the ghetto. She could not understand why he chose to remain in his gated quarantine while she and their daughter lived peacefully in “Aryan” Vilna. Mrs. Gens was not Jewish, and so the Nazis allowed both her and their daughter to live a quiet and peaceful life outside of the ghetto. Initially given the same opportunity to live outside of the ghetto walls, Gens refused, believing his place to be with his people in their time of need. Mrs. Gens pled constantly with him to join her and their daughter and flee war-torn Lithuania. Gens could not find the strength to leave the ghetto. He wrote to his wife, “I hope you understand that I cannot abandon the ghetto at a time when my people are suffering so much. I must stay and try to do the best I can for the Jews of the ghetto.” 252 Throughout the course of his two-year stay in the Vilna ghetto, Gens turned down numerous offers from family, acquaintances, and underground organizations to escape. He rebuked the idea of leaving behind his people, who needed him in their time of desperation. Such thoughts of self were unfathomable in a time of such communal horror and chaos, but Gens knew that if anyone could save the Jews of Vilna, it was him.

252 Jacob Gens quoted in Tushnet, The Pavement of Hell, 155.
Most of the negative historiography surrounding Rumkowski and Gens concerns their behaviors and decisions regarding deportations to death camps. Subsequently, Czerniakow’s positive legacy rests on the fact that he committed suicide upon learning that the deportations out of the Warsaw ghetto actually meant transportation to the death camp of Treblinka. Gens’ active participation in rounding up Jews in Lithuania and sending them to their mass graves in the forests has helped to seal his “collaborative” legacy in the historiography. The fact that Rumkowski knew that he was creating deportation lists that would send the Jews of Lodz to their deaths has left negative connotations in the eyes of survivors and historians alike. This thesis argues that Rumkowski and Gens were successful in achieving the goals they set forth from the outset of their rule, and although many of their actions were controversial, they still contributed to a better quality of life for their residents. It has also been to show that Czerniakow’s well-intentioned but mostly hands off approach to leadership, contributed to a mismanaged and abusive ghetto administration that harmed the livelihood of a majority of its residents.

This chapter will show that while Rumkowski and Gens participated in the selection of Jews for deportations, they did so only because they believed that the sacrifice of some would lead to the salvation of others. From the outset, Gens wanted to rule his ghetto in such a fashion as to avoid as much Nazi interference as possible. Because of this strategy, he personally participated in deportations in order to avoid the brutality and horror that were sure to come with Nazi involvement in round ups. Rumkowski’s main goal for his ghetto was to establish a work force that proved the value of Jewish lives. When the time for deportations arrived, he remorsefully handed over
Jews to the Nazis who were unable to contribute to his vast manufacturing enterprise.

This chapter argues that their motivations and their desire to save the remnant, (evidenced in their numerous speeches to the ghetto), outweigh their controversial participation in securing the roundups for deportation. Meanwhile, Czerniakow’s unwillingness to sacrifice his morals during his tenure in the ghetto influenced his suicide. Unwilling to send Jews to their deaths, he took his own life, thus carrying with him his dignity and principles. While Czerniakow’s suicide was honorable, this chapter will show that it only quickened the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, and sent the majority of his residents to quicker deaths in Treblinka.

Although the calls for “resettlement to the east” began in early 1942, Gestapo killing sprees were a common occurrence throughout the ghettos from their start. Although the ghetto Jews were accustomed to dealing with the catastrophic results of Gestapo mood swings, none could fathom that their destiny would lie in a vast system of mechanized slaughter. Initially believed by the Judenräte to mean the resettlement of Jews from the ghettos to labor camps, leaders met the calls cooperatively. Until 1942, most ghettos could not comprehend the horror that the Nazis were capable of, and devastating premonitions concerning the resettlements were few and far between. Due to meticulous attempts at deception, and strenuous efforts to hide the truth behind the deportations, the Nazis were successful in extracting their human quotas from the ghettos.

The starvation, sickness, and corruption that were daily occurrences in the Warsaw ghetto were nothing compared to the murder that joined the daily repertoire of ghetto life in April 1942. The Gestapo used the random murder of a German smuggler in early April as justification to punish the Jews in the ghetto. On 17 April, with the help of
the Jewish police, the Gestapo went on a killing spree throughout the ghetto that resulted in a night of horror—ending with the deaths of over 50 innocent people. The massacre quickly shattered any remnants of hope and morale still left in the ghetto. Chaim Kaplan noted in his diary that Czerniakow attempted to calm the ghetto. He recorded a speech the Judenrat leader made to the residents shortly after the massacres; “Calm yourselves! Don’t be distressed! Those who were punished were involved in some illegal activity. Let everyone return to his work!” Keeping the ghetto morale at a functioning level was important for the livelihood of the residents. Kaplan noted that Czerniakow sent telegrams to the Jewish police in order to advise the residents that such actions would no longer occur. He then observed that the ghetto public dismissed the leader’s reassurances and braced themselves for more brutality. After two years of sadness and hardship, they were beyond the point of finding comfort in the words of their leader.

While the residents of the Warsaw ghetto were no strangers to hardships and sacrifice, the rumors of Jewish massacres in other ghettos unnerved and alarmed them in a way that ghetto life did not. Rumors of deportations and murder of Jews in the Warthegau and Lithuania were normal occurrences in Warsaw, but the reality of such information did not begin to set in until the aforementioned massacre in the ghetto. The Judenrat’s initial failure to address such rumors devastated the morale of the residents. At the sight of such brutality without justification at the hands of the Nazis, the residents of Warsaw began to consider the truth behind rumors of massacre and deportations in surrounding ghettos. Kaplan noted the horror of the information that escapees from the Lublin ghetto shared with the residents of Warsaw; “What they reported was so
horrifying that we began to wonder if they too were exaggerating, for surely human beings created in the image of God would be incapable of such evil deeds... The extermination and evacuation procedures were methodically conducted. 256 Kaplan’s diary entries reflect a haunting question that emulated throughout the entire ghetto: “Why should Warsaw fare better than Lublin?” 257 Emmanuel Ringelblum, head of the ghetto archives, also noted the same fear in his diary, “The topic of deportation from Warsaw does not quiet the thoughts of Warsaw Jews. People are asking: Why should the Warsaw Jews be so privileged as to avoid the curse of deportation?” 258 The seriousness of such rumors further devastated the morale of the residents of Jewish Warsaw. If their living conditions were not catastrophic enough, the increasing presence of horrific rumors further depleted the quality of life of the Jews in Warsaw.

The only person who did not seem alarmed by the deportation rumors and the growing number of brutal acts in the ghetto was Adam Czerniakow. The rumors of Jewish slaughter circulated heavily around the ghetto and suffocated its inhabitants, and fear of the unknown paralyzed them. Czerniakow, however, appeared unphased. Reassurances from Auerswald concerning the stability of the Warsaw ghetto seemed to comfort him, as well as the inclusion of his own justifications for the ghetto’s existence. Ringelblum recorded in his diary a conversation with Czerniakow regarding the rumors of impending deportation out of Warsaw; “He explains it in a very naïve way: the governors of the displacement quarters, the Commissar of the Jewish living quarters, are [all] young people who want to evade the battle-field, and that they can do so only as

256 Kaplan, Scroll of Agony, 312.
257 Ibid., 314.
long as the ghetto is left to exist. This however, seems to be quite a poor support for our existence.” At a time when the rumors of ghetto instability and liquidation ran rampant throughout the ghetto, a lack of an official ghetto motto hit home for the residents. In Vilna, when deportation rumors hit the ghetto, the Jews convinced themselves that their production output as well as their self-reliance would ensure their safety. Lodz residents believed their superior manufacturing success would deem them untouchable concerning deportation threats. Under Czerniakow, there was no ghetto policy in Warsaw that would allow the residents to justify their existence.

As spring gave way to early summer, the deportation rumors intensified, and the residents of the Warsaw ghetto remained on edge. The fear that engulfed the Jews daily made tensions in the ghetto palpable. Resident Janucz Korczak reflected the atmosphere of the ghetto in his diary, “Oh, how hard it is to live, how easy to die!” Kaplan also voiced the sentiment of the ghetto inhabitants when he wrote, “Our only good fortune is that our days are numbered—that we shall not have long to live under conditions like these, and that after our terrible sufferings and wanderings we shall come to eternal rest, which was denied us in life.” However, Czerniakow continued to deny such rumors, as recorded by Ringelblum: “The chairman of the Jewish Council says that he was given firm promises that deportation would not be operative in Warsaw.” The unknown seemed worse to the Jews than the knowledge of what was to come.

The ignorance of the Warsaw Jews concerning their fate lasted only until 22 July 1942, when the Nazis ordered the Judenrat to fill deportation quotas. Until then, Adam

261 Kaplan, Scroll of Agony, 189.
Czerniakow remained ignorant of the realities behind the deportations. As Yisrael Gutman has argued:

Two days before the start of the mass deportation, Auerswald pretended to be totally ignorant of impending events, and in a conversation with Czerniakow he dealt with the usual agenda of the day. After more than a year of daily contact with the chairman of the Judenrat, he did not even see fit to warn Czerniakow for his personal safety or so much as hint at what awaited the Jews of Warsaw. 263

The relationship that Czerniakow believed himself to have cultivated with Auerswald remained a farce from the beginning of the ghetto to its very end.

To the surprise and horror of Adam Czerniakow, the Nazis demanded that he provide 6,000 Jews a day for the next ten days for deportation out of Warsaw. 264 The Nazis ordered that he and the Judenrat be responsible for making the selections, and if they refused, the Germans would take over. 265 Unsure of exactly what was happening, he called an emergency meeting of all of the committee leaders and Judenrat heads. He asked that these organizations aid him in fulfilling the daily quotas for the Nazis, and to help in providing provisions for the deportees. 266 Czerniakow could no longer comfort himself in the false assurances of Auserwald. After two long years of suffering and hardship, the time had come to liquidate the Warsaw ghetto. The next day, 23 July 1942, Czerniakow learned what was to become of the people he was to deport. Because the Nazis demanded that the ‘non-productive’ elements of the ghetto be sent away first, Czerniakow understood that the Nazis would transport the Jews to their deaths, and he would be the one responsible for their doom. For the first time in the ghetto, he refused to

264 Tushnet, The Pavement of Hell, 126.
265 Ibid.
266 Ibid.
sign a decree from the Nazis. Low-ranking Judenrat officials signed the Nazi resettlement decree without their leader’s signature.

Adam Czerniakow committed suicide upon learning that the deportation lists the Nazis ordered him to draw up would send his residents to their deaths. He could not bear the burden that weighed so heavily upon his shoulders. On 23 July, the day he learned of the truth behind the deportations, he took a cyanide tablet and ended his life. He left behind two suicide notes that explained why he chose death over the responsibility of sending others to their doom. One note was to his wife asking for her forgiveness. The other was for his fellow Judenrat members that read, “I am powerless. My heart trembles in sorrow and pity. I can no longer bear all this. My act will prove to everyone what is the right thing to do.”

Czerniakow’s hope that the ghetto could exist mostly free of Nazi interference proved impossible after his death, and in fact only increased the brutality of the Nazis and quickened the rate of deportations. After Czerniakow committed suicide, the Nazis bypassed the authority of the Judenrat entirely and dealt strictly with the Jewish police concerning the fulfillment of deportation orders. With the brutal cooperation of the police force, the Nazis deported over 300,000 Jews from Warsaw throughout the duration of the Aktion. By the end of the first major deportation in the Warsaw ghetto, only 70,000 people remained (down from over 450,000). The remaining Jews were shell-shocked. Resident Alexander Donat recalled the chaos that unfolded after Czerniakow’s passing and the initiation of the deportations; “The ghetto was increasingly disorganized: stores closed down, bakeries stopped baking, smuggling ceased, and food became unobtainable.

---

268 Raul Hilberg, The Destruction of the European Jews, 204.
Famine stalked the city.\textsuperscript{269} The loss of Czerniakow, while still misunderstood by the majority of the ghetto, cast a dark shadow over the lives of the residents. Unsure of the tragedy about to unfold, they knew that whatever was in store for them had to be devastating, if their leader felt the burden too heavy to carry. Confusion, chaos, and despair swept through the ghetto. The ignorance and the subsequent panic that erupted throughout the city can be traced back to Czerniakow’s death. As John K. Roth argued, “Czerniakow gave no warning about what he knew.”\textsuperscript{270} Such a sentiment became one of the largest complaints concerning Czerniakow’s death—that since he did not spread the important information regarding the fate of the Jews to the rest of the leaders, the ghetto was unable to establish any sort of resistance towards their oppressors.

Only at the end of the first deportation, when the Jews realized their fate, did they begin to organize resistance coalitions. The corruption and dishonesty of the influential men in the ghetto made previous attempts at organized resistance difficult, if not impossible. After Czerniakow’s suicide, chaos exploded throughout the ghetto. The brutality of the Jewish police and the Nazis made the residents further despise the remaining ghetto leaders, and mistrust and suspicion hovered over all men in power. The anger and hate that the police and the ghetto leaders garnered in the weeks surrounding the deportations influenced the swell of the underground groups. Through August and September of 1942, various sects of the Jewish underground assassinated police chief Jozef Szerynski, along with numerous police officers, Judenrat members, informers, and collaborators.\textsuperscript{271} The anger and power of the organizations left the Judenrat powerless in

\textsuperscript{269} Donat, “The Holocaust Kingdom,” 166.
\textsuperscript{270} John K. Roth, forward to \textit{Life in the Ghettos During the Holocaust}, ed. Eric J. Sterling (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), xii.
\textsuperscript{271} Hilberg, \textit{The Destruction of the European Jews}, 206.
the presence of a strong and able youth-driven underground. While Czerniakow’s suicide paved the way for the growth of the underground organizations, their efforts—including the honorable but tragic Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943—were all in vain. Of the roughly 500,000 Jews who made up the Warsaw ghetto, approximately 90 percent perished in the Holocaust.272

Czerniakow’s suicide cemented his legacy as a man who was so horrified by the deportations, that ending his life was the only way to stand up for the dignity and honor of his people. As Chaim Kaplan summarized;“He perpetuated his name by his death more than by his life. His end proves conclusively that he worked and strove for the good of his people; that he wanted its welfare and continuity even though not everything done in his name was praiseworthy.”273 No matter their personal opinion of the way in which Czerniakow ran the ghetto, most residents agreed that his suicide was admirable and dignified amidst a time of absolute horror and devastation. Most residents also agreed that whatever flaws Czerniakow assumed in life, all vanished due to his selfless act.

As this chapter argues, Czerniakow’s suicide ultimately proved harmful for the remaining Jews in the ghetto. As the first person who understood the truth behind the deportations, he left the ghetto to fend for itself without the slightest idea of its fate.

Marek Edelman, leader of the underground group The Jewish Fighting Organization pointed out, “We thought he had no right to act as he did...it was his duty to inform the entire population of the state of affairs.”274 Alexander Donat also had harsh words for his departed leader, “Whatever his motives or intentions, his death did not help us. We felt it

272 John K. Roth, forward to Life in the Ghettos During the Holocaust, ed. Eric J. Sterling (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), xii.
274 Marek Edelman quoted in Pavement of Hell, 130.
was desertion, not leadership. Czerniakow failed to sound the alarm and summon his people to resistance... His suicide only intensified panic. If it bore witness to his personal integrity, it did not attest to his greatness.275 Emmanuel Ringelblum also echoed the feeling of betrayal that Czerniakow’s death left in the hearts of some of the residents, “[his suicide] was a sign of weakness—should have called for resistance—a weak man.”276 Taking the knowledge of the Jews’ fate to his grave isolated his residents, who felt betrayed and abandoned by their leader, in a time when they needed him the most.

Czerniakow’s suicide was simply the last desperate act of a man at his wit’s end. It was not the final act of a leader whose rule reflected his glorious passing, as many historians claim. As this chapter argues, his death resulted in the deaths of more than 300,000 of his people in Treblinka. However, no matter the historical place of Adam Czerniakow, his death was indeed tragic, and he was one of the first victims of the Nazi genocide in Warsaw. Although his suicide is not enough to warrant his favorable legacy in history, it does not seek to downplay the sadness of his action. Fitting for a variety of interpretive angles, Chaim Kaplan best summarizes the final action of Judenrat head Adam Czerniakow:

He did not have a good life, but he had a beautiful death. May his death atone for his wrongs against his people before becoming president. There are those who earn immortality in a single hour. The president, Adam Czerniakow, earned his immortality in a single instant.277

276 Emmanuel Ringelblum quoted in Arad, The Pavement of Hell, 130.
Czerniakow’s inability to handle the call for deportations correlates to his lack of a ghetto leadership policy. He could not rely on ghetto labor, production output, or self-sufficiency to sustain a majority of his residents when the calls for deportation came, and thus he had no bargaining power to reduce the quotas. These factors contributed to his feelings of helplessness, which culminated in his suicide. In contrast, Rumkowski’s obsession with production output influenced his decision to cooperate with the Nazis in drawing up deportation lists. Although many residents disapproved of Rumkowski’s actions, popular opinion did not bother the leader, and he set forth to do whatever it took to keep a faction of the ghetto working. The first call for deportations occurred in January 1942. The Germans demanded 20,000 Jews for redistribution to settlements outside the ghetto.\(^\text{278}\) At least at this stage, most of the evidence has shown that Rumkowski knew nothing of the reality behind the deportations. Lodz was one of the first ghettos ordered to create transportation lists. With no prior knowledge of other ghetto deportations, Rumkowski was ignorant as to any ill meaning behind such a demand.

When the calls for deportation came, Rumkowski met this Nazi demand the same as all of the previous ones: cooperatively. He believed the Nazis wanted Jews for labor outside of the ghetto, and this concerned him only in the way that it would affect his own ghetto production. He convinced the German authorities to cut the quota in half, proof not only to himself but to the ghetto of just how hard he was working on its behalf.\(^\text{279}\) Therefore, the deportees chosen at the initial call were mostly prisoners who did not contribute to his beloved labor system. The demand for deportations came regularly through May of 1942. The Germans demanded that this group of deportees include the

\(^\text{278}\) Horowitz, *Ghettostadt: Lodz and the Making of a Nazi City*, 126.
\(^\text{279}\) Ibid, 143.
elderly, the sick, and the children. Once again, the Nazis forced Rumkowski to draw up a list of names of deportees for evacuation from the ghetto, or else they would liquidate the entire ghetto immediately.\textsuperscript{280} The choice made by Rumkowski to comply with the demand to draw up the list led to his negative portrayal in historiography.\textsuperscript{281} By May 1942, the Nazis had deported more than 55,000 Jews out of the ghetto.\textsuperscript{282} While ghetto residents were upset because they were separated from their loved ones, they still believed that the transports were transferring their family members to labor facilities outside of the ghetto.

In September 1942, the Nazis again demanded children and the elderly for deportation; Rumkowski reasoned that deportees were no longer needed for work.\textsuperscript{283} Compounded with this realization were rumors of Jewish deaths in Chelmno and Warsaw that had made their way to Rumkowski’s office. Aside from the rumors, several escapees also made their way back and retold the horror of the truth behind the Nazis ‘deportations.’\textsuperscript{284} By September 1942 he was assuredly aware of the fate of the deportees; some arguments claim that by February of the same year, he knew the truth behind the deportations.\textsuperscript{285} In order to understand the impact that this knowledge made for him and his role in Judenrat historiography, it is key to comprehend what various other Judenrat leaders did once they were aware of the truth behind the deportations. As evidenced earlier for Warsaw, when Adam Czerniakow realized he would be sending his people to their deaths, he committed suicide. In Kovno, Dr. Euchalanan Elkes encouraged

\textsuperscript{281} For more information on the negative historiography, look at the previously mentioned works by Philip Friedman, Isaiah Trunk, Alan Adelson, and Robert Lapides, for a start.
\textsuperscript{282} Huppert, “King of the Ghetto: Mordechai Haim Rumkowski, the Elder of Lodz Ghetto,” 144.
\textsuperscript{283} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{284} Horowitz, \textit{Ghettostadt: Lodz and the Making of a Nazi City}, 172.
\textsuperscript{285} Unger, \textit{Reassessment of the Image of Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski}, 43.
his residents to stay active and participate in the Jewish underground resistance movements within the ghetto.\textsuperscript{286} In Minsk, Moshe Yaffe encouraged the residents of the ghetto to run for their lives.\textsuperscript{287} Although this is a small sampling of the decisions made by various Judenrat leaders, they all show an unwillingness to comply with the Nazi orders, as opposed to the actions of Rumkowski.

Rumkowski based his decision to cooperate with the Nazis on the events that unfolded in Warsaw after Czerniakow’s suicide. As argued by Gordon Horowitz, “In order to avoid a repetition in their streets of what was happening in Warsaw, there could be no other choice but to cooperate and carry out the evacuation by their own hands, and in this way alone at least ameliorate the effort.”\textsuperscript{288} The chaos that shattered Warsaw and the devastating loss of life that followed Czerniakow’s death were all tragedies that Rumkowski believed were preventable with tacit cooperation. While he acknowledged the bravery shown by Czerniakow, he also understood that such an act did nothing to prevent the mass deportations that followed, and he refused to put himself in the same predicament.\textsuperscript{289} If cooperation with the Nazis meant retaining a slight semblance of control over the amount of requested deportees, then Rumkowski was determined to follow such a protocol. Controlling deportations quotas also ensured that he could still make his ghetto a significant manufacturing hub, his most important consideration.

Thus, in September 1942, when the Nazis demanded the deportation of children and the elderly, Rumkowski was under no false pretenses concerning their fate. He secured the safety of the children of policemen, firefighters, and anyone who helped to

\textsuperscript{286} Huppert, “King of the Ghetto: Mordechai Haim Rumkowski, the Elder of the Lodz Ghetto,” 141.

\textsuperscript{287} Bauer, \textit{A History of the Holocaust}, 182.

\textsuperscript{288} Horowitz, \textit{Ghettostadt: Lodz and the Making of a Nazi City}, 209.

\textsuperscript{289} Ibid., 213.
round up the remaining children in the ghetto.\textsuperscript{290} During this time, he attempted to plead with parents to turn over their children. The following is an excerpt from his infamous speech to the remaining residents of the ghetto:

A grievous blow has struck the ghetto. They are asking us to give up the best we possess—the children and the elderly. I was unworthy of having a child of my own, so I gave the best years of my life to children. I've lived and breathed with children, I never imagined I would be forced to deliver this sacrifice to the altar with my own hands. In my old age, I must stretch out my hands and beg: Brothers and sisters! Hand them over to me! Fathers and mothers: Give me your children!\textsuperscript{291}

Rumkowski operated by the motto that he had to cut off the limbs to save the body. As cruel as it sounded, he needed to comply with the Nazis demand for children in order to save the remaining Jews in the labor force. He was determined to save at least some of the remaining Jews by fulfilling such demands.

Rumkowski's willingness to take part in creating deportation lists for the Nazis incited anger and fury in the hearts of the Jews of Lodz. They did not understand how a fellow Jew could beg them to give up their children, their sick, and their elderly family members. The despair and angst that Rumkowski's pleading to the masses caused in the ghetto did not encourage him to modify his policy. He remained firm in the belief that sacrificing some residents would result in saving the lives of others, and he was devoted to following through in that belief—no matter the pain and misery that accompanied his stance. In order to reason with his critics, he gave a speech explaining his rationale:

The question arose: Should we comply and do it, or should we leave it for others to do? We were not, however, motivated by the thought of how many would be lost, but by the consideration of how many it would be possible to save. . . despite the horrible responsibility, we have to accept

the evil order. I have to perform this bloody operation myself; I simply must cut off limbs to save the body!\textsuperscript{292}

There is no doubting the sincerity in the heartache of Rumkowski's words. By retaining the productive population of his ghetto, he hoped to maintain his manufacturing centers that in turn proved the necessity of the Jews in Lodz.

There were no reported attempts at resistance in the Lodz ghetto against the Nazis during the initiation of the deportations. Rumkowski made his residents feel invincible, and as long as they continued to work hard in the factories, they would continue to live in the ghetto. Even during the deportations, Rumkowski assured the Jews that the Nazis would spare all productive people in the ghetto, and thus the children and the elderly had to be sacrificed in order to save the workers. As psychologist Larissa Tiedens has pointed out, "Lodz Ghetto residents believed that they fit into Nazi plans. They had a place in Nazi society into the future...This ignorance protected them from the sense of inevitability."\textsuperscript{293} Again, we see the recurring theme that the residents of Lodz were ignorant about the severity of their situation and thus were not inclined to resist it.

Rumkowski's reign in Lodz was a tumultuous one. He was one of the most successful and most tragic Jewish leaders during the Holocaust. The same man who signed over the lives of many of his residents also saved more Jews than any other ghetto leader. His reign over Lodz ended when the Nazis liquidated the Lodz ghetto in August 1944. Due to the success of his economic output, the Nazis could not afford to liquidate such a vital contribution to their war machine until close to the end of the war. Because of Rumkowski's labor policy, by the spring of 1944 more than 60,000 Jews remained in

\textsuperscript{292} Mordechai Rumkowski, quoted in Trunk, \textit{Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation}, 423.

\textsuperscript{293} Tiedens, "Optimism and Revolt of the Oppressed: A Comparison of Two Polish Jewish Ghettos of World War II," 64.
the ghetto. As argued by Jacob Robinson, had the Soviets continued their western
advancement, tens of thousands of Jews would have been liberated, all due to
Rumkowski’s leadership. 294 By the end of the war in May 1945, roughly 7,000 Jews
from the Lodz ghetto survived. Statistics on the number of survivors of other ghettos are
not available, as the Nazis liquidated most early in the war. Even people who survived
the liquidation of the various other ghettos endured concentration camp life for an extra
three years, most of them not surviving. In the end, although Rumkowski’s tactics were
unconventional and unforgiving, he achieved his desired goals. The success of his ghetto
economy ensured the longevity of his ghetto, and his authoritarian style resulted in a
small Nazi presence in the ghetto. Lodz factory manager Solomon Uberbaum recalled a
conversation he had with Rumkowski towards the last days of the ghetto’s existence:

"Afterwards we discussed the end. What would be. What will be. He got up
and said ‘Look, Czerniakow committed suicide. He deserves credit for
that. But what happened afterwards? They liquidated the Warsaw Ghetto. I
am sitting here today. There are 78,000 Jews in the Ghetto. And the
Russians are advancing! They have already reached Lublin. They’re
approaching Warsaw. If I save 78,000 Jews. 60,000. 50,000. I’m not afraid
of anything. What will they do to me. I’m an old Jew. Sick...So what will
be? I think I will save some of the Jews. All my work here is to save as
many as possible. Afterwards...if I survive, let them try me. Let them! I
don’t care." 295

Rumkowski set out on a path of cooperation with the Nazis with the belief that such
tactics could salvage the healthy and viable people of his ghetto. He knew that he was
unable to save everyone, and thus made strenuous efforts to save the Jews who could
assist in their own fate. The fact that the ghetto outlasted *all* of the other ghettos and had

294 Jacob Robinson, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight: The Eichmann Trial, the Jewish
295 Solomon Uberbaum quoted in Huppert, “King of the Ghetto: Mordechai Haim Rumkowski, the
Elder of Lodz Ghetto,” 150.
the most survivors is not due to luck or coincidence. The reign of Mordechai Rumkowski, flawed as it was, was the reason behind the “success” of the Lodz ghetto.

If Czerniakow’s death quickened the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, and Rumkowski’s willingness to cede certain segments of the ghetto population in Lodz allowed for its prolonged existence, than Jacob Gens’ role in the deaths of Jews in Vilna is entirely more complicated. The city of Vilna, although culturally Polish, was located in Lithuania, one of the most eastern of all of the ghettos in occupied Europe. As such, a majority of the Jews in Vilna became victims of the “cleansing in the East” program that resulted in the deaths of over a million Eastern European Jews at the hands of the Einsatzgruppen. Prior to the creation of the ghetto, the Einsatzgruppen murdered over 20,000 Jews within the Vilna city limits. Thus, in Vilna, there was no doubting the plans that the Nazis had for Jews. The ignorance and naïveté that allowed the Jews in Warsaw and Lodz to sleep at night, was a luxury unattainable for the Jews of Vilna. It also meant that the Vilna ghetto had a large and active underground resistance movement, unattainable in both Warsaw and Lodz.

As the chief of police in the Vilna Ghetto, Jacob Gens played an active role in both the selection and deportation of the Jews. Prior to his promotion to head of the ghetto, Gens proved his worth to the Nazis through his conduct of the deportations. Much of his reputation for being a reliable component of the ghetto in the eyes of the Nazis came from his role in liquidating the smaller ghetto. As noted earlier, the Vilna ghetto was initially comprised of two segregated sections of the city. The larger section contained men, women, and children, while the smaller consisted of the sick and the elderly. In the fall of 1941, the Nazis ordered Gens and his police force to round up the
Jews in the smaller ghetto and send them into the forests of Ponary, to meet their deaths. As pointed out by Isaiah Trunk, "He [Gens] was at the exit gate and directed the ‘action’ deciding who was to be deported and who was to remain in the ghetto. This in fact meant to decide who was to live and who was to die."\(^{296}\) Although Gens understood the complexity of his role, he also believed that by performing the selections himself, with the help of his police, that he was saving lives and conducting the affairs in a humane fashion. His ruling philosophy rested on taking measures to ensure only the smallest Nazi presence within the ghetto, and there was no telling what would happen if the Nazis were to conduct the actions themselves. When questioned about the legitimacy of his participation, he responded, "But this is the point of view of our police: to save what is possible, without regard for our good name and our personal experiences."\(^{297}\) After a few months of similar actions, the Nazis promoted Gens to head of the ghetto.

Upon his promotion, Gens kept an open line of communication with his residents regarding the state of deportations and resettlements. Unlike Czerniakow, who did not spread his knowledge of the destinations of the deportations, or Rumkowski, who never directly addressed his inside knowledge to his people, Gens decided to keep his residents informed. He hoped that such honesty with the Jews would result in gaining their trust and loyalty. The following excerpt is from a speech given by Gens to his residents after he assumed the position of head of the ghetto:

> I accept responsibility for the Aktion. I don’t want discussions, no one is entitled to discuss things that I did or will do. I called you so that you can see what Jews are passing through and why a Jew dips his hand in blood. We’ve had these traumas in the ghetto more than once... If the time


\(^{297}\) Jacob Gens quoted in Arad, *Ghetto in Flames*, 344.
comes when the police have to go out again, and I see that it is for the general good, we shall go." 298

His willingness to accept responsibility for the behaviors of his police officers and for their complicity in the deaths of their fellow Jews cemented his relationship to his residents. When the Nazis demanded the deportation of the remaining elderly in July 1942, the residents of the ghetto even approved of the way that Gens carried out the action. The chief rationalized with the beleaguered ghetto that it was critical to save the women and the children, as they were the future of Judaism in Lithuania. He gently reminded them that in order to secure a future for the young, that the elderly and the invalid had to leave. 299 Yitzak Arad argued that the residents were not bitter or critical of the Jewish participation in the actions, but rather, they approved of Gens’ policy and the methods in which he implemented it. 300

Although most of the residents agreed with Gens’ rationalization concerning Jewish participation, not all were so evenly swayed by the leader. Gens did not worry about the criticisms voiced by some of his residents. He honestly believed that by sacrificing some, he could save the vast majority of his people. While he gained no pleasure from the horror of his task, he accepted it dutifully and comforted himself that the ends would justify the means. He once remarked to a colleague:

I will say I did everything in order to save as many Jews as possible . . . to usher them to freedom. To ensure that at least a remnant of Jews survive, I myself had to lead Jews to death; and in order to have people emerge with a clean consciences, I had to befoul myself and act without a conscience. 301

298 Ibid., 346.
299 Ibid., 350.
300 Arad, Ghetto in Flames, 341.
The residents so trusted Gens that when the underground called for the Jews to fight back, they obeyed Gens in his wishes for passivity.  

Jacob Gens developed a cordial and tolerant relationship with the Vilna underground coalition—the United Partisans Organization. He looked the other way when they smuggled weapons into the ghetto, or when his residents left the ghetto to retreat to partisan enclaves in the forest. He pretended to be ignorant of the existence of such an organization, and made no efforts to suppress it, because he believed there would indeed come a time when it was necessary to resist the Nazis. However, based upon his relationship to Murer, he feared that any premature uprisings on behalf of the FPO would shatter not only his position within the ghetto, but would also prove detrimental to the fate of the remaining Jews of Vilna. Gens once told a member of the underground:

I am aware of the existence of the FPO and all its arm depots. I turn a blind eye to it because I know that there will come a time when I shall need them. I have good connections and I shall always know when the Germans are planning to destroy the ghetto. At that moment, I shall need all the armed Jewish boys, and then we shall all fight together.

The FPO, under the command of Itzik Wittenberg, agreed that sustaining a stable and relatively peaceful coexistence within the ghetto was vital to ensuring time, which allowed for a greater chance of success when armed resistance came to fruition.

The peaceful coexistence of Gens and the FPO was short-lived, however, as power struggles and conflicting ideologies proved catastrophic to the Jewish leaders of Vilna. As the months went by in the ghetto, the leaders of the underground resistance movement grew to openly disapprove of Gens’ participation in the roundups and

---

deportations. The mutual understanding between the two factions strained, as the FPO no longer concealed its criticism of the Jewish police’s active participation in Jewish deaths.

305 To show their mounting disapproval of Gens’ policies and leadership style, the FPO encouraged residents to speak out against their leader, and planted various forms of printed propaganda throughout the ghetto. As a result, Gens persecuted the resistance organizations with “arms raids, imprisonment, and exile of their leaders to labor camps.”306 Tensions grew so strong that that the FPO began to consider turning their strength and weapons against the ghetto authorities, as opposed to their principle enemy—the Germans.307 Gens believed that he alone had the ability to save the remaining Jews of his ghetto, and attempts to usurp his power were in vain.

The betrayal of Itzhik Wittenberg by an unidentified member of the Communist party (under Gestapo torture) to the Nazis proved an end to the fighting between Gens and the FPO. In July 1943, a non Jewish Communist with connections to the FPO told the Gestapo that Wittenberg was the leader of the underground organization in the Vilna ghetto. Upon learning of his betrayal, Wittenberg went into hiding in the ghetto. The German security police informed Gens that if Wittenberg did not turn himself in, that they would liquidate the entire ghetto.308 The FPO thought that their leader should remain in hiding, but Gens believed that he should immediately turn himself in, lest the Nazis punish the ghetto in his stead. The FPO and Wittenberg believed the Nazis were bluffing regarding the liquidation of the ghetto, and thus refused to give up Wittenberg, upon whom they rested the future of their entire organization. Gens, fearful for the

305 Ibid., 112.
306 Ibid.
307 Ibid., 160.
destruction of the ghetto he worked so hard to sustain, decided to address the residents concerning the seriousness of their current predicament. He assembled the ghetto population and pled for their help. He told them that he had received the following ultimatum from Murer, "If by 6 a.m. the next morning the ghetto does not hand over Wittenberg to the Germans, they will come with tanks and airplanes and wipe out the ghetto."[309] The residents trusted Gens, and panic broke out. After Gens finished speaking, the population demanded Wittenberg's surrender, and Gens dispatched his police to hunt for him.

Gens, who publicly acknowledged his own role in the deaths of many of the residents of his ghetto, was still able to elicit more support among the masses than the leader of a resistance movement designed to save the Jews. Psychologist James M. Glass argues, "The uncertainty and fear induced by the Germans, the policy of mass reprisal, gave to Gens a power that the underground could never overcome inside the ghetto walls. People felt safe in the ghetto—certainly safer than outside the ghetto, in forests, in the midst of anti-Semitic local populations."[310] The FPO, under the increasing pressure of the police and the population, eventually agreed to surrender Wittenberg.

Although Gens was satisfied with the FPO's decision, he was not naive about the potential fate of the young leader in Nazi hands. Even though he promised Wittenberg that he would do all within his power to rescue him, he slipped the young leader a cyanide tablet just in case.[311] Upon Wittenberg's departure, Gens tightened his policy of toleration towards the FPO. He refused to allow Jews to escape the ghetto to the partisan

---

units in the forests, and made efforts to inform himself of the FPO’s plans, and demanded that the coalition cede to his authority. On 16 July 1943, the Nazis found Itzhik Wittenberg dead in his cell at the Gestapo headquarters in Vilna. While the death of Wittenberg resonated deeply among the residents within the ghetto, their own destruction was not far off. On 1 September 1943, the Nazis demanded the deportation of 7,350 Jews for labor camps in Estonia. With a heavy heart, Gens complied. He then reassured his people, “The transport of people for work in Estonia has been completed. Tranquil life and normal work will be instituted in the ghetto... I call upon all ghetto inhabitants to return quietly to their homes, maintain order and carry out all my instructions.” Out of 60,000 Jews in Vilna at the start of the war, 10,000 remained in the ghetto.

On 13 September, a German officer warned Gens of his impending execution and told him to escape. Gens refused. He told the officer, “No. If I, the chief of the ghetto, run away, thousands of Jews will pay with their lives for my desertion.” On 14 September 1943, the German security police shot Jacob Gens for “aiding the partisans.” Horrified by the death of their beloved leader, the remaining residents of the Vilna ghetto correctly surmised that they, too, were next. On 23 September 1943, the Nazis liquidated the Vilna ghetto. Out of approximately 10,000 remaining Jews, 3,000 were sent to labor camps in the surrounding area, 5,000 were gassed in Majdanek, and the remainder were most

312 Arad, Ghetto in Flames, 399.
313 Tushnet, The Pavement of Hell, 194.
314 Ibid.
315 Arad, Ghetto in Flames, 420.
316 James Glass, “Two Models of Political Organization,” 284.
317 Jacob Gens quoted in Arad, The Pavement of Hell, 195.
318 Ibid., 196.
319 Ibid.
likely murdered in the forest. Estimates claim that only 2,000-3,000 Vilna Jews lived to see liberation. Although Gens did not live to see the end of the war, he firmly believed that his policies would see a large segment of his population through until liberation. He believed that his personal involvement in the selection, round up, and deportation of the Jews in Vilna ensured a calm environment, in which Jews could live in as much peace as possible. He understood the seriousness of the position in which the Nazis placed him, but accepted it and vowed to carry it out to the best of his ability. While the number of Vilna survivors cannot attest to the success of his policy, as can the survivors in Lodz, Gens firmly believed that his policies would aid in maintaining a peaceful and secure ghetto. He believed that cooperation would allow him to save the remnant of his beloved ghetto society, and for a while, he was accurate. He made no efforts to fool or trick his people concerning their fate. Rather, his honesty ensured their support and devotion, and they remained loyal to him until their demise. As controversial as his actions were, Gens himself had no qualms about the justification of his actions, as he once said:

It is true that our hands are smeared with the blood of our brethren, but we had to accept this horrible task. We are innocent before history. We shall be on the alert to preserve the remnants... We shall not give the children, they are our future.

Not only did he believe himself capable of leading the Jews through the war, but he also made plans for a post-war Jewish existence in Lithuania.

---

320 James Glass, “Two Models of Political Organization,” 284.


In conclusion, the deportations that plagued the ghettos in Warsaw, Lodz, and Vilna proved catastrophic not only for the men and women who boarded the trains, but also for the leaders who signed over their lives. Adam Czerniakow believed himself not up to the task of facing the horrors that the Nazis thrust upon him, and thus ended his life. After his death, chaos erupted throughout the Warsaw ghetto, confusion ran rampant, and famine hit the devastated residents. The original Nazi demand for 60,000 deportees increased to 300,000 amid the pandemonium that followed Czerniakow’s death. While the Nazi requests for deportees sickened Rumkowski as well, he obeyed the orders and managed to buy time for the residents of his ghetto. By sacrificing the elderly and the young, Rumkowski was able to save the healthy men and women who toiled daily in his factories, and thus contributed to the longevity of the Lodz ghetto. Jacob Gens is arguably the most tragic of the men, concerning his decisions surrounding deportations. As head of the police, the Nazis ordered him to round up and send Jews to their deaths in the forests. Jacob Gens could not hide behind ignorance or feign naïveté concerning the fate of his people. Thus, he decided to be honest with his residents concerning their destiny. This method allowed him to gain the trust and loyalty of his people, who stayed by his side and trusted their fate to his foresight and ability. Although the majority of his residents died before liberation, Gens’ ruling style enabled that their time in the ghetto reflected the calm and normalcy he strived so hard to obtain.

The actions of each leader in light of the calls for deportations reflect their early philosophies on ghetto leadership. Czerniakow vowed that he would not sacrifice his standards and principles upon taking charge in the ghetto, and refused to cave into the madness around him. When the Nazis ordered him to select Jews, he declined to
participate in the murder of innocent people, and took his own life instead. Gens stayed true to his strategy of maintaining a self-reliant community, so when the calls for deportations came, he chose to partake to avoid Nazi participation. Rumkowski’s belief that ghetto production would save Jewish Lodz encouraged him to turn over the non-productive elements of his society, to ensure that the remaining Jews were productive laborers.

Jews. Because it was nearly impossible to comprehend the successful execution of such a morbid racial ideology, post-war historiography concluded that it was through the help of the Judenrat that the Nazis were so successful. As time went by, historians began to contextualize the position of these men and argue that their decisions and actions are only comprehensible in light of the horror of their surroundings. While not apologizing for the decisions of the ghetto leaders, they stressed the importance of a more nuanced analysis of their role in the Holocaust. Modern historiography has tended to cast aside any critiques of the roles of the men of the Jewish Councils, and has instead argued that historians have no right to judge men in situations that are foreign to anyone who has not lived in a ghetto. While the modern historiography has opted to stop both the criticisms and praise of these men, there have been few efforts to reassess their historical legacies that came to fruition after the war.

This thesis has attempted to offer a more nuanced look into the trials and tribulations that plagued the leaders of the Warsaw, Lodz, and Vilna ghettos. Through research into the various problems and issues each man faced, it is easier to understand the decisions they made, and the way that such actions and behaviors have contributed to their place in history. The fact that the Nazis liquidated all of the ghettos does not mean that each man led his ghetto with the same insight, strength, or ability. Each man began...
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The men who found themselves in the catastrophic position as members of the Judenräte had to make unfathomable decisions on a daily basis. After the Second World War, historians attempted to understand and rationalize the loss of nearly 6 million innocent Jews. Because it was nearly impossible to comprehend the successful execution of such a morbid racial ideology, post-war historiography concluded that it was through the help of the Judenräte that the Nazis were so successful. As time went by, historians began to contextualize the position of these men and argue that their decisions and actions are only comprehensible in light of the horror of their surroundings. While not apologizing for the decisions of the ghetto leaders, they stressed the importance of a more nuanced analysis of their role in the Holocaust. Modern historiography has tended to cast aside any critiques of the roles of the men of the Jewish Councils, and has instead argued that historians have no right to judge men in situations that are foreign to anyone who has not lived in a ghetto. While the modern historiography has opted to stop both the criticisms and praise of these men, there have been few efforts to reassess their historical legacies that came to fruition after the war.

This thesis has attempted to offer a more nuanced look into the trials and tribulations that plagued the leaders of the Warsaw, Lodz, and Vilna ghettos. Through research into the various problems and issues each man faced, it is easier to understand the decisions they made, and the way that such actions and behaviors have contributed to their place in history. The fact that the Nazis liquidated all of the ghettos does not mean that each man led his ghetto with the same insight, strength, or ability. Each man began
his rule with a specific ruling philosophy, and his ability to stick to that plan contributed to the longevity of his ghetto, and to the quality of life for his residents in the interim. It is of vast importance to consider the fact that the longer the Jews lived, the longer they were able to resist the Nazi plan for their demise.

Through research into the various ruling strategies and subsequent decisions made by each man, the ghetto leaders who were willing to exert total authority and to enforce brutal and unpopular policies managed to increase the longevity of their ghettos. Adam Czerniakow’s noble attempt to retain his morals and dignity throughout his rule opened up the gates for competing powers within the ghetto, which in turn undermined his own authority. Influential men within the ghetto interpreted Czerniakow’s kindness for weakness, and the corruption and bribery that plagued his administration only increased throughout his tenure. Although his goal was to comply with demands in order to decrease Nazi presence in the ghetto, his unwillingness to enforce such orders led to catastrophic corruption throughout the ghetto administration. His suicide reflected his inability to sacrifice his morals even at a time when such sacrifices might prove beneficial to the ghetto at large.

Mordechai Rumkowski and Jacob Gens were two leaders who accepted the inner turmoil that accompanied their positions, and set forth to run their ghetto in a fashion that the Nazis would respect. Because their tactics emulated Nazi leadership tendencies, their “success” within their ghettos remains controversial. However, each succeeded in achieving the goals that they set forth to accomplish upon acquiring power. Jacob Gens was able to run the Vilna ghetto almost entirely free of Nazi interference, as was his goal from the start. This strategy ensured that the Vilna Jews spent the majority of their time
in the ghetto in peace and calm. Mordechai Rumkowski proved the worth of the Jews to the Nazis through the establishment of his incredible manufacturing hub in Lodz. The Jews became such significant contributors to the Nazi war machine that the ghetto remained in existence until August 1944.

The current historiographic trend to deem historical judgment on these men misplaced, has succeeded in lightening the historical burden that has clouded their legacies, but has stunted attempts at further scholarship on their roles. The complex sensitivity that surrounds all Holocaust scholarship is especially profound concerning the Judenräte. How is one to approach objective study of a group of men who were both victims and perpetrators alike? If the consensus states that there is no point in attempting to label these men historically, then the scholarship needs to explore other avenues in which the role of the Judenräte prove of the utmost importance. For instance, the issue of armed ghetto resistance is one that historians have yet to fully explore in the context of the actions and behaviors of the Judenrat leaders. There is plenty of room to investigate the connection between the ghetto administration in Warsaw and the later Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943, for example. If the underground organizations in the ghetto assassinated the chief of police and various ghetto administrators before taking control and planning the uprising, then future scholarship might explore the domino effect that Czerniakow’s suicide had on the initiation of an armed uprising.

There are also plenty of avenues whereby further research into the Jewish police can also add to the comprehension of the Judenräte. The roles of the Jewish police were of critical importance for determining the effectiveness of a Judenrat leader. In Vilna, the police became so powerful that they overwhelmed the influence of the Judenrat and
eventually superseded them. In Warsaw, the police also gained influence and power and became one of the greatest proponents of corruption and greed in the ghetto. In Lodz, however, the police were Rumkowski’s loyal guardians of peace and proved to be loyal proponents of his will. Historians have also labeled the police negatively, typically casting them together with the Judenräte in allegations of corruption, collaboration, and brutality. There appears to be a need for historical distinction in the way the police and the Judenrat saw themselves in relation to one another. If historians can prove that the police understood themselves to be an institution of the Judenrat, then they can argue that the infamous brutality connected with the police was merely an extension of the policies of the Judenrat. However, as appears to be the case in Vilna, if the police became a powerful entity in their own right, then their actions need to be understood in their own context, and not merely traced back to the philosophies of various Judenrat strategies.

In conclusion, the role of the Judenräte throughout history is one that will most likely continue to plague scholars of the Shoah. Simply, the inability of most historians to fathom a position of such incomprehensible tragedy clouds most legitimate attempts at Judenrat scholarship. Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi has perhaps offered the best commentary regarding the hardships surrounding historical comprehension of the Judenräte:

... [the role of the Judenräte is] the regrettable and disquieting story of... functionaries who sign everything, those shake their heads in denial but consent, those who say “if I didn’t do this, somebody worse than I would.” It is typical of regimes in which all power rains down from above and no criticism can rise from below, to weaken and confound people’s capacity for judgment, to create a cast zone of gray consciences that stands between the great men of evil and the pure victims. ...

There is no doubt that the role of the men of the Judenräte belongs in the category of the "gray zone." While their legacy will continue to conflict scholars, the catastrophe of their position cannot be contested. Czerniakow, Rumowski, and Gens remain the most tragic of Nazi victims.
REFERENCES

Primary Sources

Collected Volumes


Published Primary Sources


**Secondary Sources**


Stauber, Robbie. “Phillip Friedman and the Beginning of Holocaust Studies.” In *Holocaust Historiography in Context: Emergences, Challenges, and


