



From a Letter by Emmanuel Ringelblum's on the refugees in Zbaszyn

Srodborow, December 6, 1938

Dear Raphael,

I am on holiday in Srodborow. I worked in Zbaszyn for five weeks. Apart from Ginzberg, I am among the few who managed to hold out there for a long time. Almost all the others broke down after a more or less short time. I have neither the strength nor the patience to describe for you everything that happened in Zbaszyn. Anyway, I think there has never been so ferocious, so pitiless a deportation of any Jewish Community as this German deportation. I saw one woman who was taken from her home in Germany while she was still in her pajamas (this woman is now half demented). I saw a woman of over 50 who was taken from her house paralyzed; afterwards she was carried all the way to the border in an armchair by young Jewish men. (She is in hospital until this day). I saw a man suffering from sleeping sickness who was carried across the border on a stretcher, a cruelty not to be matched in all history.

In the course of those five weeks we (originally Giterman, Ginzberg and I, and after ten days I and Ginzberg, that is), set up a whole township with departments for supplies, hospitalization, carpentry workshops, tailors, shoemakers, books, a legal section, a migration department and an independent post office (with 53 employees), a welfare office, a court of arbitration, an organizing committee, open and secret control services, a cleaning service, and a complex sanitation service, etc. In addition to 10-15 people from Poland, almost 500 refugees from Germany are employed in the sections I listed above. The most important thing is that is not a situation where some give and some receive. The refugees look on us as brothers who have hurried to help them at a time of distress and tragedy. Almost all the responsible jobs are carried out by refugees. The warmest and most friendly



relations exist between us and the refugees. It is not the moldering spirit of philanthropy, which so easily have infiltrated into the work. For that reason all those in need of our aid enjoy receiving it. Nobody's human feelings are hurt. Every complain of bad treatment is investigated, and more than on "philanthropist" has been sent away from here.

We have begun on cultural activities. The first thing we introduced was the speaking of Yiddish. It has become quite the fashion in the camp. We have organized classes in Polish, attended by about 200 persons, and other classes. There are several reading rooms, a library; the religious groups have set up a Talmud Torah [religious school]. There are concerts, and a choir is active.

...Zbaszyn has become a symbol for the defenselessness of the Jews of Poland. Jews were humiliated to the level of lepers, to citizens of the third class, and as a result we are all visited by terrible tragedy. Zbaszyn was a heavy moral blow against the Jewish population of Poland. And it is for this reason that all the threads lead from the Jewish masses to Zbaszyn and to the Jews who suffer there...

Please accept my warmest good wishes and kisses from

Emmanuel

Source: Emanuel Ringelblum, *Documents on the Holocaust - Selected sources on the destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, Yitzhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman, Abraham Margaliot (Eds), Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 1981, pp. 123-124.