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THE JEWS OF BIALYSTOK UNDER THE OCCUPATION IN WORLD WAR II

Bialystok under Soviet Rule

Friday, September 15, 1939, German vehicles were rumbling through the deserted streets of Bialystok.¹ During just six days in Bialystok, the Germans killed more than 100 Jews and vandalized and looted more than 200 Jewish factories and homes.² On September 18, the third day of the occupation, rumor had it that the Germans were leaving, to be replaced by the Russians. The arrival of the Soviets in Bialystok, as set forth in the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, was on September 20.³ Throughout the period of Soviet rule, Bialystok functioned as the Soviets' administrative center and retained its status as the capital of Western Belorussia until the Germans entered the city on June 27, 1941.

Oppression and persecution of hostile elements – defined as enemies of the state, the people, and the revolution – were an integral part of Soviet policy throughout the period of Soviet rule. The Soviet security apparatus had various criteria for determining who was dangerous. Those most likely to be arrested and deported in the Jewish sector were Zionist or Bund leaders, members of militarist or Trotskyist organizations, expelled members of the Communist Party, former factory owners, wealthy merchants, and refugees.⁴

The life of the Jewish community of Bialystok during the period of Soviet annexation should be considered from both the Soviet and the Jewish perspective. From the Soviet perspective, the authorities favored a policy

¹ KLAUS A. MAIER et. al, *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Vol. 2, Stuttgart 1979, pp. 118-119.

² RAPHAEL REIZNER, *Der Umkum fun Bialystoker Yidntum, 1939-1945*, Melbourne 1948, pp. 20-23.

³ MAIER et. al., *Das Deutsche Reich*, p. 129.

⁴ REIZNER, *Umkum*, pp. 25-26.