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The German Jewish Councils and the Organization of Life in the German Ghettos of Riga and Minsk[1]

"He had quite extensive powers at that time and was, so to speak, the mayor of a small town of 13,000 inhabitants." This is how Lore Israel, in a letter written shortly after liberation, characterized Max Leister from Cologne in his position as Elder of the German Jews in the Riga Ghetto, the so-called *Ältestenrat des Reichsjudenghettos in Riga*.[2]

In the winter of 1941/42, thousands of Jews were deported from the Greater German Reich to the ghettos in Riga and Minsk. Here, unlike the situation in occupied Poland, special ghettos were established for German, Austrian, and Czech Jews, and they also had their own German Jewish Councils. Due to the lack of sources, we do not know much about these Jewish administrations.[3] Using testimonies written by survivors, this chapter reconstructs these councils' histories and how they organized life and work in the ghettos. The picture cannot be complete and is rather descriptive due to the very fragmented nature of the available sources. This is especially true for the Minsk ghetto, about which only a few dozen German and Austrian Jews who survived could testify after the war. Due to the limited availability of sources, this article focuses on Riga.

1 This article was made possible thanks to the author's tenure as a J. B. and Maurice C. Shapiro Senior Scholar-in-Residence at the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

2 Lore Israel, *Letter to Mrs. Aronsfeld*, trans. Wiener Library [hereafter WL], P.III.h. (Riga) No. 162, 2.2. The primary sources and testimonies cited in this essay are originally in German and English. The English translations of the German sources are my own unless otherwise stated.

3 Isaiah Trunk did not write about these German Jewish Councils. See Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

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Unlike the Jewish functionaries they discussed, those who survived had the benefit of hindsight. In the cases described here, we do not have, for example, letters written by council members that shed light on their mindset and tactics.[4] In a way, however, this reflects a problem we more generally confront when researching the history of these councils. Whereas there are some "Jewish Councils" in occupied Europe that left behind a large amount of contemporary documentation, such as those in the ghettos of Theresienstadt and Litzmannstadt,[5] there are many cases where documentation is lacking, especially in smaller places in Eastern Europe. This is the reason why we know very little about many "Jewish Councils" outside of major cities.[6]

Background: Systematic Deportations

In the fall of 1941, the systematic deportations of Jews from the German Reich began. From mid-October to the beginning of November 1941, the National Socialists deported to the Łódź ghetto about twenty thousand Jews in twenty-four transports from various cities of the "Old Reich," Luxembourg, Vienna, and Prague, as well as five thousand Roma from Burgenland. Local authorities in Łódź protested further transports to the overcrowded ghetto. Heinrich Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich decided to direct transports further east, to areas that had only recently come under German control following the attack on the Soviet Union. Between November 8, 1941 and February 6, 1942, approximately thirty-two transports carrying one thousand people each traveled to the *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, namely to Riga and Minsk. In November 1941, five transports of Jews from the Reich also arrived in Kaunas in occupied Lithuania, where they were murdered upon arrival.[7]

4 Laurien Vastenhout, *Between Community and Collaboration: 'Jewish Councils' in Western Europe under Nazi Occupation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022) demonstrates to what extent the councils' interpretations and actions can be properly interpreted using these letters.

5 On Litzmannstadt, see: Michal Unger, *Reassessment of the Image of Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004); Monika Polit, *Mordechaj Chaim Rumkowski—Wahrheit und Legende* (Osnabrück: fibre, 2017); Andrea Löw, *Juden im Getto Litzmannstadt. Lebensbedingungen, Selbstwahrnehmung, Verhalten* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006). On Theresienstadt, see: Anna Hájková, *The Last Ghetto: An Everyday History of Theresienstadt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

6 See the introduction to this volume.

7 Alfred Gottwaldt and Diana Schulle, *Die "Judendeportationen" aus dem Deutschen Reich 1941-1945. Eine kommentierte Chronologie* (Wiesbaden: marix, 2005); Birthe

At these new destinations, German officials "made room" for the deportees by murdering large segments of the local Jewish population. In Riga, the SS and police forces together with Latvian auxiliary police units murdered, according to German reports, 27,800 Latvian Jews in the Rumbula forest on November 30 and December 8-9, 1941. In Minsk, the SS murdered about seven thousand residents of the ghetto on November 7, 1941, and another five thousand on November 20, 1941.[8]

At roughly the same time these murders were carried out, the first Jews in the German Reich received orders to present themselves at predetermined assembly points for deportation. They were only allowed to take hand luggage and a suitcase. They frequently had only vague knowledge that they were to be taken "to the East." The Gestapo determined which representatives of the Jewish community would be assigned to the transports. In most cases, these personnel decisions concerning who would be designated as transport leaders (*Transportführer*), meaning those responsible for groups of deportees during the transport and for keeping discipline in the trains, also played a role in who would hold positions in the ghetto administration. Max Leiser, later the Eldest of the Jews in the German ghetto in Riga, for example, was a transport leader during his deportation from Cologne, and Gustav Kleemann from Würzburg was responsible for the first transport from Franconia to Riga and later became the Eldest of the Jungfernhof Camp, which was located at an estate on the outskirts of Riga.[9] Berthold Rudner, who was deported from Berlin to Minsk, sharply criticized his transport leader Günter Freudenthal in his diary, describing Freudenthal as "out of place, at best knows how to handle animals, and the rations of the Berlin

Kundrus and Beate Meyer, eds., *Die Deportation der Juden aus Deutschland. Pläne—Praxis—Reaktionen 1938-1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004); Andrea Löw, "Die frühen Deportationen aus dem Reichsgebiet von Herbst 1939 bis Frühjahr 1941," in *"Wer bleibt, opfert seine Jahre, vielleicht sein Leben." Deutsche Juden 1938-1941*, eds. Susanne Heim, Beate Meyer, and Francis R. Nicosia (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010), 59-76.

8 Andrej Angrick and Peter Klein, *The "Final Solution" in Riga: Exploitation and Annihilation, 1941-1944* (New York: Berghahn, 2009), 130-74; Wolfgang Scheffler, "Das Schicksal der in die baltischen Staaten deportierten deutschen, österreichischen und tschechoslowakischen Juden 1941-1945. Ein historischer Überblick," in *Buch der Erinnerung. Die ins Baltikum deportierten deutschen, österreichischen und tschechoslowakischen Juden*, eds. Wolfgang Scheffler and Diana Schulle (Munich: Saur, 2010), 1-43, here 4-5; Petra Rentrop, *Tatorte der "Endlösung." Das Ghetto Minsk und die Vernichtungsstätte von Maly Trostinez* (Berlin: Metropol, 2011), 139-42; Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941-1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999), 624-25.

9 Angrick and Klein, *The "Final Solution" in Riga*, 205-14.

transport were the worst." Rudner announced: "I will make this scandal public later."[10]

Upon arrival, chaos and violence reigned: as much as the Jews were already familiar with exclusion and the capriciousness of the authorities from their hometowns, the arrival in Riga or Minsk was a deep shock. After arriving in Riga, German security police and Latvian police forces drove the people out of the wagons, beating them. Everything had to be done quickly, which was especially difficult for the elderly after the long and exhausting journey. In Riga, the first deportees had to march to Jungfernhof as there was still not enough space for them in the ghetto. Only after the second mass murder of local ghetto inmates on December 8 and 9, 1941 were deported Jews brought directly to the ghetto. From there, many men were selected for the Salaspils camp. Both Jungfernhof and Salaspils had to be constructed by the first prisoners.[11] On December 10, 1941, a transport from Cologne arrived in Riga. The deportees were the first to march from the station to the ghetto, where they were directly confronted with the traces of the massacres of the last two days. Lilly Menczel described this: "On the day of our arrival in the ghetto, we saw everywhere traces of the fact that people had been murdered there shortly before: There was frozen blood in the streets—a terrible sight. We found food on the table in the apartment; they hadn't even let the poor condemned people finish their meal."[12]

In Minsk, available reports speak of violence and shouting on the part of the guards upon arrival. Gerhard Hoffmann from Hamburg described this in a letter written shortly after liberation: "To the left and right of the train we saw SS troops standing in a close chain. The train stopped, and we were chased out of it with whips. The first shots were heard—that was our reception. We saw the first corpses."[13] Again, the deportees had to march several kilometers to the ghetto on foot, and some were transported in trucks. For many, the so-called Red House, a former school, was the first stop. The building was completely overcrowded; people

10 Susanne Heim, ed., *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933-1945,* vol. 6: *Deutsches Reich und Protektorat, Oktober 1941—März 1943*, VEJ 6/60 (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019), 246. Source edition abbreviated VEJ, together with the volume and document number in subsequent notes.

11 Angrick and Klein, *The "Final Solution" in Riga*, 202-14.

12 Lilly Menczel, *Vom Rhein nach Riga. Deportiert von Köln: Bericht einer Überlebenden des Holocaust*, ed. Gine Elsner (Hamburg: VSA, 2012), 26.

13 Translation of letter written by Gerhard Hoffmann, October 22, 1945, Archive Memorial Flossenbürg, Acc. No. 2015.0123, 2.

were laying tightly packed in the rooms and in the corridors. After a few days there, they arrived at their actual accommodations. Berthold Rudner wrote about it in his diary: "The quarters turned out to be miserable wooden houses, plundered and demolished, which were also in an indescribable condition that a Central European would not be able to imagine."[14]

The Organization of Life in the Ghetto

In both Riga and Minsk, the ghettos of German-speaking Jews were separated from those of the local Jews, which differs from the situation in occupied Poland. In Minsk, there were two "special" ghettos for those carried on the various transports from the Reich; in Riga, there was the so-called German ghetto and the "Small" ghetto where the local Jews lived. These two ghettos were separated by fences. In both Minsk and Riga, the most important positions in the German-Jewish self-administration were filled by persons who arrived on the first transports; in Riga, these were persons from Cologne, and in Minsk, those from Hamburg. In Minsk, German authorities appointed Edgar Franck, a doctor of economics and former owner of a banking house in Hamburg, as chairman. In Riga, Max Leiser was appointed the chairman of the Council of Elders of the Reich Jews in the Ghetto; Leiser was the former head of the Jewish social affairs office in Cologne. Both Franck and Leiser had been transport leaders, so their leadership appointments in Riga and Minsk, respectively, had already been influenced by the Gestapo in their hometowns.[15] Frieda Marx, Leiser's secretary in Cologne, was appointed Ghetto Commander Krause's secretary in the German ghetto in Riga.[16]

Alfred Winter, who survived the Riga ghetto after he was transported there from Düsseldorf, described the creation of the Jewish Council and some of its departments at length in a manuscript/memoir written by Winter in English more than five decades after the war. He summed up some of the problems of the ghetto administration and criticized some German-Jewish officials:

14 Heim, *Deutsches Reich und Protektorat, Oktober 1941—März 1943*, VEJ 6/80, 291.

15 Angrick and Klein, *The "Final Solution" in Riga*, 214; Björn Eggert, "Biografie Edgar Franck," in *Deutsche Jüdinnen und Juden in Ghettos und Lagers (1941-1945). Łódź. Chełmno. Minsk. Riga. Auschwitz. Theresienstadt*, ed. Beate Meyer (Berlin: Metropol, 2017), 110-22.

16 Testimony Frieda Marx, Institut für Zeitgeschichte (Institute for Contemporary History, hereafter IfZ), Archive, Gh02.05-1-138 [German].

> A so-called Judenrat was formed under the leadership of Leiser. The group leaders of the various transports held their office and some became members of the Judenrat. A police unit was formed and Chief of Police was a watchmaker from the transport Duesseldorf with the name of Frankenberg. A Ghetto Labor Office was installed to which each group had to report all able-bodied males and females. In charge of the Labor Office was a fellow named Schulz from the transport Cologne. Schulz was no angel and his behavior was short of collaboration with the Germans. He controlled every one's life in the Ghetto more than anybody else. He could assign a person to a good or bad work commando. This made him open for bribes and corruption since his food ration was not much better than the rest of the Ghetto inhabitants. The Germans gave those in charge better housing and additional bread. Also their families were protected during the action when all those who could not work were taken out of the Ghetto. In the final end the Germans put them in the same category and their families suffered the same fate, like any other Ghetto inhabitant. Each transport group had their own labor office which reported to the central labor office. The office leader in the group Cologne was a fellow with the name of Simons. He had 7 small children and therefore many mouths to feed. His behavior was so bad that he got to be known with the group members as "Little Napoleon."[17]

As described here, every transport after arrival constituted a specific group in the ghetto, named after its place of origin. Moreover, every group had an eldest who became a member of the Jewish Council, and every group eldest had a deputy. The elders and their deputies had an office in one of the group's buildings. In Riga, these delegates served under Leiser's command. The work assignments of the respective groups were under the control of Max Schultz (Schulz) from Cologne.[18]

One of the most infamous group elders was Günther Fleischel from Hanover, a Christian and former SA man who only in the mid-1930s found out about his Jewish origin and whom Ghetto Commander Kurt

17 Alfred Winter, *The Ghetto of Riga and Continuance, 1941-1945* (Monroe, CT: Manuscript, 1998), 25.

18 Gertrude Schneider, *Journey Into Terror: Story of the Riga Ghetto.* New and Expanded Edition (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 29; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereafter USHMM), Edith Brandon Papers, RG-10.250*5, Bl. 37, University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute (hereafter USC Shoah Foundation Institute), VHA #21541 Liesel Ginsburg, Segment #49; USC Shoah Foundation Institute, VHA #9538 Ruth Foster, Segment #48.

Krause appointed as group elder.[19] Gerda Gottschalk recalled after the war that Fleischel was feared like an SS man as he beat people with a stick.[20] For the Hanover group, Selma Sollinger was responsible for the labor assignments; she was the first and one of the very few women within the ghetto administration.[21]

However, the activities of the council went far beyond designating Jews for labor. As Werner Sauer recalls: "Each group had its work assignment, its own ambulance with a doctor and nurses, its food distribution, craft shops and even hairdressers."[22] They also organized schools for the children. These groups were, in many respects, the first institutional points of contact for deported Jews. As such, the German Jewish Councils in Riga and Minsk were less hierarchically structured than many other *Judenräte*.[23] Food rations, for example, were provided in small stores for each group, which underscores the decentralized nature of the provision of social welfare by these councils. These distribution points received their supplies from a central food distribution point.[24]

Initially, the situation of the deportees was extremely difficult. As Alfred Winter recalls, in the spring of 1942, not everything was in place yet, and the deported Jews did not really understand what was going on, that they had arrived to a place of terror, hunger, and ultimately murder. In this context, his comments about the German Jewish Council make a clear distinction between these councils and others in occupied Eastern Europe: "During that time, the leaders of the different transport groups were eager to fill any German request because they felt they were Germans first and not Jews."[25]

Soon after their arrival, everything became more and more organized and, consequently, also more complicated, as Gertrude Schneider, survivor and historian of the Riga Ghetto, describes:

19 Herbert Obenaus, "Vom SA-Mann zum jüdischen Ghettoältesten in Riga. Zur Biografie von Günther Fleischel," *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 8 (1999), 278-99; *Testimony Bernard Stein*, Yad Vashem Archives (hereafter YVA, O.33/89, 2-3.

20 Gerda Gottschalk, *Der letzte Weg* (Konstanz: Südverlag, 1991), 33-34.

21 Schneider, *Journey Into Terror*, 16.

22 Testimony Werner Sauer, YVA, O.33/4126, 28 [German].

23 See Peter Klein, "Die Ghettos Theresienstadt und Riga. Vergleichende Bemerkungen zu den Strukturen ihrer jüdischen Selbstverwaltung während der Gründungsphase," in *Lebenswelt Ghetto. Alltag und soziales Umfeld während der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung*, eds. Imke Hansen, Katrin Steffen and Joachim Tauber (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 106-16, here 112-13.

24 Schneider, *Journey Into Terror*, 30.

25 Winter, *The Ghetto of Riga and Continuance,* 33.

> As the ghetto grew, so did its bureaucracy; the German authorities insisted on detailed reports, which, for lack of typewriters, were written out by hand at the groups' offices and were delivered to the *Kommandantur* by 11:30 each morning by the *Ordonnanz* of the group. These communications were equivalent to "morning reports" in the army. They contained the following information: the number of people in the group as of that day, the names of those who had died during the night, how many were out sick for the day, how many were employed at jobs within the ghetto, the number of children, and the number of people who had gone to work on jobs outside the ghetto. At the main office, the reports were then tallied against the lists of the outgoing labor details made by Baum and Schiff [in the Labor Deployment Central Office] earlier that day.[26]

The Nazi authorities announced their latest regulations and orders to the Jewish Council, which then communicated these to the offices and the various groups that served under their leadership. These offices, in turn, informed their members.[27] Communications between the Council of Elders and their respective groups were documented in a journal where the group Elders would write down all orders they received. Unfortunately, only one such journal survived. The journal of the Dortmund group consists of ninety-eight handwritten pages and covers the period from February 15 to September 4, 1942.[28] This journal shows how extensive the correspondence of the Jewish administration was and what kind of documentation was lost. The level of organization and detailed regulations documented here illustrate the deported Jewish administration's attempt to maintain order in the chaotic reality of the ghetto.

In Minsk, one Jewish Council oversaw both German ghettos. As mentioned before, the SS appointed Edgar Franck, the transport leader of the very first transport from Hamburg, as Eldest of the German Jews in Minsk. Karl Loewenstein, a survivor of the Minsk ghetto, indeed calls him *Judenältester* in his memoir. Other appointed Jewish Council members had also been on this first transport, including Biber, Behrend, Kohn, Jakob, Satz, Spiegel, and Rapolt. Unfortunately, further information on them is lacking. The council was in contact with the German

26 Schneider, *Journey Into Terror*, 29-30.

27 Ibid., 33.

28 *Journalbuch der Gruppe Dortmund*, Lettisches Historisches Hauptarchiv Riga (LUVA), P132 Materialien der Außerordentlichen Kommission – Bezirk Lettland. The author wishes to thank Peter Klein for a copy of this important source. See Angrick and Klein, *The "Final Solution" in Riga*, 214 and 230n53.

Ghetto Commander Michael Schmiedel—who was responsible for the two German ghettos in Minsk until the spring of 1942—and the German police and received their orders from them. Similar to Riga, the German Jews organized themselves in groups according to the cities from which they had been deported. Each of the so-called camps (*Lager*) had a leader in charge of the group.[29]

The few survivors of these ghettos assessed the responsibility and scope of action of the council very differently. Manfred Alexander recalled that "they tried to run the ghetto in conjunction with the German soldiers, the German SS," and also that the "Judenrat had the last say."[30] Hersh Smolar, a Russian Jew, made a similar observation about the Minsk *Judenrat* leadership as had Alfred Winter regarding the Riga *Judenrat*:

> At first the attitude of the Hamburg's [the local Jewish population called the German Special Ghetto the Hamburg Ghetto as this was the place of origin of the first transport] toward the German civil administration was different than toward the Jews of Minsk. With the Germans they acted almost as fellow countrymen.[31]

Conversely, Gerhard Hoffmann had a more realistic recollection:

> Soon we had to arrange for our own camp leaders to reign within the ghetto. Of course they did this under the strictest SS supervision, and they [the SS] came more than once daily to keep control over them as well as us.[32]

29 Karl Loewenstein, *Minsk*, *im Lager der deutschen Juden* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für Heimatdienst, 1961), 17; Shalom Cholavsky, "The German Jews in the Minsk Ghetto," *Yad Vashem Studies* XVII (1986): 219-45, here 230; Hersh Smolar, *The Minsk Ghetto: Soviet-Jewish Partisans against the Nazis* (New York: Holocaust Publications, 1989), 49; Rentrop, *Tatorte*, 180.

30 USC Shoah Foundation Institute, VHA #49006 Fred (Manfred) Alexander, Segment #45.

31 Smolar, *Minsk*, 49.

32 Letter written by Gerhard Hoffmann, October 22, 1945, trans., Archive Memorial Flossenbürg, Acc. No. 2015.0123, 3.

Medical Help

In both the Riga and the Minsk ghettos, each group had excellent doctors. To organize medical care, the Jewish Councils in both ghettos established Jewish hospitals. Additionally, there were medical stations within the individual groups where doctors tried to help as much as they could. There was, however, a serious lack of medicine and necessary space for treatment. Almost all survivors praised the efforts of doctors and nurses but also stressed how terrible the conditions in which they had to operate were. Edith Blau reflected on the limited possibilities the medical personnel had: "Oh, but what have these people accomplished."[33]

In Riga, the so-called *Zentral Lazarett* was erected in a former school building. The ghetto's main doctor, Dr. Hans Aufrecht from Cologne, had his office there. Some survivors sharply criticized him for being egoistic and not really trying to help his fellow Jews.[34] There are also positive accounts regarding the medical support offered by Jewish functionaries in the ghetto. Among them was the testimony of Ruth Foster, who worked as a nurse in the Central Hospital. She testified about the excellent doctors and about the fact that it was mainly Latvian Jewish doctors who smuggled medicines into the ghetto and thus saved many lives, at least temporarily. She also recalled the abortions and other risky operations they had to perform to save women.[35] In fact, most of the operations doctors had to perform were abortions as Jews were not permitted to give birth in the ghetto.[36] Ruth Foster summed up the doctors' achievements: "Under these bad conditions, they performed miracles."[37] These doctors were under extreme pressure, and the hospital was a dangerous place for patients to be: Ghetto Commander Krause visited it regularly, and he often insisted on being present and watching abortions. He frequently threatened to have the parents sterilized as becoming pregnant was considered a crime. After a while, the Jewish authorities set up a secret room for abortions to protect pregnant women from Krause.[38]

33 USHMM, Edith Brandon Papers, RG-10.250*5, 38 [German]. See also Oral history interview with Sophie Nathan, USHMM, RG-50.323.0007, Min. 29; Winter, *The Ghetto of Riga and Continuance*, 36; Testimony Edith Sophia Marx, geb. Wolff, 15.7.1969, USHMM, RG.14.101M, Reel 188, B162/3070, p. 1550; Testimony Inge Rothschild, 15.1.1946, AŻIH, 301/1507, p. 1.

34 See, for example: Testimony Werner Sauer, YVA, O.33/4126, p. 97; Winter, *The Ghetto of Riga and Continuance*, 31.

35 USC Shoah Foundation Institute, VHA #9538 Ruth Foster, Segments #49 and #60.

36 Schneider, *Journey Into Terror*, 31; Testimony Werner Sauer, YVA, O.33/4126, 97.

37 USC Shoah Foundation Institute, VHA #9538 Ruth Foster, Segment #68.

38 Schneider, *Journey Into Terror*, 31.

In Minsk, a primitive hospital was hastily erected. The lack of resources was similar to that in Riga, as Chaim Berendt remembers: "There were enough doctors but hardly any medical instruments or medicines, so that the actual medical treatment could only be inadequate."[39] As Karl Loewenstein remembered, the situation was so bad, a surgeon from Brno "had to perform his operations with a kitchen knife." In the Central Hospital, they had about twenty patients in a single room that smelled terribly.[40]

Organizing Work

From the German authorities' perspective, the most important thing was the distribution of Jewish workers to all kinds of departments, factories, and other workplaces where they could work for different companies as well as the German army. In the beginning, many Jews had to clean the streets of Riga from snow or unload goods in the port. After the mass murder of the Latvian Jews, workers were in short supply. So, the most important Jewish department for the German rulers was the Labor Deployment Central Office, which served as a contact for the German employment office.[41] This office, directed by Herbert Schultz from Cologne, assembled laborers every morning. They left the ghetto under guard and marched to work sites, only to return in the evening. Every group in the ghetto had a delegate to the German employment office, and these persons had to support the Labor Deployment Central Office in trying to remain up to date concerning how many workers were available in each group.[42] Work as a possible salvation, the tactic for which Chaim Rumkowski in the Łódź ghetto is probably best known,[43] played a significant role in Riga too. Here, however, the initiative did not come from the Jewish administration. Immediately after their arrival in the ghetto, German officials and various companies requested the deportees as workers. The Jewish administration then set up the organization to coordinate this labor deployment. Due to the widespread use of the

39 Chaim Behrendt-Baram, *Where Was the Sun, 1939-1945* (Israel[?]: Gideon Behrendt, Manuscript 1996), 8.

40 Loewenstein, *Minsk*, 35-39.

41 Peter Klein, "Die Ghettos Theresienstadt und Riga," 109.

42 Angrick and Klein, *The "Final Solution" in Riga*, 215; Hilde Sherman, *Zwischen Tag und Dunkel. Mädchenjahre im Ghetto* (Frankfurt: Ullstein 1984), 41.

43 For Łódź, see, for example: Michal Unger, *Reassessment of the Image of Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004).

Jewish labor force and the dependencies this created, the ghetto existed until November 1943, and thousands of Jewish workers continued to be used in and around Riga even after that, until they were evacuated in the summer of 1944 due to the approach of the Red Army.[44]

After the war, survivor Hermann Neudorf praised the Jewish Council's work in this respect: "Thanks to the excellent work of the Jewish ghetto leadership, the division of labor gradually became better organized."[45] This praise did not include Herbert Schultz, however. Most ghetto dwellers criticized him after the war: "Schultz acted like a dog which had won the first prize in obedience for his master and did everything to please his German masters."[46] I will return to Schultz later.

In Minsk, a man named Spiegel, who had been deported from Hamburg, was initially in charge of the Labor Deployment Office, but later on, this position was given to Karl Loewenstein, who was deported from the Reich even though he had converted to Protestantism in 1919 and had been a Freikorps fighter. He described his work as follows: "The activity consisted of fulfilling the requirements of manpower from the SS, the military, private companies, Organization Todt, and the Reichsbahn, as well as other services."[47] The office created the labor groups—so-called *Arbeitskommandos*—and sent them to various workplaces.[48]

As the workers in both Riga and Minsk went to their labor assignments outside the ghetto, they were able to exchange some of their few remaining belongings for food with local non-Jewish workers. They then smuggled this food into the ghetto in the evening. Given that rations were always too small, this was necessary to avoid death by starvation. But it was dangerous: Survivors from Riga report that time after time, they returned in the evening and found murdered Jewish men hanging from the gallows of the ghetto. They were hanged because they smuggled. Riga Ghetto Commander Kurt Krause also frequently shot women convicted of smuggling in the Jewish cemetery, as did Ghetto Commander Adolf Rübe in Minsk. In both ghettos, a German Jewish police or Order Service existed, and some of its members denounced Jews who tried to smuggle food into the ghetto or helped German guards search for these goods.

44 Angrick and Klein, *The "Final Solution" in Riga*, 336-50, 366-78.
45 Hermann Neudorf, "Das war Riga," USHMM, Acc. Nr. 1994.83.2 Hermann Neudorf papers, Series 1, fol. 6: Personal testimony, 1945, Bl. 2 [German].
46 Winter, *The Ghetto of Riga and Continuance*, 34-35.
47 Loewenstein 1961, *Minsk*, 30-32.
48 Behrendt-Baram, *Where Was the Sun,* 8.

Smuggling and the Jewish Police

As with the other issues discussed here, evaluations of the behavior of the Jewish police forces set up in the German ghettos in Minsk and Riga vary widely. Some accused its members of being responsible for the death of their loved ones. Riga ghetto survivor Ingeborg Benjamin, for example, accused the Chief of the German-Jewish police Friedrich Frankenberg of having sent a Jewish policeman to her cousin's apartment. He took all her belongings and reported the case to Commander Krause, who shot her cousin. Summing up what she thought about Frankenberg, she wrote: "He was among the vilest criminals in our own ranks."[49] Sophie Nathan remembered that some Jewish policemen were very strict when prisoners returned to the ghetto in the evening, while others only pretended to search for smuggled goods.[50] Werner Sauer recalled that Rudi Haar, Frankenberg's deputy, saved some Jews from certain death. Overall, he offered a mild judgment of Jewish functionaries in the ghetto: "In general, it must be said that the ghetto notables in Riga did not exploit their position in the same way as the Kapos and Elders in the concentration camp later did."[51]

German authorities, probably Ghetto Commander Schmiedel, also ordered the establishment of a police unit in Minsk, with Karl Loewenstein as its chief. Members included former soldiers with military ranks from the German, Austrian, and Czechoslovak armies. Its tasks were—as in other ghettos—keeping order, stopping theft and trafficking, distributing food, caring for the sick, and burying the dead.[52] Survivor Martin Stock in his testimony also mentioned another task: "A police force was formed by us, who guarded the camp. These did not wear uniforms, they were later identified by armbands. They had to ensure order within the camp and were also posted as gate guards."[53]

Karl Loewenstein recalled the great meaning of bartering and smuggling for the hungry ghetto population: "Bartering was forbidden and punishable by death, but that did not stop anyone, because hunger

49 Letter written by Ingeborg Benjamin, 4.1.1950, WL, P.III.h. (Ghetto Riga) No. 1011/b, p. 1 [German].

50 Oral history interview with Sophie Nathan, USHMM, RG-50.323.0007, Min. 56.

51 Testimony by Werner Sauer, YVA, O.33/4126, p. 28 [German]. For the organization of the Jewish police, see Angrick and Klein, *The "Final Solution" in Riga*, 214-15.

52 Cholavsky, "The German Jews," 230; Loewenstein, *Minsk*, 19.

53 Testimony Martin Stock, Landesarchiv Baden-Württemberg, Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe [hereafter GLA Karlsruhe], 465 h Nr. 10384, p. 123. See also: Behrendt-Baram, *Where Was the Sun*, 9.

hurts."[54] As he described in his testimony, he wanted to organize some kind of warning system with his Order Service to alert ghetto dwellers that SS guards were approaching to search them, but the Elder of the Jews, Franck, opposed this:

> The only one who did not agree with the bartering was Dr. Frank [sic!], because he was satiated. He not only banned the trade but also confiscated the bartered food himself or had it taken from the people by his successor Harf, who came from Bremen. If he discovered a barter trade, he even beat those people with his rubber truncheon or had Harf beat them. Yes, Frank [sic!] even searched the apartments himself. Power had gone to his head, and in him, too, the saying proved true: power corrupts, more power corrupts more![55]

It has to be stressed here that it is quite problematic to deal with these questions when Karl Loewenstein was the only member of the Jewish Council who survived and was able to testify about these complicated issues and the council's responsibilities. On the other hand, it is rare that we have such a testimony, especially in a case like this, where no contemporary sources are available; thus, this is our only chance to understand at least partially the form and function of the Jewish Council and police in Minsk.[56]

In Riga and Minsk, as in other ghettos, the local Nazi officials involved the Jewish Council functionaries and policemen in their terror measures, for example to enforce collective punishments to prevent escapes and resistance. These Jewish functionaries had to act within the confines of their limited room for maneuver, which always was a balancing act. When three prisoners fled the Berlin camp of the Minsk Ghetto, SS-*Oberscharführer* Michael Schmiedel requested three hundred ghetto dwellers be delivered to him. Loewenstein knew that this meant these persons were to be murdered. He discussed the terrible dilemma with Franck, and they tried to buy time. He then negotiated with Schmiedel, who reduced the number of the victims to one hundred, and later to thirty. Loewenstein had doctors select persons with cases of open tuberculosis:

54 Loewenstein, *Minsk*, 35.
55 Loewenstein, *Minsk*, 35-36.
56 Interestingly enough, H. G. Adler is full of praise for Loewenstein, his character, and his work in the Jewish self-government in Theresienstadt, where he was later imprisoned. See H. G. Adler, *Theresienstadt. Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005; Reprint Mohr Siebeck, 1960), 138-41.

> I told myself that if, contrary to expectations, the three escapees actually did not come back, it was still better to offer victims who would not survive the harsh winter and inadequate nutrition anyway than healthy people.[57]

Loewenstein's tactics here were the same as those we know about from the responses of other "Jewish Councils" when facing terrible choices: If they were required to select people from the ghetto to be turned over to the German occupation authorities, they often sacrificed those who were sick, who could not work, who might not survive anyway. Soon after having reached this difficult decision, Loewenstein was informed that the three fugitives had been caught: "The reaction to this news began with me immediately: within a few minutes, I was thoroughly wet with sweat, despite the severe cold. The water ran down my entire body, as if I were standing under a shower." The next day, the ghetto residents had to line up and, as a deterrent, watch the SS shoot the three escapees—one woman and two men.[58]

Mass Murder in 1942: Cooperation and Powerlessness

The terrible dilemmas the Jewish Council leaders faced have already become clear. When the mass murder of the deported Jews in Riga and Minsk began, like other "Jewish Councils" in occupied Europe, their position became even more difficult. In the spring of 1942, segments of the German and Austrian Jews in Riga became victims of an annihilation action, the so called "*Aktion Dünamünde*." Allegedly, there was a fish cannery in Dünamünde where elderly and sick people were supposed to live and work under better and easier conditions. In fact, however, the people selected were shot not far from the Jungfernhof camp and the ghetto; the trucks returned empty after only a short time. When the Jewish Councils were ordered to prepare and hand over lists of the ghetto dwellers, they did not know anything about the fate that awaited these people. They had been in the ghetto only for a few weeks and had not seen what the Latvian Jews had seen and experienced. Even when they had heard about the mass killings that happened before their arrival, many of them still thought that their fate might be different because, like the perpetrators, they were Germans.

57 Loewenstein, *Minsk*, 25-26.
58 Loewenstein, *Minsk*, 25-27.

On February 4, 1942, Agnes Scheucher, a member of the administration of the Berlin Group, received an order from Max Leiser to compile a list of all the sick and old people from the Berlin Group as they were to be taken to a home for the elderly. A day later, a German SS man lined those on the list up and selected victims, all of whom were taken away on trucks.[59] After the war, Jeanette Wolff was very clear about responsibilities in preparation of this mass murder: "If an unrighteous elder had anyone he wanted to finish off, that person was included on the dispatch list." The German ghetto's chief physician, Hans Aufrecht from Cologne, had Wolff's twenty-eight-year-old daughter put onto the list of deportees, but she was released after a German intervention.[60]

In the Jungfernhof Camp, some survivors blamed the Jewish Elder Kleemann for participating in the selection, but others saw this differently and stressed that he could not have known what awaited these deported Jews:

> It is possible that the camp elder Kleemann had a hand in the selection for Dünamünde, but only insofar as he carried out the order to draw up a list of certain age groups purely schematically. I simply cannot believe that Kleemann would have known what was going to happen to those on the list.[61]

Another survivor emphasized that Camp Commander Seck selected the victims "in cooperation with a Jewish Council of Elders or camp committee. However, its members are no longer alive since they were all intended for Aktion Dünamünde themselves."[62] As happened in the Jungfernhof Camp in Riga, in Minsk, some members of the Jewish Council were murdered in the spring of 1942. This clearly demonstrates how helpless these Jewish functionaries ultimately were.

59 WL, P.III.h. (Ghetto Riga) No. 1035/a. See also Schneider, *Journey Into Terror*, 34.

60 Jeanette Wolff, *Sadismus oder Wahnsinn: Erlebnisse in den deutschen Konzentrationslagern im Osten* (Dresden: Sachsenverlag, 1946), 11. The Dortmund group journal confirms that it was Aufrecht—and not the Germans—who had her daughter put onto this list. *Journalbuch der Gruppe Dortmund*, LUVA, 51.

61 Testimony Julius Ceslanski, IfZ Archive, Gh02.05-1-55 [German].

62 Testimony Hans Werner Loszynski, IfZ Archive, Gh02.05-1-39 [German].

The First German Jewish Council in Minsk is Murdered

Members of the German Jewish Council in Minsk were murdered even before deported Jews fell victim to raids that resulted in mass murder. The entire German Jewish camp leadership—Franck, Bieber, Behrend, Cohn, Jacob, Satz, Spiegel, and Rappolt—was imprisoned at the beginning of 1942, which caused great distress in the ghetto because it was unclear why this was done. The motives soon became clear, however: a German policeman had befriended these *Judenrat* members and had offered to smuggle mail for them, which was strictly forbidden in both Riga and Minsk.

The ghetto inhabitants heard nothing about the affair for weeks until one day, a horse-drawn sleigh came into the ghetto with Edgar Franck lying on it, barely alive. The scene was dramatic, as Chaim Berendt from Berlin recalled:

> The Jewish guard stopped the sledge near the Ghetto headquarters. A man with long stubble lay on it. Incomprehensible sounds came out of his mouth. A doctor, who was immediately called, recognized the emaciated man as our Dr. Frank [sic!]. He was taken straight away to the Ghetto hospital, where all possible care was extended to help him regain consciousness, to hear where he had been, what they had done to him etc. But all help was in vain. The next day the incomprehensible mumble also ceased: he was dead.[63]

Karl Loewenstein, who recalled that this happened on March 8, 1942, suspected that the Germans poisoned Franck. The others were brought back to the ghetto on April 13th, after which SS-*Obersturmführer* Kurt Burckhardt shot them.[64] Richard Frank remembered this terrible scene: "As these victims were brought back to the ghetto from detention to be shot, they were so battered and physically weakened that they could hardly hold themselves upright. They had to take off each other's shoes, stand in the deep snow for about half an hour in the worst cold, only then were they shot."[65] Werner Blumert, Spiegel's nephew, heard from his aunt who had to watch how her husband was killed: "My uncle Spiegel was not immediately dead but resuscitated 2 more times and

63 Behrendt-Baram, *Where Was the Sun*, 9; Loewenstein, *Minsk*, 31.
64 Loewenstein, *Minsk*, 31.
65 Testimony Richard Frank, GLA Karlsruhe, 465 h Nr. 10379, p. 275 [German].

then received a mercy killing."[66] Their murder demonstrates in a very clear way how powerless the *Judenräte* were. They could try to improve the situation within the ghettos, and they could also try to improve their own situation. Yet ultimately, as was the case with the "Jewish Councils" in other ghettos, it was the Germans who determined their fate. On the members of the later German Jewish Councils in Minsk, survivor Heinz Menzel said after the war: "These men always disappeared after a short time in an inexplicable way."[67]

1943—The Liquidation of the Ghettos in Riga and Minsk

Those Jews who survived several murderous "actions" moved daily in columns to their various work sites, and this continued until the ghettos were dissolved in October 1943 (Minsk) and November 1943 (Riga). However, even workers were never safe. Selections took place, still-existing families were torn apart, and people were murdered in Bikernieki near Riga or Maly Trostenez near Minsk. During the ghetto liquidation in Minsk, mainly young, single men were deported to labor and extermination camps in occupied Poland.[68] The remaining ghetto residents in Riga were sent to the newly built Riga-Kaiserwald concentration camp in the north of the city beginning in the summer of 1943. On November 6th, the last ghetto residents were taken there. For many, this was a transit camp where they were registered and then sent on to other camps or to the barracks of their factories.[69] With the Red Army's approach, the SS began to relocate Jews who were still alive. For most of them, the further path of suffering took them, by ship, to Danzig, and from there they were marched to Stutthof concentration camp.[70]

66 Testimony Werner Blumert, GLA Karlsruhe, 465 h Nr. 10384, Bl. 156a [German].

67 Letter by Heinz Menkel to the Jewish Community Bremen, 6. 8. 1947, GLA Karlsruhe, 465 h Nr. 10379, p. 274.

68 On Gerhard Hoffmann's fate, see: Archive Memorial Flossenbürg, Acc. No. 2015. 0123.

69 See: Franziska Jahn, *Das KZ Riga-Kaiserwald und seine Außenlager 1943-1944. Strukturen und Entwicklungen* (Berlin: Metropol, 2018).

70 Andrea Löw, "Die 'Hölle' bezeugen. Frühe Berichte überlebender deutscher Jüdinnen und Juden aus Riga," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 1 (2023), 155-207.

German Jewish Councils in the Final Phase

Not much is known about Minsk. Karl Loewenstein, who wrote extensively on the earlier phase, was released from Minsk in 1942, sent to Vienna, and then brought to the Theresienstadt ghetto, where he again became a member of the Jewish Council.[71] Franck's successor Erich Harf from Bremen was murdered in the summer of 1942; the exact circumstances of his death are unknown.[72] Günther Katzenstein recalled in an interview many years later: "The camp leadership, these were German Jews. The camp leadership, well, I survived eight camp leaderships, the camp leaderships, they were not alive for long."[73] As far as we know, Karl Loewenstein was the only member of the Jewish administration in the ghetto who survived.

When it comes to the German Jewish Council in the Riga ghetto, probably only Herbert Schultz from Cologne survived. Günther Fleischel, who after so-called Operation Dünamünde in spring 1942 had been appointed Elder of the groups Hanover, Berlin, and Vienna, celebrated the first anniversary of his appointment with a big party in March 1943. Later that year, it became clear that he already knew back then that he was seriously ill and probably would not survive. In September 1943, he died of stomach cancer.[74] Some Jewish Council functionaries were still alive after the dissolution of the ghetto. When the first inmates were sent to Riga-Kaiserwald in 1943, there were rumors about bad conditions and violence in the camp. As Alfred Winter recalled, Max Leiser, who was still in charge then, organized a meeting and told them that he did not have any control over the new place, which was then still called *Kasernierung Sauer* (Albert Sauer was the first commander of the camp). He hoped this situation would not last long. Winter criticized him for this: "In doing so, he tried to quiet down the Ghetto and deceived every inhabitant because he must have had some knowledge that the Kasernierung Sauer was actually the concentration camp Kaiserwald."[75] Max Leiser was later deported to Stutthof concentration camp. From there, in November

71 Adler, *Theresienstadt*, 138-41.

72 "Peter Christoffersen, Erich Harf," accessed October 31, 2022, http://www.stolpersteine-bremen.de/detail.php?id=723.

73 Julius Günther Katzenstein, Interview *Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Düsseldorf*, November 6, 1998, GED-31-001-100.119, Transkript, Bl. 10 [German].

74 Schneider, *Journey Into Terror*, 79, 95; Obenaus, "Vom SA-Mann zum jüdischen Ghettoältesten in Riga."

75 Winter, *The Ghetto of Riga and Continuance, 1941-1945*, 47.

1944, he was sent to the KZ sub-camp Hailfingen, where he died in December 1944.[76]

Herbert Schultz (or Schulz) survived several camps, and after a death march from Hamburg to Kiel, he ended up in Sweden after the war. Many survivors sharply criticized him and the role he played in Riga—both in the ghetto and in later camps. Toni Jakubowicz wrote the following about him: "The camp elder Schulz cooperated with the SS in the ghetto. He was present at the selections and actions, he could have saved some, because he had the ear of the SS, but he was too bad to help people."[77] In contrast, Erwin Sekules testified how Schultz helped him later on in the camp Mühlgraben near Riga; Sekules had been transferred to a penal command, and Schultz supported him by bringing him fresh laundry.[78]

After the war, Schultz testified against SS-*Untersturmführer* Kurt Migge, who was responsible for food distribution to the ghetto. Schultz accused Migge of never having brought enough food to the ghetto because of his greed, and of constantly enriching himself:

> When the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) ordered that the food supply in the ghetto be improved by means of heavy and very heavy worker allowances, Migge defied this order. Only after we explained our situation to Ghetto Commandant Krause were these allowances introduced, but Migge always kept the best ready for his own purposes.[79]

The dilemma of the Jewish Councils becomes very clear in this statement as there was not much Schultz could do if the German authorities were not willing to provide him with the proper food rations.

In another statement concerning the late ghetto commander Eduard Roschmann, his terrible dilemma becomes even clearer. Schultz explained his involvement in the compilation of a list used for the deportation of children from the so-called ABA (Army Clothing Office) 701 barracks camp in April 1944. He had been called to Camp Commander Müller, "where Roschmann demanded a list of all children who were under the age of 12. He explained that the children were not yet included on the rations list, and they would have to be registered statistically." Schultz

76 Volker Mall, Harald Roth and Johannes Kuhn, *Jeder Mensch hat einen Namen. Die Häftlinge des KZ-Außenlagers Hailfingen/Tailfingen. Daten und Porträts aller Häftlinge. L bis Z* (Herrenberg: KZ Gedenkstätte Hailfingen Tailfingen, 2020), 5.

77 Letter of Toni Jakubowicz, WL, P.III.h. (Muehlgraben nr. Riga) No. 1034/b [German].

78 Testimony of Erwin Sekules, WL, P.III h. (Muehlgraben nr. Riga) No. 1034, Bl. 4 [German].

79 Testimony of Herbert Schultz, WL, P.III.i. (Latvia) No. 1032a, Bl. 1-2 [German].

was worried about an upcoming special action (*Sonderaktion*), and this indeed took place. He testified: "On April 22, 1944, all children under the age of 10, and one over the age of 10, were taken and deported, and were never heard from again. This includes my own 2 children."[80] A more dramatic situation than drawing up a list that would be used to coordinate the deportation to death of one's own children hardly seems imaginable. Years after the war, Schultz lived a very secluded life in Minden, Germany. In an interview, another survivor named Liesel Ginsburg said that Schultz knew that he was unpopular among the survivors. He died in Minden in 1977.[81]

Conclusion

Ever since 1939, the ways Jewish communities and the "Jewish Councils" reacted to Nazi persecution have been the subject of heated debate. Many Jews accused Jewish leaders of collaboration with the Germans; sometimes they even held them responsible for the persecution and annihilation of Jews. After the war, there were discussions about whether the councils supported the Nazis in accomplishing their murderous plans or at least made it easier for them. Starting in the early 1970s, researchers came to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of "Jewish Councils'" room for maneuver, their interpretations of the situation, and their intentions. They recognized councils' efforts to organize Jewish life and emphasized that one should not assess the history of the councils with the benefit of hindsight. The strategies councils adopted did not work, but how could they have known this? In the situation these people found themselves, the hope to survive because of rational action turned out to be an illusion. Indeed, for most of them, survival was not even a possibility, no matter which strategies they or Jewish officials chose.[82]

The situation of the German Jewish Councils in Riga and Minsk was very distinct. They were thrown into a foreign and brutal world and, without knowing the place to which they had been deported, had to fulfill the same tasks as other local "Jewish Councils" in occupied Europe. Furthermore, in Minsk and Riga, as in some ghettos in the Lublin District, the German authorities had more contact with the ghetto populations—

80 Testimony of Herbert Schultz, WL, P.III.i. (Latvia) No. 1032/b., Bl. 1.

81 USC Shoah Foundation Institute, VHA #21541 Liesel Ginsburg, Segment #104; Franz-Josef Wittstamm, "Schultz Herbert," *Spuren im Vest*, accessed October 31, 2022, https://spurenimvest.de/2021/06/09/schultz-herbert/.

82 For the historiography of the councils, see the introduction to this volume.

unlike some of the more closed ghettos like Litzmannstadt, and this seemed to be the reason they set up a German Jewish Council or at least appointed German members to the Polish councils. In cases like Litzmannstadt and Warsaw, German Jewish representation did not seem necessary.

The German Jewish Councils had very similar structures and tasks as local Jewish Councils even though their position was arguably more difficult because they were forced to function in a completely foreign environment. As such, they could not build on prewar structures, knowledge, and relationships. Moreover, due to the postal ban in Riga and Minsk, German Jewish Council leaders were not in touch with other Jewish communities or aid organizations; thus, they could not receive any outside information. At the same time, they were confronted with the reality of German mass murder immediately upon arrival, even before they began their work. But while they knew about the murders at the places to which they had been transported, they also may have thought for quite some time that their fate would be different from that of the Jews of Eastern Europe. After all, like the perpetrators, they too were Germans and Austrians. Unfortunately, we cannot say when this perception changed or how the Jewish Council functionaries eventually interpreted their situation.

Similar to Jewish Council leaders elsewhere, Jewish officials in Riga and Minsk faced a terrible moral dilemma: they were confronted with situations from which there was no real escape. None of their decisions could lead to the salvation of the ghetto population. Lawrence Langer very appropriately calls what they had "choiceless choices." Ultimately, they had to fail because survival was not the fate assigned to them in the system into which they were forced. For a long time, neither the officials nor the general population knew where persecution would lead. Consequently, they could not properly interpret or respond to their situation.

Overall, the German Jewish Councils in Riga and Minsk were organized in a less hierarchical manner than, for example, the Jewish Council in Litzmannstadt as they were divided into groups according to place of origin. Nevertheless, survivors' testimonies repeatedly criticize these bodies as well. As is common in the case of "Jewish Councils" elsewhere, it is difficult to judge the actions of the Jewish Councils in Minsk and Riga. Thus, Sophie Nathan's words about the Jewish Council's work in the Riga ghetto capture the complex context: "I don't think they were helpful to the Jews." But, and this seems to be the most important point here, she also stressed: "I don't think they had very much choice."[83]

83 Oral history interview with Sophie Nathan, USHMM, RG-50.323.0007, Min. 31.