

*Jerzy Kochanowski*

## **Jewish Letters to Hans Frank (1940): Opposition or a Survival Strategy?**

“In ancient Polish culture the phenomenon of supplication was quite popular,” Marcin Kula wrote. “These were letters to a feudal senior, containing a mixture of request and complaint (about one’s lot, burdens, or an administrator). Their common characteristic was self-humiliation, putting one’s trust in the addressee, and the expectation of his help. A rebellious attitude was quite alien to them, even if the very fact of opposition, be it in the form of a request for help to change one’s situation, sometimes could have been construed as a rebellious action.”<sup>1</sup> Not only was it a permanent phenomenon, but due to democratization, literacy growth, and the spread of postal services, combined with the deep faith that “the ruler is good, but only [his] officials are bad,” it was even growing. As a result a sizeable part of the correspondence sent to the offices of the most important state officials was made up of all kinds of requests, petitions or memorials. Poland was no exception, and with Mościcki and Śmigły-Rydz gone, and before Bierut and Gomułka arrived, they were sent to Hitler or Hans Frank.

Several dozen such letters can be found in the collection of the General Government (*Regierung des Generalgouvernements*), and after December 1939 of the Office of the Governor General (*Amt des Generalgouverneurs*) at the Archive of Modern Records in Warsaw.<sup>2</sup> The earliest letters had been sent in the autumn of 1939, even before the General Government was established, and Hans Frank appointed to head it, while the last ones were sent in May 1940 (with the replies coming in June). It is hard to assume that the lack of subsequent supplications was caused merely by the restraint of their potential authors (although they were apparently less convinced of the letters’ effectiveness). It is more likely that the lack is due to archive depletion on the one hand, and on the other due to a radical change in the occupation policy in the spring of 1940, the intensification of terror and the giving up of all attempts to win the hearts and minds of the

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<sup>1</sup> Marcin Kula, “Wstęp,” in *Supliki do najwyższej władzy*, ed. Marcin Kula (Warsaw: ISP PAN, 1996), 5.

<sup>2</sup> I am now working on an edition of these letters. See Jerzy Kochanowski, “Nawet psi są spokojne,” *Polityka* 17/18 (2013).

Polish society.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, during the early months of the occupation, despite the brutal repressions not only on the territories incorporated into the Reich but also in the General Government, it seemed that such favor could be won. The Polish society at large hoped that the war would be over soon, perhaps in the said spring of 1940, and it also expected that the occupation would resemble that of the previous war, with some form of statehood, perhaps a small Polish army, and respect for merits and the law...

The Office of the General Government received both letters addressed directly to Hans Frank and to his territorial agencies or central institutions (among them the Reich Chancellery, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), which for reasons of official pragmatics were forwarded to Kraków. Most likely, the Governor General was aware only of some of the petitions, carefully selected by his officials, and passed his opinion only on one such document – the case of the Warsaw professor of law, Roman Piotrowski, with the rest processed by the normal bureaucratic machinery. Considered were not only requests and enquiries sent from abroad and by Germans, but also by the “racially alien” (*Fremdvölkischen*) – Poles, Ukrainians, Czechs, and even Jews. The letters came from professors and illiterates, the desperate and the calculated, and those whose entire world had collapsed, as well as those who felt that their time had come. These were not denunciations, but typical supplications, as described above. Some proposed that a kind of Polish rump state (*Reststaat*) be established, there were also frequent requests of refugees who in September 1939 had left for Romania or Hungary, and when the military operations were concluded, they were eager to return. However, most common were letters dealing with daily matters, which had not been settled at a lower level, or their senders assumed that appealing to the highest authority would have the greatest chance of success. They appealed for reimbursement of confiscated money, meat or horse, for benefits, work, land or timber allocation to rebuild a house burnt in September 1939, for permission to keep a radio set, or for help in finding acquaintances or relatives or permission to marry a German. There were quite many applications of desperate inventors – fairly typical in such a situation – who hoped that their revolutionary invention would finally be implemented. Those groups who had felt socially or politically handicapped come to the fore, as they believe that better times had come. We may quote here petitions submitted by peasants, who are often critical of the pre-war authorities, or Ukrainians who remember persecution by Poles or by those who were willing to become Germans...

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<sup>3</sup> It was clearly stated by Frank at a meeting of high-ranking police functionaries on 30 May 1940. See *Okupacja i ruch oporu w dzienniku Hansa Franka*, vol. 1: 1939–1942, ed. Stanisław Płoski (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1970), 189–220. In the so-called Operation AB carried out from May to July 1940 around 3,500 members of the Polish elite were murdered in the General Government.

That such complaints and requests were not simply thrown into the bin, but were given official attention, sometimes with substantial effort and time spent, can be explained not so much by Hans Frank's ambition to play the part of a "good ruler," sensitive to the misfortune, needs and poverty of his subjects (he referred to himself as the "viceroy of Poland"), but by the gradual crystallization of the principles of occupation policy and the fact that General Government institutions employed bureaucrats who, although they were Nazi party or SS members, had a sizeable administrative experience and related habits. From October 1939 to September 1940, the chief of the Main Department of Internal Affairs (*Hauptabteilung Innere Verwaltung*), which dealt with this kind of matters (and whose archives contain such letters) was the lawyer Friedrich Siebert (1903–1966), the mayor of the Bavarian town of Lindau<sup>4</sup> before the war. One could venture to say that in the early stage of the occupation it was thanks to the bureaucracy that Polish subjects were treated as persons rather than an object of law. In the early months of the General Government there are no signs of different treatment of enquiries by, for example, the Reich Leadership of the National Socialist Physical Education Union (*Reichsführung des NS-Reichsbundes für Leibesübungen*), which was seeking contact with the Polish tennis player Jadwiga Jędrzejewska (then a waitress at the Warsaw *Pod Kogutem* cafe), or by the Daughters of the American Revolution from Pittsburgh about the Warsaw resident Antonina Ripa, or by the Berlin Embassy of the Kingdom of Italy about the arrested Arnold Szyfman,<sup>5</sup> or by the Swiss enquiry bureau of Winterthur about the family of the musician Symcha Bak-

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<sup>4</sup> Ernst Klee, *Das Personenlexikon zum Dritten Reich. Wer war was vor und nach 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2007); [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich\\_Siebert\\_\(SS-Mitglied\)](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Siebert_(SS-Mitglied)), retrieved 24 May 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps Szyfman had no idea about the Italian intervention, at least in his – detailed! – memoirs there is no mention of it. It should be emphasized that Szyfman was detained in the same prison cell in Daniłowiczowska St. among others with Bolesław Piasecki, who was visited by Luciana Frassati-Gawrońska, the daughter of the Italian ambassador Alfredo Frassati, and by the wife of the Polish diplomat Jan Gawroński. Piasecki was released on 16 April 1940, following an Italian intervention. Antoni Dudek, Grzegorz Pytel, *Bolesław Piasecki. Próba biografii politycznej* (London: Aneks, 1990), 111–112; Arnold Szyfman, *Moja tułaczka wojenna* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo MON, 1960), 63–100. On 19 April the Italian embassy in Berlin sent a verbal note to the German Foreign Ministry asking it to provide "whatever available information on dr Arnaldo Szyfman, former director of the [Polski] Theater in Warsaw, allegedly detained since late April." It emphasized Szyfman's merits for the promotion of Italian theater and its interest in the lot of "personages connected with the Italian ministry for 'Cultura Popolare'". The final reply was sent from Kraków to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin on 29 June 1940. "[...] Arnold Szyfman was arrested as a Jew on 2 March 1940, and sentenced by the Special Court for 6 months imprisonment on the basis of the ordinance on marking Jews of 23 November 1939. Archiwum Akt Nowych [Archive of Modern Records] (later: AAN), Rząd Generalnego Gubernatorstwa (later: RGG), 422/3, pp. 100, 103.

man, who were living in Radom.<sup>6</sup> Other petitions considered by the authorities came from Germany with proposed solutions of the Jewish question,<sup>7</sup> as well as requests on such an obvious issue as the requirement that the Jews wore armbands with the Star of David.

This is the prevalent theme of letters sent by Jews. There are only a few, but they are a separate category. Other “racially alien” senders – Poles, Ukrainians, Russians and Czechs – came from all walks of life and social statuses, and among them there were well-educated people and illiterates, the poor and the well-off, the elite and the dregs. Their letters were frequently written in broken German or definitely substandard Polish. Some are obvious instances of servilism and opportunism, while others were a result of truly dramatic (or even traumatic) experiences. But regardless of the sender or his reasons, virtually all the petitions have a more or less pronounced financial context. However, in the case of four preserved and published letters written (mostly in proficient German!) by Jews we deal with members of the elite on the one hand, and with a psychological rather than a financial phenomenon. Only Berta Grünberg of Warsaw, whose late husband was a physician, and a Polish Army officer, who died in the September campaign, was unable to cope in the new situation, and appealed to Hans Fran for [financial] help. However, her request to Governor General could be, with some probability, construed otherwise: even though she did admit to be a member of Judaism, lived in a Jewish quarter, and was desperate and bereft of hope, she appealed – idealistically and naively! – to a representative and a symbol of a world that was apparently more familiar to her and which she knew and identified with.

The three other requests can be interpreted in the same vein, as they are a kind of protest against the requirement that the Jews in the General Govern-

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<sup>6</sup> As early as 30 September 1939, the Bureau de recherche de disparus of Winterthur, Switzerland requested the occupation authorities (military at that time) for information about the musician’s family staying in Radom. The replay that Sura, Jankiel and Izaak Bakman, “sound and healthy” were still living in Radom was sent on 19 January 1940. AAN, RGG, 422/1, pp. 24–28.

<sup>7</sup> Characteristic is the proposal submitted on 13 December 1939 to Hans Frank by an anonymous resident of Legnica [Liegnitz]: “The future of both nations, and particularly good relations between Germans and Poles are close to my heart and therefore I take the liberty to warn you, Sir, against the danger that the disenchanting Jewish population in Poland poses. I know Poles and Jews and therefore I believe that the only way of separating and protecting Poles from pernicious Jewish influence is to have Jewish offspring sterilized by Polish municipalities or under the supervision of Polish cultural organizations. Sterilization should replace the existing symbolic circumcision of children, and the Jewish custom of circumcising boys as inhumane and harmful for productivity ought to be strictly forbidden on German territories.” The opinion was issued on January 11 the following year: “The Council [...] does not propose anything new, because the implementation of the plan was many a time discussed in professional circles. Such a measure to solve the Jewish problem depends on the development of the political situation, which will have a decisive importance for the final solution of the Jewish question.” AAN, RGG, 422/1, pp. 156, 159.

ment wear armbands with the Star of David. The requirement was meant to offer no exceptions; moreover – as Hans Frank said – when he discussed the issue on 10 November 1939: “all resistance must be punished accordingly.”<sup>8</sup> The ordinance of 23 November 1939 (and subsequently repeated) pertained to all Jews over 10, regardless of religion, language or their relation to Jewish culture. The higher the social status and the more advanced the assimilation, the harder the experience of having to wear an armband, a painful stigma that symbolized being pushed to a ghetto (virtual for the time being), a shift to an alien world they did not understand or know. The trauma related to wearing an armband, its destabilizing influence on the psychology and the awareness that it was the first so tangible and so clear a wall that separates the two societies, pervade Holocaust survivor testimonies, and they usually were representatives of the most assimilated and most closely connected with Polish culture.<sup>9</sup>

Various strategies were adopted – “and at the end of the month [November 1939 – J.K.] there was an announcement that no one could believe at first. Not in our most secret thoughts would we ever have suspected that such a thing could happen: Jews had from the first to the fifth of December to provide themselves with white armbands on which a blue Star of David must be sewn. So we were to be publicly branded as outcasts. [...] For weeks on end the Jewish intelligentsia stayed under voluntary house arrest. No one would venture out in the street with the brand on his sleeve, and if there was simply no way to avoid leaving home we tried to pass unnoticed, walking with our eyes lowered to the ground, feeling shame and distress.”<sup>10</sup> Some, such as Arnold Szyfman or Janusz Korczak – openly refused to wear an armband, and consciously risked repression. “Gestapo men asked him several times,” Rafał Staszewski wrote of Szyfman, “why he wasn’t wearing an armband with the Star of David. He would give the same reply: Governor General can issue all kinds of ordinances, but the matter of my nationality, my feelings, my faith and my thoughts is mine only.”<sup>11</sup> Korczak, too, refused to submit to the ordinance, and argued: “I have nothing against this beautiful emblem, but the intention of those that order the Jews to wear the armband on their sleeves is to humiliate and disgrace both the emblem and those who wear it. So, in this situation I found myself in, the only right way I can and need to go is to preserve my dignity. I won’t wear an armband!”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Das Diensttagebuch des deutsche Generalgouverneurs in Polen 1939–1945*, ed. Werner Präg and Wolfgang Jacobmeyer (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1975), 64.

<sup>9</sup> Witold Bereś, Krzysztof Burnetko, Marek Edelman. *Życie. Po prostu* (Warsaw: Świat Książki, 2008), 47.

<sup>10</sup> Władysław Szpilman, *The Pianist: The Extraordinary True Story of One Man’s Survival in Warsaw, 1939–1945* (Picador, 1998), 54.

<sup>11</sup> Rafał Staszewski, *W gościnnych dworach*. Quoted in: [http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuly/58489\\_druk.html](http://www.e-teatr.pl/pl/artykuly/58489_druk.html), retrieved 25 May 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Mieczysław Kowalski, “Niepokorny,” in *Wspomnienia o Januszu Korczaku*, ed. Ludwika Barszczewska and Bolesław Milewicz (Warsaw: Nasza Księgarnia, 1989), 280.

These attitudes can be described as ostentatious and symbolic, something only persons protected by their high social authority (sometimes international) could do. It is puzzling, however, how widespread was another “refusal strategy,” attempts to persuade the authorities that for reasons of descent, merit, attitude or religion the applicant should be exempted from this shameful duty. Since there are three such requests in the files of the Main Department of Internal Affairs – from Warsaw, Kraków, and Jarosław, from a physician, an engineer and a woman from a landed gentry family – one may conclude that in the higher strata of society it was a belief as common as it was infrequently implemented. Members of the elite had sufficient instruments at their disposal to be able to realize that a “devil’s loop” was being tied around them.<sup>13</sup> It was even more evident in the spring of 1940, when on the one hand a wave of brutal terror was sweeping the General Government, and on the other further restrictions were imposed on the Jews (separate areas on public transport, forbidden entry to parks or restaurants, etc.), which increasingly separated them from the rest of society. Also the “Easter pogroms” in Warsaw and Kielce (22–30 March 1940) may have played some role.

All this must have led to desperately seeking ways out, including those that were most likely seen as the last resort, i.e. petitioning the highest authorities. It is hard to say to what extent they thought such action effective. Undoubtedly, it was not an easy decision to make, and it must have been based on a careful calculation of potential profits and losses. Characteristically, both in the center (Warsaw, Kraków) and the periphery (Jarosław) it was decided that with the presented set of arguments there were chances of success. An example that shows that such hopes were not in vain is the petition of Ludwik Holzer, who referred to his war-time merits and his Iron Cross decoration. Warsaw officials seconded his request only to be rejected in Kraków.<sup>14</sup> But regardless of the arguments used, the very fact that those letters were sent can be (should be?!) seen as a form of spontaneous opposition, what Marcin Kula called “rebellious action”. The chance that the senders had survived is slim, which is all the more reason to preserve their testimonies.

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The letters and replies published below are kept in the Archive of Modern Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych) in the General Government folder, 422/3. These letters do not form a separate collection, but are scattered among other documents. All the originals are in German and have been translated. The apparatus

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<sup>13</sup> Joanna Olczak-Ronikier, *Korczak. Próba biografii* (Warsaw: W.A.B., 2011), 343.

<sup>14</sup> An example of the (limited) effectiveness of quoting one’s war-time merits is the fate of people awarded military decorations and living in the Łódź ghetto. Their applications supported by certificates of being decorated, e.g. with the Iron Cross, at least did delay deportation. See Ewa Wiatr, “Knights of the Iron Cross in the Łódź Ghetto,” in this volume.

such as footnotes has been sizably minimized, with the letter notes, seal description, etc. dropped. All ellipses are marked with square brackets.

1

[Ludwik Holzer, Warsaw]

Warsaw, 2 May 1940

To the Commandant of the City of Warsaw

Please exempt me from the [duty] of wearing the Jewish armband. My arguments are as follows:

During the World War I served at the front as a soldier in the Austro-Hungarian army and in German units, from 1914 until I was captured by the English in 1918. I was a POW on Malta and in Egypt until 1920. In 1915 I was wounded in the battle of Gorlice. I have five military decorations, including the Iron Cross Second Class (certificates attached). In recognition of my humble merits and my deeds, to which I devoted my body and soul, I find my duty to wear the Jewish sign a heavy and undeserved punishment and therefore I request to be relieved of this stigma.

Doctor of medicine Ludwig Holzer

8 attachments<sup>15</sup>

*Source: AAN, RGG, 422/3, p. 105.*

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Warsaw, 2 May 1940

### My resume

I was born in 1890 in Lwów. During 1900-1908 I attended the local Second German Secondary School, where I received my High School Diploma. During 1908-

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<sup>15</sup>The attachments include: a published handwritten Holzer's resume (pp. 106-107) and certificates of graduation from Vienna University dated 2 August 1914 (p. 108), Iron Cross Second Class certificate dated 17 August 1918 (p. 109), brown Military Medal of Merit dated 22 September 1915 (p. 110), silver Military Medal of Merit dated 19 September 1916 (p. 111), silver Military Medal of Merit with Swords dated 31 August 1917 (p. 112), the Turkish War Medal dated 20 June 1918 (p. 113), and diploma of appointment to the position of senior physician (*Oberarzt*) at the Military Medical School dated 7 June 1916 (p. 114).

1914 I studied medicine at the University of Vienna, where I received my medical diploma in 1914. In April 1914 I was drafted, and as a soldier and non-commissioned officer I served in the former imperial and royal 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, as a professional officer in the former imperial and royal 4<sup>th</sup> Rifle Division, in the former 24<sup>th</sup> Motorized Mortar Battery and in different German detachments of the Yilderim Army Group.<sup>16</sup> In September 1918 I was taken prisoner by the English, and remained in captivity until 1920, first on the island of Malta, and later in Sisli Bistr near Alexandria. When I returned to Vienna from captivity, I was forced – due to the collapse of the [Habsburg] monarchy – to resign my commission and worked as a physician in the Kępno district in Wartheland, and in Łęczycza near Litzmannstadt. I have a spotless reputation and no criminal history, and I come from a spotless family with no criminal history. I have never permitted myself any kind of hostile or tactless behavior or attitude toward Germanhood or the Germans, and many a time did I personally save German lives (by offering first aid to a wounded airman, forced to land near Tul-kerim, Turkey in 1918) or for material reasons (as in the case of Lt. Eng. Karl Frense-Detmanhorst or Willy Hampel in 1919 in Egyptian captivity), and until recently I had enjoyed the trust, as a friend and advisor, of the Volksdeutsche I worked with.

Dr Ludwig Holzer

*Source: AAN, RGG, 422/3, pp. 106–107.*

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Warsaw, 4 May 1940

The Office of Governor  
for the Occupied Polish Territories  
Chief of the Warsaw District  
Department of Internal Affairs

The Office of Governor  
for the Occupied Polish Territories  
Department of Internal Affairs  
Kraków

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<sup>16</sup> That is the *Heeresgruppe Yıldırım* (Turkish, lightning), an Ottoman army group (armies 4, 7, and 8) operating from 1917 until the end of the war on the Palestinian front, under German command. From June 1917 to February 1918, the commander was the former Prussian War Minister and Chief of General Staff Erich von Falkenhayn, followed by General of Cavalry Otto Liman von Sanders.



Please find enclosed the application of the Jew, doctor of medicine Holzer for exemption from wearing the Jewish armband. Dr Holzer was an officer in the former imperial and royal Austrian army, decorated, among others, with the Iron Cross, 2<sup>nd</sup> class.

Originals of attached copies of certificates of decoration enclosed.

The application is seconded.

*Source: AAN, RGG, 422/3, p. 104.*

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[Kraków,] May 18, [194]0

Chief of the Warsaw District

[...]

The application by doctor of medicine Holzer for exemption from wearing the Jewish armband cannot be considered favorably. Mr. Governor General ruled that no exceptions are to be made to this directive.

*Source: AAN, RGG, 422/3, p. 115.*

2

[Berta Grünberg, Warsaw]

Warsaw, 15 May 1940

To Mr. Governor General Dr. Frank  
Kraków

I hereby take the liberty to submit to Mr. Governor General the following request.

I am a widow, as my husband, a physician by profession, was called into the army as a Captain and unfortunately died in the line of duty. Since then I have been deprived of all livelihood and cannot expect any help, because I am of the Mosaic faith. As an old, sick woman I have no chance to earn a living.

Therefore I take the liberty to appeal to the generosity of Mr. Governor General and request [financial] help.

Please forgive my boldness and I hope that in my situation Mr. Governor General will take my situation into consideration. Sincerely

yours  
Berta Grünberg

Berta Grünberg  
Warsaw  
Karmelicka 3 flat 3

[There was no reply to this letter, only an annotation: "to be filed, 18.5.40"]

*Source: AAN, RGG, 422/3, p. 116.*

3

[Leo Smetana, Kraków]

certified engineer Leo Smetana,  
Kraków, Podgórze, Ringplatz 11/I

To the Office of Governor General  
for the [Occupied] Polish Territories  
Department of Internal Affairs  
Kraków

Re: Application for exemption from wearing the Jewish armband.

I hereby apply and justify [my application] with important reasons. Taking into consideration the important reasons, I request that I be exempted from wearing the Jewish armband.

I have already been granted one such exemption by the district governor as a former Czechoslovak citizen, but it was lifted by a general directive several days ago.

I justify my request by the fact that, born in 1897, I was a serving officer in the former Austro-Hungarian army and as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant of the 1<sup>st</sup> Opawa Infantry Regiment I fought at the front uninterruptedly from 1915. In late 1917 I was shot and wounded in my arm and chest, and having received many decorations, I served until the end of the world war.

Having graduated from the German Technical College in Brno, as a certified engineer [specializing in] machine construction and motorcar construction I came to Germany, where I was employed as a constructor in the Fahrzeugen DIXI and RUMPLER Motoren A.G Flugzeugwerker Berlin – Johannisthal. Later I founded<sup>17</sup> a special cylinder and crankshaft grinding establishment, which was also engaged in the manufacture of pistons and piston rings for internal com-

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<sup>17</sup> In October 1938 Bogumin (Czech Bohumín, Ger. Oderberg) was annexed to Poland and incorporated into the Silesian voivodeship. This would explain Smetana's presence in Kraków.

bustion-engine vehicles; I employed 40 people and had owned this firm until the outbreak of the current war.

I can confirm the above with [relevant] documents to confirm, and I hope that my matter will be considered favorably.

Kraków-Podgórze, 20 May 1940  
Ringplatz 11/I

certified engineer Leo Smetana,

*Source: AAN, RGG, 422/3, p. 185.*

\* \* \*

May [194]0  
[...]

J. 4879/40

Mr.  
certified engineer Leo Smetana,  
Kraków  
Podgórze. Ringplatz 11/I

Re: Your application of 20 May 1940

Your application for exemption from wearing the armband cannot be considered for fundamental reasons.

*Source: AAN, RGG, 422/3, p. 186.*

4

[Jula Rothstein]

[Undated document. Received as per the seal: 30 May 1940]

To Mr. Governor General for the occupied territories

I, the undersigned Jula Rothstein of Jarosław, Dietziusa 23, submit to Mr. Governor General the following request. About 25 years ago, together with my 2 daughters, Irena Rothstein and Teresa Rothstein, for purely ideological reasons and guided by heartfelt feelings, I converted to the Christian faith – and thus brought on myself implacable hatred and hostility of the Jewish population.

My conversion to Christianity was a consequence of the upbringing we had received – both I, raised in a Benedictine monastery, and my children, who never had any awareness of the Jewry.

I come from a landowners' family, always considered true Polish citizens, [and] most of my relatives in Poland and in Vienna are Christians. And today I was summoned by the Gendarmerie and given the strict order to wear the armband as a sign for the Jews.

Together with my daughters I had left the Jewish community before the Aryan statute was passed – I was hated and persecuted in the community – and now I am to be excluded from Polish society, although thanks to the upbringing and kinship (my aunt's grandfather was the bishop of Chicago), and I lived in a pure Christian spirit.

Therefore, I request Mr. Governor General to exempt me and my daughters Irena Rothstein and Teresa Rothstein from the obligation [of wearing] the armbands.

I ask Mr. Governor General to kindly consider my above request.

Jula Rothstein

*Source: AAN, RGG, 422/3, p. 236.*

\* \* \*

June 1, [194]0

Mrs.  
Jula Rothstein

Jarosław  
[ul.] Dietziusa

Your application to exempt you and your daughters from the obligation of wearing the Jewish armbands has been rejected.

*Source: AAN, RGG, 422/3, p. 237.*

Translated by *Jerzy Giebułtowski*

### **Abstract**

In Warsaw's Central Archives of Modern Records, in a collection of documents known as the General Government Administration set, there are dozens of letters and petitions sent between October 1939 and May 1940 by residents of occupied areas to the new German authorities, including the Governor General

Hans Frank. In the collection there are also several letters (presented in Polish translation) sent by the Jews. While the Polish, Ukrainian and Russian authors represented a wide range of professions and social positions, and the petition themselves – a variety of issues, all Jewish letters were sent by members of the social elite, and the majority of them voiced their objection to the compulsory armbands with the Star of David, as the order to wear them accentuated the social exclusion of Jews in both practical and symbolic sense. Asking for permission not to wear an armband, the authors of letters referred to their service in the Austrian or German army, their lack of association with Judaism, etc. However, regardless of the arguments, the very act of sending those letters can be seen as a form of spontaneous opposition, described by the Polish historian and sociologist Marcin Kula as “rebellious action”.

**Key words**

occupation, General Government, Hans Frank, letters, petitions, exclusion of Jews, armbands, resistance, assimilation