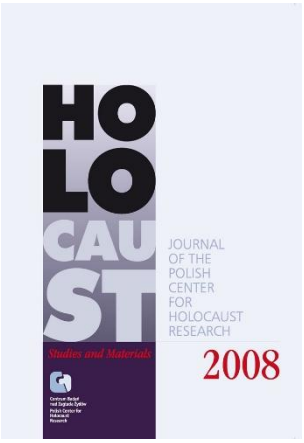


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The Text Called Szmul Rozensztajn's Diary

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The Text Called Szmul Rozensztajn's Diary

The text called *Szmul Rozensztajn's Diary,* catalogue number 302/115, can be found in the Memoirs collection of the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute. This is a typewritten text in Yiddish, 161 pages long, compiled on the basis of a manuscript written in the Łódź Ghetto. Daily entries cover the period from 20 February 1941 to 21 November 1941. This is no doubt part of a larger whole. Both the immediate post-war scholars of Jewish literature from the Łódź Ghetto – Ber Mark and Iszaja Trunk – and the contemporary editors of fragments of *Szmul Rozensztajn's Diary* translated into English – Alan Adelson and Robert Lapides – say that the original of the *Diary* is kept at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, while the typewritten text is in Yad Vashem Archives in Jerusalem. But the inventory of the Jewish Memoirs collection of the Jewish Historical Institute published in 1994 mentions only a typewritten copy. The whereabouts of the original are unknown. We do not know which part of the copy is available to us.

The author is Szmul Rozensztajn, born in 1898, deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in the summer of 1944. Before the war he worked as a teacher of Hebrew and a journalist, the Łódź correspondent of the "Hajnt" daily. In the ghetto he was a close collaborator of Chairman Chaim Rumkowski and held the following posts: manager of a billboard painting shop, teacher, registration department clerk, head of the press department of the Eldest of the Jews, and manager of the printing shop and stamp makers. Between 7 March and 21 September he was the editor of the ghetto weekly *Geto-Cajtung*; he also compiled two calendars: for 1942 and 1943.

Rozensztajn's notes are detailed descriptions of Rumkowski's everyday routine, duties and meetings as well as his speeches, either in full or in fragments. There are no personal comments by the author. The narrative "I" appears only a few times, and only in the context of clarifying remarks ("I will write about this tomorrow"; "As I have been told"). The style of these notes is a mixture of official and persuasive forms, which contribute to a favourable image of Rumkowski as a leader of the Jews in the ghetto. That is why, in the analysis of this text, which I intend to present in my doctoral dissertation, I shall also reflect upon the appropriate generic term for those notes, traditionally referred to as a *Diary*, but which is a highly impersonal testimony, most likely commissioned by Chairman Rumkowski.

The translation herein retains the awkward style and syntax of the rather careless original.

* * *

Tuesday, 24 February 1941

Today, at 10 a.m., the chief of the Ghetto Board,[1] Mr Biebow, visited the Chairman in Rynek Bałucki and held a lengthy conference on various ghetto management issues. The conference lasted 2 hours. After the conference, the Chairman was depressed and very nervous.

At 2 p.m., the Chairman visited the tailoring department at 16 Jakuba St. In the yard workers from both shifts gathered, around 1,400 people, whom the Chairman addressed briefly, and said among other things: "Just as poor work should be condemned, good work ought to be praised." When the workers started murmuring, he shouted back: "I am not asking provocateurs hiding in holes."

The workers condemned this kind of reaction among their colleagues.

The Chairman explained that those who display a proper attitude to work would be given soup without food coupons every day.[2] This explanation was received with enthusiasm.

Then the Chairman explained that every department that displayed a positive attitude to work would receive such meals. In order to carry out this operation, the Chairman proposed that 6 workers be selected – not party delegates or members, but honest people, who together with the Chairman would calculate the soups and determine lunch times for both shifts. From this day on, the working day will not be longer than 5 hours, but there will be no breaks. The Chairman concluded: "Its my understanding of the situation that has brought me here, and in spite of the difficult economic situation of the ghetto, I have decided to take this step. My principle: "one should help".[3] I am helping you, but you, in turn, should help me in my different task."

From there, the Chairman left for the Purchase Department, where he had a lengthy conference with its head, Mr David Warszawski.

Because the Chairman had to deal with a number of pressing matters in his office at Rynek Bałucki, he did not have lunch today in his private flat, but in his office at Rynek Bałucki.

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[1] That is the German Board of the Łódź Ghetto (*Gettoverwaltung*)

[2] As a supplementary meal.

[3] Azojw-tazojw (Heb.) – the biblical command to help people in need.

Workers from the tailoring department at 49 Łagiewnicka St. sent a petition to the Chairman today. They request that the Chairman set the department in motion, so they could feed themselves and their families. They apologise for the impolite behaviour of some workers in the Chairman's presence and assure that it will not happen again.

The "Bandit"[4] Chairman decided to take heed of their request and re-open the factory the following morning.

Wednesday, 26 February 1941

Today before noon, the Chairman went on an inspection of the provisions camp in Marysin, next to the new station.[5] There he was informed on the progress of reloading of delivered goods and how they will be distributed among the individual provisions centres in the ghetto.

From there the Chairman went to the children's colony in Marysin, where he visited schools for boys and girls as well the Talmud Torah.[6] The children were delighted to see their beloved guest, who has always taken care of them and does his best to provide for them. The Chairman visited some lessons, but he was even more interested in their food and clothing. He asked the children whether they received full rations of bread, butter and meat. The children's radiant faces again proved how deeply they are attached to their old friend. This, however, does not satisfy the Chairman. He wanted to find out personally about the situation in the kitchen and what kind of products were used. Seizing this opportunity, the headmistress "gypped" for the children a good deal of butter, soap, etc.

It is interesting that during his visit to the Talmud Torah, he noted that both the rooms and the syllabus differ in some respects from the local elementary schools, which he found disappointing. Still on the same day, in a conversation with the school management he accused them of neglecting the aforementioned Talmud Torah. The management explained that the building was nearly completed and would shortly be brought up to the required standard. This explanation set the Chairman's mind at rest to some extent.

As of today, the authorities have prohibited distribution of food products received by rail from the provinces, including food parcels which might arrive in the future. According to the same ordinance, all food parcels are to be confiscated by the Chairman for the common good of the ghetto dwellers. Thus the Chairman ordered that all parcels to be used, by special assignment, by the sick, women in childbirth and children, be delivered to a health food store at 18 Łagiewnicka St.

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[4] The original word used was *gazlen* (Yid.) – a brigand, bandit. The reference here is to words shouted by workers during Rumkowski's visit to the departments.

[5] That is the Radogoszcz siding.

[6] The Talmud Torah – a religious school with elements of lay syllabus.

Obviously, this ordinance was met with bitterness by the ghetto dwellers. As stated above, the Chairman is not to blame in the least. State law.[7]

Thursday, 27 February 1941

In the last few days, the Chairman has been contemplating the establishment of the so-called representation kitchen for the orthodox [Jewish] population, which due to high prices cannot afford kosher restaurants.

The head of the Housing Committee showed the Chairman a number of restaurants in different parts of town. The Chairman did not like any of them. He argued that he did not want to discriminate against the orthodox population. They need to be given an appropriate restaurant that could seat several hundred people inside, while others would have take-away meals.

During his visit to a newly renovated kitchen at 26 Zgierska St., which has a special cholent oven,[8] the Chairman was very keen to set up the aforementioned orthodox kitchen there. For some reasons he decided not to for the time being. But it is more than certain that in the next few weeks such a kitchen for the orthodox population will be opened.

Today the Chairman visited the carpenter's shop at 12 Drukarska St., where he showed particular interest in the new kitchen, which was specially made by this shop. The kitchen and its equipment impressed the Chairman significantly.

During his visit to the carpenter's shop the Chairman addressed the workers briefly and said among other things: "while setting up this carpenter's shop I thought that both you and your comrades would help me with my hard work. I also gave you some limited time to introduce your own order. But I realised that you aim one step beyond – you want hegemony and security for the future – and then I said: Stop! This is neither the time nor the place for rallies and fighting, but for what needs to be done to be able to survive.

To create jobs and obtain products is not so easy as you and your comrades think. My motto is: work! This can keep us alive. Politics and rallies have to wait until days of normalcy.

I, on my part, have done what I could, and you? You didn't want to build and when you started frolicking, I stopped you with my strong arm. . . . To save the ghetto I have to act quickly, like a surgeon who amputates limbs to keep the heart beating. . . . Believe me, and I'm sure you don't think I'm that stupid, I would be happy, perhaps happier than you, if I could give you more than you want. To tell you the truth, you would have won before a "bejs-din",[9] but now there isn't time.

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[7] Rozensztajn avoids literal terms and uses the traditional Hebrew term *dine-demalches*, which stands for laws and commands that are usually directed against the Jews.

[8] Cholent – a traditional Jewish Sabbath dish: a stew of beans, onions, potatoes, sometimes groats or meat; prepared and put into the oven on the Friday before the Sabbath.

[9] *Bejs-din* (Heb.) – a Jewish religious court that also settles civil disputes.

What I can do for you now is give the carpentry department paid meals, but without coupons.[10] (This unexpected explanation by the Chairman arouses great joy and enthusiasm among the workers). As far as the technical side of lunch distribution is concerned, the price calculation and the ingredients – it is up to you."

At the end the President explained that old furniture must be finished as soon as possible, so they could commence new production in the next few days.

In the evening the Chairman had a conference with the head of provisions, Mr Szczęśliwy, regarding new issues as per announcement No. 223.

Friday, 28 February [1941]

In connection with the opening of kitchens for individual factories, the Chairman visited today the rubber coat factory at 5 Bałucki Rynek. On this day the factory was closed due to shortages of various finishing materials.

In the afternoon, the Chairman visited the tailoring department at 16 Jakuba St. The head and the instructors informed him about current production.

Soon afterwards, in a very pleasant and truly friendly atmosphere, the Chairman had a short conference with a few workers from the above-mentioned department, and heard their opinions on the ingredients of lunches in the kitchen at 16 Jakuba St., which the Chairman assigned for 1,400 workers employed there, as well as on the technical aspects of lunch distribution.

As to the question asked by workers' representatives, the Chairman replied that supervision of the kitchen was solely in the hands of the community.[11] Then he added with a smile: "I am a Litwak[12] and I only trust myself." But the technical side and organisation, as well as the keeping of proper order, he leaves to the workers themselves. As regards the soup ingredients and the price, it has been set at 20 Pfennig each, [and] the soup will be rich in vegetables such as carrots, beetroots, onions, etc. The Chairman also added his idea of setting up a small buffet at the factory, where the workers could obtain several decagrams of sausage every day.

This kitchen opened the following Sunday, 2 March 1941.

At the end the Chairman made a remark about acts of theft committed by some of the employees of the tailoring department. This could lead to very unpleasant consequences. He therefore appeals to the workers to put things in order themselves, so that innocent people would not have to suffer for that.

The Chairman paid a long visit to the metal factory at 56 Zgierska St. The manager Chimowicz showed the Chairman around all the floors and workshops, and informed him in detail about all factory operations.

One must admit that the Chairman follows closely everything that is going on in his factories, and, if necessary, he responds quickly and usually severely.

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[10] That is: without food coupons.

[11] Rumkowski means the *Judenrat*.

[12] *Litwak* – a Jew from Polish territory incorporated into Russia. Among Polish Jews the *Litwaks* were regarded as distrustful and sceptical.

Seizing this opportunity, the Chairman ordered that the mechanical shop from 14 Dworska St. be moved to the factory which had hitherto employed students from a mechanical junior high school.

Virtually all the lessons will be held at the factory.

The entire afternoon the Chairman was busy in the office at 1 Dworska St., where he received a number of different people and listened to their requests.

Saturday 1 March 1941

At 3 Krawiecka Street, a Jewish music concert was held – the conductor was the well-known Jewish composer Dawid Bajgelman. The soloist was Mrs Ali Diamant. After the concert the Chairman briefly addressed the audience. He said, among other things:

Today we have had the true pleasure to finally hear a concert of Jewish music and song; we have an inexhaustible source of our own Jewish music. You, the "*klezmerz*"[13] (I don't mean, God forbid, to insult you with this expression. This is the true and proper name for Jewish musicians), you give us spiritual delight, and I shall give you bread and potatoes.

The ghetto, for the time being, does not have serious problems with food supplies, and work [also] keeps coming in.

Now I care about young people and in the next few days I am beginning my youth retraining programme. You will be informed about all that by special announcements.

Don't be deceived by all kinds of rumours, spread in the ghetto by incompetent people. Be brave, things will be good, it will be better! The work slogan I declared is bringing good results.

Soon thousands more workers will have the chance to work. I demand of you but one thing: peace in the ghetto.

I know, mice are coming out of their holes, alas with no other work to do . . . .

It's been a year since my police began to maintain order [in the ghetto]. We have gone through a lot and we will go through more, but I will do my utmost to improve our situation.

I will disaccustom young people from wandering around and will harness them to work.

Help me combat smuggling, because any smuggling means new problems. For our common good, I ask you not to hide smugglers, but, to the contrary, give away the smugglers' names, and we will avoid a lot of unpleasant situations in the future.

The audience, which filled the room to the last seat, received these brief but meaningful words of the Chairman.

[13] In Yiddish, however, the term "*klezmer*" stands for a home-grown musician, usually at wedding receptions, without formal musical education.