

Kalman W., Testimony about Clandestine Radio in the Lodz Ghetto (Retrospective, 1993)

Abstract

Recorded testimony of Kalman W., who was born in Lodz, Poland, in 1920. He recounts listening to clandestine radio and spreading the news in the Lodz Ghetto. According to his account, he listened to broadcasts in both Polish and German. He recalls that the Communist broadcasts were not particularly good, but that the BBC provided intelligent political analysis. He also describes reports about the burning of the Warsaw Ghetto in April 1943.

Source

Translation

[...]

At home, people would start to come by at a certain time, and my father would tell them the news from the radio, from outside the country. I asked him how he came by this news – I said what is this, what is it. He said he heard some news, and that's all.

One bright day, I decided to see what exactly this was about.

People started coming to our house, I found out that my father had acquaintances who had a secret radio. At certain hours, they would go and listen to the news and then tell their friends. This started with a cantor in the ghetto, called Tafel (see *The Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto*, p. 499). He knew many languages. Viktor Rundbaker built a radio out of spare parts, and people would come to his room and listen to the news. And they would spread the news among others.

This man became famous. So a cousin of mine, who was in the know – his name was Shaye Kalman – organized the building of a second makeshift radio by Rundbaker. This radio was hidden in the same house that we lived in, in a neighbor's apartment. When I got it, I started to be a part of this "business." I started listening to the radio, as well, and disseminating the news to the ghetto. There was Tafel's radio in the Wexler's apartment. There was another radio, in the ghetto, someone named Altschuler, as well, I didn't know him, but I knew there were others.

Finally, in this situation, my cousin Shaye, who politically was a revisionist Zionist, had another radio built. This one was bigger, and it was in the apartment across from our apartment, under the roof, in the Lubinsky's apartment (See *The Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto*, p. 499). This Mr. Lubinsky had sent his family away, to Bedzin, or some other town, so he was alone in his apartment in the ghetto. He was a good friend of my father, from the time that my dad had a warehouse for the sale of fabrics.

We started broadcasting the news. My father was afraid, because we heard that Tafel was hosting the Zionist activists in his house. My father felt that this was too dangerous, which is why we had the second radio built. And this radio was in our place. I would sit by the radio three or four times a day, with my headphones, it was primitive,

but I was able to listen to the news from the BBC.

I started listening to the radio three or four times a day, sometimes even at night. We were no longer disconnected from the world. We mostly listened to the BBC, which broadcast in Polish and German – these were the languages. We also sometimes listened to a Polish Communist station that broadcast from the Eastern front, [Polish] but mainly the BBC. The Communist broadcasts were boring [more accurate: were not very good], without any political analysis. The BBC had intelligent analysts that explained each and every move, and the broadcasts would encourage us. In fact, they broadcast a daily song for encouraging the people in the camps.

Were these well-known songs?

[He recounts a few lyrics from these songs]

Is there a song you remember in particular?

I don't know. It started with "ten million, ten million who are behind the fences and in concentration camps" and so forth.

One bright day, I'm sitting next to the radio, and I catch a Polish station that sounds like an underground station from the occupied territories of Poland. It was called "Swit" [Spit? In Hebrew it sounds like that] (see *The Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto*, p. 498). Until the liberation, I was convinced that it was an underground station. When I found out that it was actually being broadcast from London, I couldn't believe it. They had the background sound effects—you can hear the dogs barking, the creaking gates—that made it convincing. I was sure it was broadcasted from some village.

One bright day, in April of 1943, I'm listening to the "Swit" station and I hear these words: "A world of free people, can you hear us? The Warszawa Ghetto is burning!" Even today, I cannot forget these words. This news surprised me. I went straight to my father and the rest and told them. It was the last time I heard these words. Like that, it got into my head. [. . .]

Translation from Yiddish to English: Fortunoff Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library.

Source: Kalman W., Witness testimony (HVT-3565) [audio recording], recorded in July and August 1993. Clip provided by the Fortunoff Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library,
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