Queue

Categories: Phenomena

This word is of Polish origin and means actually a crowd of people who, as the result of external, local circumstances, form a line for waiting. In the ghetto, queues were a common phenomenon and certain aspects of its economy were even unthinkable without them. People formed queues in front of imported-food shops, wood and coal stockpiles, dairy and meat shops, post office counters, various departments, and especially before kitchens rationing “ressort" soups. They came into being mainly because of the lack of free trade in shops (distribution points). Any food received was rationed and assigned to a specific distribution point, also primarily to a specific time. The ghetto inhabitants were required to receive food rationed for one or two weeks in a specific shop. Because these shops functioned as distribution points for almost all products, such as flour, sugar, jam, oil, grains, peas, coffee blend, salt, baking soda, matches, etc. (with the exception of meat, sausages, dairy products, and vegetables over 2 kg per person), much time was needed to get them. There was one more inconvenience resulting from the fact that all inhabitants of the ghetto wanted to go into imported food shops at the same time – either on Sundays and holidays or after work at 5 o’clock in the evening. The natural consequence of this rush was a long line of people demanding admission, in other words: a "kolejka", a queue.

At a certain time, there was also a queue at the mortuary, especially in the winter of 1942 when mortality rates were extremely high. Relatives and friends had to wait a long time for burials.

Queues were a phenomenon – however, an unavoidable one under the mentioned circumstances – that people were afraid of. In a queue, quarrels, irritation, and fist- fights broke out, also violent interventions by managers, guards, or Order Service officials would happen. People standing in queues were also concerned about the fact that the long, drawn-out waiting was often foredoomed to failure. In that case, the next day was necessary for the grueling

queuing, whereas on the other hand, the protégés were served on the spot and in this way took products that other people were queuing for.

On the basis of the word kolejka an idiom was created: “to make oneself a queue.” According to the expression, it was possible to guarantee oneself a place in the queue from its beginning to the moment of achieving something without waiting all the time. It happened in the way that the person concerned would agree after a certain time with neighboring persons to have the place in the queue guaranteed. That person left the queue and after returning took his or her place again, relying on the honesty of persons standing there. This unwritten rule was obeyed in general; however, it caused many disagreements. Because the right to the queue place was acquired not by standing, but by sitting. It was a legal position that significantly alleviated the torture.

Ed. Oskar Rosenfeld

Resources

Encyclopedia, p. 114-115.

Tags

provisions starvation language of the ghetto everyday life

Updated: 07-11-2026

Added: 10-01-2023