

## B. Go to HASAG! Go to HASAG!

Due to the lack of precise data, it is not possible to determine how many Apparatebau workers were active in the underground in the ghetto. However, at first glance it seems that only a few helped the underground in any real way.

The difference between the HASAG workers and the workers of the *Möbellager* is particularly striking.

The latter built bunkers, moved children and adults to hiding places, organised kitchens and medical aid for the needy, helped the partisans and the name of their leader, Machel Birencwajg, was on everyone's lips.<sup>1</sup>

And, what did they say about the HASAG people?

Ita Diamant, a liaison for *Gordonia*, an underground activist in the Raków camp, writes:

“Once I had to enter the “Small Ghetto” in the evening but, with the Pelcery people, it was very difficult. They walked in a tight group, under the guard of the *Werkschutz*. These Jews thought they would be covered... nothing would be done to them, because it was an arms factory. They never wanted to help. They did not want to take any risks... Opposition to the fighting organisation was also reflected at a later time...

“This attitude was especially prevalent among the workers in ‘safe places’ and it dictated their attitude towards the militant underground.”<sup>2</sup>

Where could the unfortunate Jews of the ghetto seek salvation? The “Palestine” plan was buried, the forest was infested with enemies and, outside, the *Szmalcowniki* were lurking.<sup>3</sup> The underground could have assured them of a dignified death, but not salvation.

In June 1943, the exterminations began. Following Degenhardt's raid on the *Möbellager*, Machel Birencwajg was captured and, a few days later, Dr Wolberg was murdered, two of the leaders of the Bund, two men revered by all the Jews of the ghetto.

So, what to do?

“Go to HASAG! Go to HASAG! Soon they will eliminate all the factories, but not HASAG!

“If Jews remain anywhere, then only in HASAG! Although life there is the worst, it is the safest. You will learn to live on the supplies you receive – they increased our bread rations to 400 grams per day. If they don't kill us, then with these rations we will reach the end of the War!”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hanan Kiel, *The Hero Machel Birencwajg R.I.P.*, Sefer Częstochowa, pp. 231-234.

<sup>2</sup> Testimony of Ita Diamant, YVA, 0.3/3153. See also: “Mojtek”, pp. 71-72.

<sup>3</sup> *Szmalcownik* (in Polish) – This is how informants about Jews in hiding were referred to during the War.

<sup>4</sup> Lustiger, *Pamiętnik*, ch.17, pp. 22-23

This is how Norbert pleaded with his wife Henia, until she left her good job in the Garibaldi warehouses and moved to HASAG.

At the time, many people moved to HASAG. It was not difficult. There was no need for a “favour”. They would simply join a group of workers in the morning and walk. The journey took about an hour.

The day passed slowly, the work was hard and boring. In the evening, they would line up again for the rollcall, be counted and set off. Hana Lustiger says,

“The city streets now looked completely different from the morning. The streetlights were already on. The footpaths were crowded with people... They looked at us like creatures from another world... At the sight of the bustling traffic on the footpaths, the blinding lights, emanating from the shops and houses, I grasped the bitter and gloomy truth that, here, I was outside the sphere of normal human life... I had plans for the future. I had plans to study. I thought about writing a book... And now, where am I and who am I?”<sup>5</sup>

Similar thoughts troubled other young people in the group of HASAG workers, who were marching through the streets of Częstochowa.

Here was Alfred Kromołowski, who won this “privilege” in exchange for 50 złoty which he gave to Futerko, the foreman in the generator department in Apparatebau. But his wife Stela did not want to move. She was afraid of hard work and the beatings of the *Werkschutz*.

Julia Babiacki and several of her friends decided to move.<sup>6</sup> The loving couple, Jadzia and Izio Abramzon, went to HASAG in the hope that they could be together there. Thirteen-year-old Rut Cytter, who was left without parents, joined her friend Szoszana Glik, who was several years older than her.<sup>7</sup> And the young Benjamin (Jurek) Bender, whose brother Berek was already working at HASAG, also came to the factory at the request of his parents, who remained in the bunker and committed suicide.<sup>8</sup>

In June 1943, the city commissioner of Częstochowa, Dr Franke, sent a letter to [Radom] District Governor Kundt, requesting that the ghetto be finally liquidated for all Jews. Was the danger also lurking for the HASAG workers? After all, as early as 31<sup>st</sup> May, it had been agreed at a meeting of government representatives, held in Kraków, that the Jewish workers were essential for the armaments industry and should be kept at work.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Lustiger, *The Ups and Downs of Life*, p. 350.

<sup>6</sup> Testimony of Julia in Babiacki, YVA, 0.3/9459

<sup>7</sup> Rut Sztern née Cytter, *What We Remembered to Tell – Twenty-Four Members of Kibbutz Megiddo Testify*, Moreshet publishing – Poalim Library, Tel Aviv 1988, p. 178.

<sup>8</sup> B. Bender, *Glimpses-through Holocaust and Liberation*, (Berkeley, North Atlantic Books, 1995 p.88)

<sup>9</sup> Arbeitssitzung, Krakau, 31/05/1943, Das Diensttagebuch, p. 682

[90]

So, it would have been worthwhile to go to HASAG...