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The Activity of the *Kibbutz* During the German Occupation

Before dawn, on 1st September 1939, the din of aeroplanes interrupts our sleep. A few minutes later, a powerful detonation is heard. There is no longer any doubt – the War has begun. On the fourth day, the Germans occupied our city and the entire region and, immediately, we felt what a German occupation means. Only after Warsaw had fallen and the whole of Poland was already under occupation - and the Gestapo had already begun rampaging in the city - did the committees of the *Poalei Zion* Party, *Jugend*¹, *Freiheit*², *Ha'Chalutz*³ and the leaders of the *Kibbutz*⁴ come together. They all came to an agreement that the work needed to become centralised. The committees were dissolved and a commission of five members was chosen. Its duties were, first and foremost, relief activity - as the majority of the comrades, who were factory workers, had been left unemployed and without any means of sustenance and, secondly, to make contact with the central authorities in Warsaw. It was decided to hide the party banners and archives. The question of whether the *Kibbutz* should be dissolved, or should continue to exist illegally, was a cause for discussion. By a majority of votes, it was decided that the *Kibbutz* needed to continue to be maintained under any circumstances. The *Kibbutz*, in fact, held out to the very last minute, viz. until the final liquidation of the "Small Ghetto".

At the beginning of 1940, the arrests of political activists began and, among others, our former councillor, Comrade [Jakow-Icek] Zarnowiecki, was sent away to a concentration camp. The other leading members managed to hide and the relief work for the comrades was carried out during the entire time. We received money from Warsaw and from several comrades of means. Comrade Zarnowiecki was sent 100 *złoty* every month, because that was the most one was allowed to send. The [...] as such, it⁵ conducted a semi-legal activity. The *Judenrat* was perfectly aware that all the Zionist work was being carried out there and the Chairman of the *Judenrat*, Leon Kopinski, and the members of the presidium, Bernard Kurland [and] lawyer Jeremiasz Gitler, extensively aided the *Kibbutz*. The *Kibbutz* numbered 160-200 members - refugees from various towns, or those for whom the ground was burning under their feet⁷. They streamed to our city, to the *Kibbutz*. They were provided with documents and food. On 22nd September 1942, when the liquidation of Częstochowa Jewry began, the *Kibbutz* had 208 members. Seventeen comrades were able to sneak past the Ukrainian guards to the "Aryan side", and the rest went to the *akcja*, of whom forty-odd of these comrades survived.

In the "Small Ghetto", the *Kibbutz* soon reorganised and put itself in contact with Warsaw. Members of the Częstochowa *Kibbutz* were among the first fighters of the Jewish Fighting Organisation [ŻOB]. The first grenades and other types of ammunition were also produced in the *Kibbutz*. The entire ghetto was aware of the goings-on at the *Kibbutz*, and all the Jews treated the heroic fighters with sympathy and respect. Soon, reports arrived to the effect that the "Small Ghetto" was to be liquidated, meaning that some would be sent to [forced] labour and the rest would be annihilated. A

¹ [TN: "Youth"; Left-wing Poalei Zion's youth organisation.]

² [TN: "Freedom"; Right-wing Poalei Zion's youth organisation.]

³ [TN: "The Pioneer"; oldest Zionist youth movement in Poland, which advocated training youth for settlement in the Land of Israel, and from which all other suchlike movements evolved.]

⁴ [TN: Apparently ref. to Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair's training kibbutz in Częstochowa, which was established in 1932.]

⁵ [TN: A line is missing from the book at this juncture, and in its place appears a line which is repeated in the subsequent paragraph – in its proper place: "...allow the Surviving Remnant to be annihilated! Particularly ardently was defended..."]

⁶ [TN: The subject appears to be the *Kibbutz*.]

⁷ [TN: Viz. individuals wanted by the German authorities.]

discussion was held as to whether the ghetto should be defended, or as many comrades as possible should leave the ghetto and go to the partisans in the woods. The majority decided to defend the ghetto and, with it, Jewish honour, to fight like heroes and fall in battle. Vigorous words were heard, "We have not brought weapons into the ghetto, with so much effort and sacrifice, in order to [just] leave them there and to allow the Surviving Remnant to be annihilated without resistance!" This idea was defended particularly ardently by Comrade Rywka Glanc, the leader of the *Kibbutz*, who was, by the way, posthumously decorated by the Polish [Field] Marshal, [Michał] Rola-Żymierski with

one of the highest military orders, for her heroic deeds.

Caches of weapons were hidden in several houses and in the canals. Everything was ready for the battle. But the caches were uncovered, either by accident or due to denunciation, and dozens of comrades immediately paid with their lives. One of the *Kibbutz's* best members, Jakow Potaszewicz, died in an incredibly heroic manner. He was taken to the Gestapo and murderously beaten with sticks and iron [rods] over two days and two nights, whereupon he was brought back to the ghetto, where everyone had to march past him, in order that he should point out who belonged to the *Kibbutz* and to the Jewish Fighting Organisation. He no longer had any human semblance - he was all swollen by the blows. Suddenly, he leapt up with his last strength and began running, yelling, "Down with Hitler's murderers! Long live the Jewish People!" A few strong blows from the band of killers put an end to his young, combative life. Honoured be his memory!

Comrade Lajbisz Tenenbaum was one of those who was in contact with the "Aryan side" and organised the sending of partisans to the forests. [Once,] in a bid to save several more comrades [by sending them] to the partisans, he contacted a German chauffeur, who presented himself as a socialist and had already led out several small groups. Now, as he took this group over, it appears that his German conscience overcame his "socialism" and, instead of taking them to the woods, he took them to the Gestapo and turned them over to the leader.

That same day, the ghetto was surrounded by the gendarmerie. Everyone had to go to the ghetto square. In this way, they wished to capture Comrade Tenenbaum, but that time they were unsuccessful. They promised huge cash rewards for bringing Comrade Tenenbaum in alive. It was only when the "Small Ghetto" was liquidated, and Comrade Tenenbaum managed to escape into HASAG with the rest of the comrades, that he was recognised by the German *meister* and was shot in front of everyone.

The discovery of the caches of weapons caused the ghetto to be liquidated earlier than the German blackguards had originally planned.

Once part of the Jews had already been transferred to the HASAG munitions factory and the rest were about to be shot, the members of the *Kibbutz* opened fire on the gendarmerie. In a bid to spare [themselves] casualties, the Germans began blowing up, house by house, with dynamite. When it became clear that the battle was at its end, the commander of the *Kibbutz*, Zylberberg (Mojtek), committed suicide. When the leader of the *Kibbutz*, Rywka Glanc, and our comrades the Slomnicki brothers had already fired all their bullets, they tried to cross over to the "Aryan side" via the canal. But they fell, severely wounded by a salvo of bullets. On the threshold of the ghetto, their hearts ceased to beat.

All their lives they strived for the renewal of the Jewish People in the Land of Israel and, when the hour struck, they cast themselves into battle for the honour of the Jewish People. The struggle, which they initiated, has [now] resumed once again⁸. Honoured be their memory!

⁸ [TN: Presumably ref. to the warfare leading up to Israel's independence in 1948.]