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For the Third Anniversary of the First Jewish Uprising in the Częstochowa Ghetto

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It is three years, to the day, since the heroic death of the twenty-seven victims of the openly armed uprising against the cruel occupier. Today is the third anniversary of the day when the Jewish fighters were put to their historic test.

In order to honour those tragically fallen, and to bring out the details of the last days of their lives in a more distinct manner, here, I wish to present a brief snapshot of the "Small Ghetto".

The "Small Ghetto" consisted of three parallel, small, filthy and narrow alleys in the poorest part of our city - Nadrzeczna, Garncarska and Kozia - fenced in with barbed wire and constantly guarded by the gendarmerie [viz. *Schutzpolizei*] and Ukrainian fascists.

Six and a half thousand tragic shadows of people, who had managed to wring out a little more time from their sombre destiny, were held locked in a narrow cage. Six and a half thousand slaves, from whom everything had been taken, were packed into 1,200 confined little rooms without any plumbing. This is where the condemned had to build their new lives.

The day in the ghetto begins at five o'clock in the morning. All must be ready by then, and leave the ghetto as a group to the workplaces to which had been designated in advance, where they are forced to go through the terrifying procedure of tortures, humiliations and mockery. At nine o'clock in the evening, the bugle lugubriously calls to bed. The streets become like dead.

The depressive mood hangs over the ghetto like a heavy, leaden cloud. After all, everyone here has lost everything - those closest to them, and all that gives any significance, worth and content to life. Solitary mothers are drenched in their tears, as they think of the bright, laughing little eyes of their massacred children. The few individual, miraculously saved children lie in dark bunkers, longing for their mothers' caresses and, losing themselves in heartrending tears, they call for the mothers who will never again come to them.

Almost every day, upon marching out to work, the arch-murderer Überscher stands at the "*Pletzl*" [Little Square] - the tearfully notorious Rynek Warszawski. With the crook of his cane, he catches some individuals in the group by the neck and drags them, like dogs, off to the so-called "*Jatka*"². From the "*Pletzl*", entire parties are also sent out to [the munitions factories in] Skarżysko and Bliżyn. Each shipment brings [with it] casualties. People are murdered while attempting to flee, or by the bullets of the gendarmes, who shoot into the packed motor vehicles or carts for no apparent reason, [but just] to amuse themselves or to engender fear and obedience. The thought of a total liquidation looms over the ghetto like a dark, shadowy nightmare. It is the recurrent theme of all conversations - speculations are made as to when the end will come. The nerves cannot withstand the constant strain and the uncertainty of tomorrow.

¹ [TN: A very similar version of this article appears above in Chapter C of "*The Community's Catastrophe*" (pp.188-201) by the same author.]

² [TN: Pol., lit. "mess/bloodbath/carnage"; used in Yiddish in ref. to a butcher's shop or meat-market, in this case probably ul. Targowa, or the "Meat-market Street."]

But there are also some who do not wait passively with their arms crossed. This is the youth of the Fighting Organisation, who conduct underground operations in the bunkers and cellars. Here young girls and boys sit, without differentiation between political beliefs, and consolidate their hatred inside themselves. The dreadful, vegetative state in ghetto oppresses them. But they, the condemned, shed off the helplessness, despair and pain and, with a mighty will, forge forth the action. Girls and boys, practically children, create a little enchanted world in the dark cellars and holes.

The unhappiness is turned into a luminous, profound love, and the bewilderment - into boundless hatred.

Love and hate! Love for the memory of those so tragically annihilated, and hatred towards the German murderers and bandits. The work goes on day and night - revolvers are stashed away and, at the risk of life, bullets and dynamite, which are stolen from the German munitions factories, are smuggled into the ghetto. Under the permanent shadow of death, inexperienced young lads clumsily experiment with the manufacture of grenades. A tunnel is dug out with an exit far outside the ghetto, to provide those forced to retreat from the battle with an opportunity of escape.

Spirits in the ghetto gradually change, especially following the great defeat of the German Army in Stalingrad. The number of combatants grows from day to day. The underground activities become stronger, more intensive. The gendarmerie continues its extermination work. New communications and harsher restrictions appear with increasing frequency. Thus, for instance, women and men are not allowed to live on the same street. Each day brings new victims. The sick, whose faces bear the traces of tuberculosis, are shot. Men are shot for visiting their sisters. Mothers, who lost their minds under the pressure of the events and misfortunes, are murdered. Thirteen-year-old girls, who do not go to work in order to prevent their mothers from committing suicide, are massacred. One pays with one's life for staying inside the ghetto [during working hours] for even one day, for leaving work, and so on.

On 3rd January 1943, at ten o'clock in the morning, the ghetto is surrounded by a large company of gendarmes and Ukrainian fascists. The ghetto is frantic. It is buzzing like a beehive. A feverish state prevails and despair breaks forth from everyone's eyes - *"What else are they preparing? What other demonic plan do they have for us now?"*

The gendarmes, at the ready, wearing iron [sic steel] helmets, leisurely stroll about by the barbed wire and unconcernedly watch what is happening inside the ghetto.

Suddenly, a division of gendarmes and Ukrainian fascists descends upon the ghetto. Cries of help and screams fill the air. Old people and mothers with children are dragged out from the cellars and attics. Some, resigned, let themselves be led away without resisting. Others fight bitterly and, with all their strength, defend themselves against annihilation. The blood curdles in one's veins, looking upon this tragic wrangle.

The hell in the ghetto's streets lasts all day. The *akcja* is interrupted in the evening, but not finished.

Early morning brings the continuation. And, once again, mothers with children are dragged out of their hiding places and, once more, heartrending cries are heard from almost every house. The groans, the screams, the lamentations and weeping are accompanied with intense gunfire. All the ghetto's inhabitants are driven into the "Market" [viz. Rynek Warszawski], where they are segregated³.

³ [TN: Viz. subjected to a "selection."]

For the first time, the fighters from the “little enchanted world” are tested.

Fiszlewicz shoots his revolver at the gendarmes. Fajner, a very young [lad], throws himself upon the murderers. The others follow him. After a brief fight, twenty-seven Jews pay with their lives for defending their human worth.

The youth do not rest. They leave the ghetto as a group and participate in various sabotage and combat operations. The youngest group of fighters is slain, while participating in the operation at the so-called “Ostbahn” and twenty-five other Jewish workers [are slain] with them. The second diversionary unit, which is fighting at the position on ul. Wilsona 32, [also] falls. The partisan group in the Olsztyn forest is massacred. Of the fifteen partisans in the Koniecpol woods, barely seven are left.

The ghetto’s remaining combatants continue their arduous work and prepare themselves for the final armed offensive on 22nd June 1943. The majority of them fall in this gruesome, unequal battle.

Now, on the day of the third anniversary of the first armed battle against Hitler’s bandits, as we inter the twenty-seven fighters, we handful of survivors stand with aching hearts and we bow our heads in reverential awe for the sacred memory of our fallen heroes.

