

## The Underground Movement in Częstochowa

In the atmosphere of spiritual and physical persecutions, mass murders, moral depression and also, regrettably, traitors and denunciators from within, the Jewish Combat Organisation shines forth like a bright star.

The organisation was called “ŻOB”, which are the initials of “*Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa*” – the Jewish Combat Organisation.

Phenomena, in social and political life, are the result of a whole series of development processes, objective conditions and historical necessity.

The underground movement in Częstochowa - the Jewish Combat Organisation – expressed itself as an organisational and combat factor in accord with the conditions listed above.

The marching into Częstochowa, on Sunday, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939, of the brutal, tyrannical Nazi forces was accompanied by an open mass murder, which took place on Monday, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1939. This day is called “Bloody Monday”. “Bloody Monday” had a threefold effect:

The first was apathy, hopelessness, despair and fear on part of the disoriented masses. The second was coming to terms with the Nazi regime, through corruption and opposing their demands. The third was

- a) an armed struggle against the Nazi regime;
- b) fighting the *Judenrat* - the carriers of the idea of cooperation with the Nazi authorities;
- c) explaining to the masses that apathy, hopelessness, despair and fear can achieve nothing, and preparing them for armed warfare.

The first organised form of the underground movement was the *Arbeiterrat* [Workers' Council]. This was almost the only organisation in Europe which, in secret, illegally formed a mass movement with clear, concrete goals.

The *Arbeiterrat* was a non-partisan, professional, cultural and political organisation, which turned into a people's movement. The structure of the *Arbeiterrat* consisted of the presidium, the executive and the advisory council.

First and foremost, political-communal activists of all shades belonged to the organisation and it was supported by the unpaid, forced labourers. In a short time, the number of members reached 3,000.

The activities of the *Arbeiterrat* are quite simply to be marvelled at. Every task was carried out with the utmost fanatical idealism, regardless of whatever the field might be.

The *Arbeiterrat* chairman was Mojsze Lubling. In the days of the mournful *akcje*, he was dragged away to the Treblinka death camp. But even there, in view of the tragic reality, his

revolutionary fighting spirit was not broken and he organised the revolt there, in which he fell as a hero and martyr.

An entire array of prominent personalities belonged to the *Arbeiterrat*, such as Jakób Roziner, the lawyers Koniarski and Lajb Fogel, Dawid Szlezzynger, the renowned writer H.L. Żytnicki and many others.

The *Arbeiterrat* led an bitter struggle against the *Judenrat*, which was manifested in hunger strikes, protest demonstrations, announcements, circulars, newspapers and also the demolition of installations at the *Judenrat* [premises].

The *Judenrat*, our masters and the owners of our bodies during the Nazi epoch, reacted with draconian measures. They summoned the Gestapo who, numerous times, arrested the organisers of the *Arbeiterrat*, and similar harmful actions. Notwithstanding, the *Judenrat* was forced to hold negotiations with the *Arbeiterrat* and yield to their demands, which consisted of paying wages to the forced labourers.

The most tragic period for Częstochowa Jewry was from the day after Yom Kippur (22<sup>nd</sup> September 1942) to *Simchas Torah*. During this time, 40,250 Jews were annihilated, by the Nazis, in the gas chambers of Treblinka, and some were shot in Częstochowa.

The *Arbeiterrat* suffered great losses and the organisational structure was rebuilt into the ŻOB, the Jewish Combat Organisation, which bore a military character. This organisation was a unification of all political parties. The high commander was "Mojtek" (Motek Zylberberg). The organisation formed ghetto combat units, partisan squads in the forests of Koniecpol, Olsztyn, Miechów and Radomsko, and a special group to produce armaments. The leader of the munitions production was "Jacek" (Henech Wiernik).

This group was made up of ten members - specialist workmen, chemists, electricians and metal lathe operators. These were Henech Wiernik, member of the high command, his wife Natka Wiernik, Henech Kaufman, Benjamin Mandelbaum, Lajzer Szmulewicz, who was known as "Malay", Zyskind Szmulewicz, Mojsze Rużanski, Benjamin Erenfryd, Abram Czarny and Mendel Willinger.

The group began manufacturing pistols of the "everlasting spring" type and immediately went over to the mass production of hand grenades and "cocktails". This "cocktail" consisted of bottles, filled with liquid explosive materials, to combat tanks and armoured vehicles. The production of hand grenades, in the Częstochowa "Small Ghetto", aroused great interest on the part of the ŻOB in Warsaw and a special commission arrived in order to acquaint themselves with the production system and the effectiveness of the grenades.

The organisation, through its member Mendel Krauze, a former Polish army officer who was working at the office of the [*Judenrat's*] Labour Deployment, took out two typewriters, a multiplying apparatus<sup>1</sup> with all its components, paper and ink, and sent them over to the

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: In Krauze's own 1958 version, he calls this apparatus a "papyrograph", which Webster's Dictionary of 1913 defines as being "an apparatus for multiplying writings, drawings, etc., in which a paper stencil, formed by writing or drawing with corrosive ink, is used. The word is also used of other means of multiplying copies of writings, drawings, etc."]

headquarters of the Częstochowa partisans in the Koniecpol woods. In those times, this was a treasure, because this enabled them to conduct expanded activity - publishing notifications, circulars and instructions.

The goal of the underground movement was to hasten the downfall of the Nazi regime through destructive activity and armed combat.

The destructive activity was manifested in destroying the raw materials, which served for the production of ammunition and dismantling train rails, so that the trains with military [personnel], munitions and food should be flung into the air, thus torpedoing the German offensive and defensive prowess on the frontlines.

The armed struggle was manifested in removing the murderers of Jews and those hindering the execution of the set tasks. The organisation could not tolerate denunciators and informers, who betrayed the Jewish community and put themselves at the service of the Nazi murderers. Two traitors were sentenced to death, based on a court verdict of the underground movement. The sentence was carried out. The same happened with nine other individuals who, for their own purpose, were extorting money and clothing from the Jewish populace.

Events develop at a startling pace:

On 4<sup>th</sup> January 1943, the first clash takes place. During the course of a selection, two young members of the organisation, Izio Fajner and Mendel Fiszlewicz, holding revolvers, set upon the Nazi barbarians Rohn and Sapport.

In the time in between, smaller and larger battles take place against German posts and, in this manner, weapons, uniforms and wrecked German materials are obtained.

In March 1943, an emissary from the Warsaw ŻOB organisation arrived with instructions and commands for the Częstochowa organisation. He was detained at the entrance to the "Small Ghetto" by the Nazi tyrant Ibischer [aka Überscher]. The arrestee was handed over to the Jewish ghetto police, [to be put] at the disposal of [Paul] Degenhardt, the arch-murderer of Częstochowa Jewry, who was to arrive the following morning.

Five members of the organisation - almost the youngest - entered the police station and forced the policemen to stand with their hands raised, facing the wall. They broke into the ghetto jail and freed the envoy who, that same night, after fulfilling his mission, exited the ghetto by way of the tunnels which the underground movement had built.

The underground movement was in continuous contact with Warsaw and sent its own couriers to Będzin. One of these couriers was Rywka Glanc, who was part of the high command - a girl of twenty-six. She was a phenomenon in the fields of organisation and combat.

Contact with the Polish organisation comprised three stages: 1) Shattered Dreams, 2) Hopes and 3) Bloodstained Disappointments.

**The first stage:** the “Big Ghetto” period until 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1942. Money was raised in the ghetto and, alas, given to Polish “comrades” with which to purchase weaponry. A detailed plan was worked out, to the effect that, should the Germans embark on an *akcja* of resettling Częstochowa Jewry, the Polish comrades would, at precisely the same time, set fire to an entire array of buildings at different points in the city, thus causing a commotion among the Germans. The Jewish youth would fight with weapons in the ghetto, break through the military cordons and join the Polish combat units. The militants were to meet after the battle at various points in the woods.

On the tragic day 21<sup>st</sup> September (Yom Kippur), one day prior to the selections, massacres and resettlements, the Polish “comrades” responded that they had no weapons and were not yet ready for battle.

**The second stage:** the “Small Ghetto” period - January to June 1943. Contact was successfully made with a Polish officer of the underground movement which was called “Polish Underground Armed Forces<sup>2</sup>”. The officer’s name was Langiewicz. He and his adjutants thought seriously about the Jewish Combat Organisation. They committed themselves to conducting training exercises with the Jewish partisans in the forests and to provide weaponry. They were good military instructors and had a large arsenal of armaments at their disposal. The rendezvous point with them was at ul. Kucelinka 61, not far from the Raków ironworks.

This location was discovered by the Germans, with the aid of Polish denunciators, and a skirmish took place, first with the *Granatowa Policja* [Navy Blue Police], which is what the Polish police were called, and then with the Germans. In the fight with the *Granatowa Policja* a Polish policeman and one of Officer Langiewicz’s adjutants fell.

When the Germans attacked Officer Langiewicz’s apartment, he was ill just then and was running a high temperature. He had then an important conversation with the high commander of the Jewish Combat Organisation, Motek Zylberberg, and the headquarters member Kantor. Motek Zylberberg managed to disappear and made it back into the “Small Ghetto”. Officer Langiewicz vanished into the nearby woods.

The Germans wanted to capture Langiewicz at any price. His wife and daughter had long since been sent away to the Auschwitz [Oświęcim] concentration camp, and the Germans had burned down his house.

This time, the Germans employed all means. They encircled the forest and sent out patrols with tracking dogs. At the time, Langiewicz was so ill, that he could not stand on his feet and it is only due to this that the Germans took him prisoner. With this ends the second stage, which is characterised by the hope of assistance from the Polish underground movement.

**The third stage:** parallel to the events at ul. Kucelinka 61, other events of very critical importance were transpiring. The underground movement had bought off a German

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<sup>2</sup> [TN: In Yiddish in the original; we have not been able to ascertain this organisation’s Polish name.]

chauffeur, who had declared himself to be anti-Hitler. From time to time, he would take members of the underground movement out to the woods or to bunkers. On this occasion, the members of the high command, Pinek Samsonowicz, Hari Potaszewicz and Jakubowicz were travelling with him. As it turned out, the chauffeur had betrayed them and informed the Gestapo about it. When the car began to travel, the high command members noticed that another car, with gendarmes in full readiness for battle, was following them. The plan was disrupted. They were to have travelled to the squad in the woods for an important organisational conference. The members of the high command immediately took up the fight.

Samsonowicz shot at the treacherous chauffeur, Potaszewicz and Jakubowicz at the gendarmes. In the heroic battle, Samsonowicz and Jakubowicz fell then and there. Hari Potaszewicz fell, alive, into the hands of the gendarmes. By various ingenious means, they assured him he would remain alive, should he point out who were the members of the Combat Organisation.

As a worthy and proud battle leader of the underground movement, Hari Potaszewicz cast aside all the proposals of the Nazi tyrants with disgust. The Germans killed him with particularly sadistic methods.

These events caused the Częstochowa partisans to be left without contact and without instructions, being ignorant of the new political changes. The political changes were the following:

General [Kazimierz] Sosnkowski was appointed to replace the deceased chief of the Polish government-in-exile in London, General [Władysław] Sikorski. The Polish underground movement called "AK", viz. "Armia Krajowa" (Home Army), was under the leadership of the Polish government in London. General Sosnkowski issued antisemitic orders, to the effect that the AK was to liquidate the Jewish partisans.

The Częstochowa Jewish partisans, having no knowledge of this and no contact with the high command of the "Small Ghetto", were gradually killed off by the treacherous AK. Thus ends the third period, which we have called "Bloodstained Disappointments".

[This is] the course of the events:

- the battle at ul. Kucelinka 61;
- the battle of the high command with the gendarmerie;
- the brazen operation on the governmental bank<sup>3</sup>, in which both Polish and Jewish underground militants took part – the Poles belonged to the AL, or Armia Ludowa (People's Army), which was the leftist faction and was friendly disposed towards Jews;
- the operation at the railway<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> [TN: In the chapter "Janek Krauze" of his book "Churban Czenstochow", the author writes: "The second "job" was one of the greatest, and it was spoken of all over Poland. Janek Krauze, along with ten other members of the AL (Armia Ludowa, The People's Army), launched an attack on the Częstochowa governmental bank. They arrived in a freight van dressed in German uniforms, cordoned off the street with guards on either sides of the bank and took over two million zloty and various valuables. At the time (April 1943), the entire gendarmerie was mobilised against them, but to no avail. The partisans took the uniforms from Höniger's drycleaner's on Aleja 35."]

<sup>4</sup> [TN: Probably ref. to the failed sabotage attempt at the Ostbahn railway line which took place in the Passover season of 1943.]

Denunciations, on the part of traitors, brought about the speedy liquidation of the “Small Ghetto”. On 26<sup>th</sup> June 1943, the official liquidation of the “Small Ghetto” took place.

The Germans mobilised all their formations for the battle. The underground movement took up the fight and conducted it from their bunkers in the buildings at ul. Nadrzeczna 86, 88 and 90. The battle lasted one week. The underground movement utilised machine-guns, manual rifles, revolvers, hand grenades and “cocktails”.

The liquidation of the “Small Ghetto” cost two thousand Jewish victims. The fighters perished heroically. These dead are the pride and flower of Częstochowa Jewry. Among these casualties are the legendary heroes, such as the commander of the underground movement Motek Zylberberg, the organisational leader Rywka Glanc and similar combat personalities.

Only a handful of individuals have survived. One of them is Berl [Bolek] Gewercman, commander of the partisan squad in the Koniecpol woods. Directly after the downfall of the Nazi regime, he left for Israel, where he fought in the Haganah and, later, in the Jewish army.

The Częstochowa underground movement has enriched the history of the Jews with heroic fortitude and blood.



## **Memorial Days**

- 1) The Liquidation of the “Big Ghetto” - 24<sup>th</sup> Tishrei, one day after Simchas Torah (4<sup>th</sup> October 1942).
- 2) The [last] stand of the underground movement and liquidation of the “Small Ghetto” - 22<sup>nd</sup> Sivan (26<sup>th</sup> June 1943).

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- Sixteen statistical tables from the Częstochowa *Judenrat* and Town Hall from the years 1940-1941.
- Sixty individual testimonies from *Częstochower landsleit* taken in the years 1946-1948.
- Materials from the memorial convention in Germany, held on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1946 in Landsberg. Twelve hundred Częstochowa townspeople participated in this memorial convention.
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<sup>5</sup> [TN: As the author explains in that booklet, the term is derived from the German word “Lump”, meaning scoundrel or blackguard – thus, the term “lumpocracy” may be rendered as “rule of the blackguards”.]