

The Deportation from Częstochowa and the Vicinity

After Warsaw, the turns came for Radom, Piotrków and other cities.

Throughout the deportation period, the leadership is in telephone contact with the *kibbutz* in Częstochowa and reports on the situation. The telephone is in the factory of Landau, the father of Margalit from the *Ha'Galil* group and Miryam Hajnsdorf usually sat next to the device and sometimes Mordche himself – who, in those days, went by the name “Marian”.

Aryje Wilner was then sent on behalf of the leadership to Częstochowa. He told the *kibbutz* about the deportation from Warsaw and also about everything that was happening in Treblinka. He posed the question of self-preservation and defence to the *kibbutz*.

“The Movement”, said Aryje, “does not oppose self-preservation. Anyone who has any possibility of saving his own life - may do so. The Movement will also help in any way it can. But its path is that of defence. The Movement cannot, and is not willing, to hide as an anonymous entity. It cannot help but avenge the honour of the *People* who have been defiled. It cannot help but respond to the murder of the elderly and children, the gas chambers and the extermination camps. It is clear to us”, he added, “that we will not be able to last long. But our counterattack will be strong, very strong - stronger than the Germans imagine. And it is better for us to die in a battle which will save our honour, than to fall, one by one, in deportations, camps or hideouts.”

That is what Aryje said and his words left a great impression. It was difficult to adjust to the idea (there were no deportations around Częstochowa yet!) that the Movement was going knowingly towards organising a revolt in which everyone would fall. Nevertheless, everyone accepted his words and it was decided to take immediate action. Aryje delivered all the practical instructions. Together with the alumni of the Częstochowa cell, and the other *kibbutz* which consisted of two groups - one from *Dror* and the other from *Gordonia*, we established the Częstochowa branch of the Jewish Fighting Organisation [ŻOB]. At the meeting of the representatives of these bodies, we decided on the details of the division into squads, as well as on the Organisation's plan of action in the event of deportation. It was decided to set fire to the New Market Square [Nowy Rynek] and to blow up the important Raków steelworks, where many Jews worked. We already had half a kilogram of dynamite, which a member of our *kibbutz* had stolen from the factory. It was also decided to set fire to every house as soon as the Jews were taken away from it.

Aryje promised to always send news and to communicate via coded telephone messages. We wished to predict when the *akcja* in the Częstochowa district would begin and to prepare for it properly. This, unfortunately, did not work out for several reasons. Firstly, the method employed in Częstochowa was different from the practices elsewhere (typical of the fact that, in every locality, the Germans used a new method which surprised the Jews). Secondly - and this was the main thing – our Resistance, even though it had a fighting spirit, was in actuality defensive in nature. The signal would only be given in the event of deportation and the initiative was always in the hands of the extermination squads, who held, in their hands, all the factors with which to surprise us and thwart all our plans.

In the *shtetl* of Żarki, near Częstochowa, the date of the deportation was found out and, one day earlier, all the people of the town fled through fields and forests to the neighbouring town of Pilica. Of the three thousand Jews, only some seven hundred remained in the ghetto – those with German work certificates. These people were sure that the Germans would acknowledge these certificates

which had been issued by their own institutions. The Gestapo, however, tore up all the papers in the faces of the hapless ones and they were all deported.

A fortnight later, it became known that the Germans were preparing a deportation in Pilica. The people of Pilica, who had taken all the refugees from Żarki into their dwellings, even though they outnumbered the inhabitants of their own *shtetl*, were also forced to flee. To where? No one knows. But everyone flees - to the fields, to the villages, to the forests. The people of the nearby villages (Bronowice¹, Pradła, etc.) at first welcomed the Jews and housed many in their homes. But the situation changed after the Germans began sentencing an entire family, in whose flat or grounds a Jew was found, to hanging. The Jews are forced to abandon the villages and to wander destitute in the woods during the winter season (November-December).

A few weeks later, a notice was published in the *Warsaw Courier*², as well as in the *Krakauer Zeitung*³, that a new ghetto had been created in the city of Radomsko for the Jews in the district (the Radomsko Jews had long since been exterminated) - every Jew would be given work and accommodations in the ghetto. The German authorities in the villages and towns would make various vehicles available to the Jews and transfer them, with all their remaining property, to Radomsko. Good conditions had been created in the ghetto, where one could come and go unhindered, and work in any available position. This situation lasted for three whole months and thousands of Jews, who had spent the winter in the forests, flocked to the city from all around. After three months, at the end of January 1943, the ghetto was suddenly surrounded by huge forces of gendarmerie and SS and the expulsion was carried out with full force - with a cruelty that surpassed anything that had been so far perpetrated. On either side of the road, from the ghetto to the railway station, rows of SS men stood, who rained their blows with furious cruelty upon the entire multitude that was pushed between them. The entire way was littered with dead bodies. Those who survived were put onto carriages and taken to Treblinka. Many of them, once more, tried their luck and jumped out of the trains and were shot by the guard squads. The whole road from Radomsko, through Koluszki and Warsaw to Treblinka, was littered with the bodies of the dead and wounded which had frozen in the snow.

Meanwhile, the defence organisation in the *Small Ghetto*, left in Częstochowa, is getting stronger. During this period, Aryje announces that the first shipment of weapons has been transferred to the Warsaw Ghetto. He promises to send weapons to other cities as well in the near future.

In December 1942, once more, Aryje arrived in Częstochowa on a mission from the Fighting Organisation's headquarters. The resistance in the ghetto was then finally organised, according to the example set by the Warsaw organisation. A group of Jewish members of the PPR* also joined us. Despite the demands of their party (which called on its Jewish members to leave the ghettos and camps and join its squads), they decided to stay in the ghetto and join the defence organisation. We had only two pistols at the time.

On 3rd January 1943, the Germans suddenly attempted to conduct a deportation operation. They gathered all the Jews, who did not go to work, in the city marketplace and announced that a selection would be carried out and that the elderly and children would be deported. Among those

¹ [TN: in the Hebrew original; although there are various localities in Poland named Bronowice, none appear to be near Pilica. This is very likely to be a reference to Bonowice, which is not far from Pilica and Pradła.]

² [TN: Ref. to the Nazi propaganda publication named "Nowy Kurier Warszawski" (New Warsaw Courier), which appropriated the name of the hitherto very popular local paper, the "Kurier Warszawski."]

³ [TN: "Kraków Newspaper"; German daily paper issued in the GG in 1939-1945.]

* The Communist Party of Poland.

gathered were two members of the Organisation, Mendel [Fiszlewicz] and Faia⁴, who had not gone out to work that day and they had one pistol. They decided to resist by force.

During the selection, Mendel got out of the line, went to the gendarmerie commander, Lieutenant [Felix] Rohn, and aimed the pistol at his head. The gun malfunctioned. So Mendel attacked the German, in an attempt to wrest the weapon which he was holding from his hand. In the meantime, the gendarmes, who were standing close by, rushed to the German's aid. One was knocked to the ground by Faia, but the rest shot at the lads and killed them. The female members of the *kibbutz* called on the gathered Jews to rush to the aid of the young men, but no one moved. The Germans, too, were in shock and, even after the lads were already lying in the snow, they did not move and looked around in amazement and fear. Then they started shooting in the air to scare the crowd and one rushed off to ring the Gestapo headquarters in the city to inform them of an "uprising in the ghetto". A few moments later, many automobiles appeared with SS men, surrounded the Jewish crowd (there were about seven hundred people), selected from amongst them twenty-five people, made them stand in a row and shot them dead. Until the last moment, the Jews did not believe that they really were intending to shoot them. Some two-hundred elderly folk and children were led away to be deported and the rest were taken back to the ghetto.

When the labourers returned from work, they picked up rumours in the city's *Aryan side* about "an uprising in the ghetto", "dead Germans", etc. The event made echoed large, because it was the first attempt to use firearms against the Germans. But the atmosphere in the ghetto remained indifferent. Although a certain appreciation was felt for the two boys who had dared raise their hand, no encouragement came in words - not to mention in deeds.

⁴ [TN: Codename for Izio (Icchok) Fajner.]