

The Liquidation of the Ghetto in Częstochowa

From 5th January, when the two members of the Fighting Organisation [ŻOB] in Częstochowa attempted to oppose the Germans, the Organisation took important steps to acquire weapons. For the purposes of defence, large sums were also collected from the well-to-do, who paid between 15,000 and 50,000 *złoty* each.

Living conditions in the Częstochowa Ghetto were unique at the time. All the remaining people were organised in a huge labour camp. The Jews were forced to go to work every day in the factories outside the ghetto and returned only in the evening. This situation weighed heavily on the preparatory activities of the Fighting Organisation.

Many emissaries travelled to Warsaw to obtain weapons. Most of them fell into the hands of the Gestapo along the way, but we sent others again in their place. We also acquired arms on the local black market. We made the grenades in the workshops of the Organisation, which were hidden in bunkers. The necessary material was brought by the members, who worked in the weapons factories ("HASAG"). We then reached a close cooperation with the members of the Polish Underground, the PPR¹ and PPS². We took an active role in organising sabotage in the arms factories and in the railway network around Częstochowa, which was an important transportation hub.

After the uprising in Warsaw, with its tragic end, it was once more proven (for us, the pioneering youth, this was the primary concept of our Zionist consciousness) how important the "home front" was and that the ghetto uprising would have reached other dimensions had we had many squads in the forests who could have come to the aid of the combatants. It was then that we decided in Częstochowa to send two squads out to the woods. About sixty people set out for the forests around Janów and Koniecpol. Their task, alongside their usual operations, was to rush to the assistance of the fighters during the operations of liquidation for which we were preparing.

During this period, the Fighting Organisation's popularity in the Jewish and Polish public greatly increased. The Germans were also aware of our existence and organised special squads ("lightning squads") whose job it was to discover the Underground in the ghetto. The Germans were assisted in these actions by a group of villainous Jews from the underworld, who collaborated with the Gestapo and who extorted money from the Jews through intimidation and force. The Fighting Organisation's Central Command issued a death sentence on twelve Jewish Gestapo members. A closed bottle, containing the verdict and the indictment, was placed in their common grave. Our hand did not reach some of the most dangerous types - the Gestapo hid them in the *Aryan side*.

During June 1943, two large searches in the ghetto were repeated, to no avail. The third time, the Germans entered the ghetto with great forces during the day, when all the men were at work in HASAG. They came straight to the main bunker, from which all the tunnels branched off into the small bunkers and to the *Aryan side*. Only a small number of members of the Fighting Organisation were there. They opened fire. Those, who were not holding weapons, fought with their bare hands. Only a very few were saved by way of the tunnels and they reached our company in the Koniecpol woods. The entire stockpile in the main bunker fell into the hands of the Germans. They took everything out from it and then blew it up with dynamite.

¹ Polish Communist Party

² Polish Socialist Party

Three days later, a notice appeared in the official newspaper, announcing the liquidation of a large Jewish partisan company “which operated in the home front”.

In those days, the ghetto was liquidated and the rest of the Jews were transferred to a labour camp near the HASAG factory. The situation of the partisan squads in the Koniecpol and Janów forests deteriorated considerably. First, their main support had been lost - the Fighting Organisation in the ghetto – and, with it, [had been lost] the whole reason for their existence. Furthermore, the wanderings in the forest without suitable clothing, medicine and food made took their toll for the worse. Nevertheless, the members continued their activities and, as late as the beginning of 1944, news of their existence reached Slovakia.