

The Ghetto on the Eve of the Liquidation – “The Battle of the Newspapers”

In January 1943, the Fighting Organisation’s defence operation changed the mood in the ghetto. The apparatus of “independent” government (the Jewish Council and Police) was completely paralysed. The Council does not actually exist anymore, although its members still appear on the lists. OD [Jewish Police] men are afraid to appear on the streets of the city. No one pays any attention to the Council’s notices and the orders it still issues from time to time.

Power in the ghetto is in the hands of the Fighting Organisation. Any order or announcement from the Council is followed by an immediate response from the headquarters of the Fighting Organisation. These responses show the intentions of the Germans, for whom the atrophied Council serves as mouth and hands, in the right light. The words find a sympathetic ear. The armed opposition to the attempted deportation in January cut the *Gordian Knot*, which had bound a people who were being led to the gallows and who lived under illusions until its last moments.

After the battles in January, the Fighting Organisation also got onto the *King’s Road*¹. All its members were fully aware that the coming days would decide the outcome. They also knew that they would not be able to withstand the enemy. But there was one thought that made them tick - to fall in battle [and] to avenge the Jewish blood that had been split in the streets of Warsaw and all the cities and towns of the country during the whole four years of the rule of the Nazi hangmen.

The ghetto feels that it is living its last days. Some of the youth, who are not attracted to the defence organisation, the remnants of the “golden youth of those good old days”, live a life of debauchery and drunkenness, the likes of which has never existed among Jews. Many sell all that they have left and turn their nights into one long feast. They live from day to day, from hour to hour. Others try to prepare in advance for the evil. They build bunkers under houses. There were some who reached the peaks of elaborateness in this construction. There were bunkers equipped with every good thing - from water and power lines, to radio, ventilators, stores of food, etc.

The Fighting Organisation also built bunkers. But they were not used as hideouts. Its bunkers had stockpiles of arms, places for examining and repairing pieces, training points, first aid stations and, in later times, [served as] the seats of the regional command centres and the main headquarters. The bunkers of the Fighting Organisation were extremely well guarded. The connection between them, as well as the connection between them and the observation points on the borders of the ghetto, was very strong. Lads stood guard day and night, following the enemy’s slightest movement. And indeed, the German attack did not surprise the combatants.

In March 1943, the Germans began spreading rumours about sending fifteen thousand workers to workplaces near Warsaw. The “proposals” met with a very hostile attitude in the ghetto. The Germans immediately changed the content of the notices and issued an official statement to the effect that the intention was not to deport, but to transfer the workers, together with their families, and factories. The Fighting Organisation responded immediately. It issued notices to the ghetto residents in which it explained the intentions of the new “shipment”. The posters were pasted on the walls of the houses next the German ones calling to departure. In response, the Germans began to use means that they had hitherto not employed in their relations with the Jews. They flooded the ghetto with all sorts of newspapers in which some of their Jewish servants wrote. The newspapers

¹ [TN: Heb. expression meaning to start functioning properly, or getting back on track.]

contained “information” about the good intentions of the German government, which takes care of the workers needed for the war effort and included incitement against the Fighting Organisation, “a collection of criminals and irresponsible elements that could bring a holocaust upon the Jewish public in the ghetto (!). No one is thinking of carrying out a deportation,” the bastards wrote. “This is not mentioned in any official announcement (!!) - the intention is only to arrange new labour camps around Warsaw and anyone, who so wishes, may leave voluntarily.” The newspapers described, in minute detail, the arrangements in the camps, the food rations, etc., etc.

The “Battle of the Newspapers” lasted for several weeks. The Germans tried, by all means, to divide the surviving remnants and to isolate the Fighting Organisation. They also used the German foremen – [Fritz Emil] Schultz, [Walter C.] Többens, and others - who appeared before their workers and also “explained” the matter. We later found out that there had been special instructions from the Gestapo Centre to conduct the deportation quietly. In Częstochowa, we intercepted a circular from the central authorities to the branches in the cities, with instructions to allow deportees to take household items and working tools, to treat them politely, etc., etc. - all in order to deceive those who remained and to prevent them from resisting the machinations of extermination.

But this time, all their fine efforts were in vain. The vigorous response of the Fighting Organisation influenced the few who were still vacillating. Not even the minimum number of volunteers for departure was found. The propaganda of “decency” was completely silenced.