

## Relations with the Polish Underground

As early as the spring and summer of 1942, before the *Great Deportation* from Warsaw, the leadership made many efforts to establish ties with the Polish partisans. After extensive and extremely dangerous searches, Tosia contacts one *Ojzer*, a Jew, who is to bring them into contact with the partisan squads in the Międzyrzec Forest near Warsaw. The first company is immediately selected (from among male and female members of the “*Tel Amal*”, “*Masad*” and “*Benir*” troops). It was only with great difficulty that they managed to equip them with suitable clothes, food, etc. The company was taken out of the ghetto to the *Aryan side* and, from there, passed on to Międzyrzec to that same *Ojzer*.

During that period, Tosia came to Częstochowa to organise a second company from the *kibbutz*. All the members of the *kibbutz* wanted to be among those chosen but, given the difficulties of transferring them to Warsaw, we decided to choose only those members with a typical Aryan appearance. Only six people were initially selected. Tosia said that she would let us know the departure date by phone, with a special password. The news did not come and, in its place, after a long time, a letter came from Nola [sic Pola] Elster (“*Merhavia*” troop), who had gone out into the forests with the first company. The news was vague: she wrote that some comrades were still sitting in Międzyrzec and had not [yet] gone into the woods and that - the main thing was - for the time being, the departure of the second company was not [even] to be discussed. We needed to wait.

Meanwhile, the deportation began in Warsaw. The connection with Międzyrzec was severed. After a few days, the remnants of the first company returned to Warsaw. Tosia met them on the *Aryan side* and directed them immediately to the *kibbutz* in Częstochowa. They arrived at the *kibbutz* after much hardship and told the story of the company's experiences.

The “partisans”, to whom they had come, were an assortment of diverse elements who, for different reasons, lived outside the boundaries of the law and the civilian government. Some had fled from the obligation to work, others were just seeking adventures. The group was deprived of any political and ideological character. They lived from the looting of government warehouses, but did not engage in any actual partisan operations. Relations amongst themselves were unruly, as was their attitude towards the Warsaw company. During one of the German operations in the area, the group was dispersed and our remaining comrades returned to Warsaw.

When the great expulsion and total extermination began, it became clear that there was no basis for the operation of squads in the woods and that the hope, that the masses of people in the cities and towns could continue to exist, even if only in distress and disgrace, was false. What was the point, then, of the war of individuals in the forests, when the masses of the people for whom they were fighting were being completely annihilated?

Attempts to leave the ghettos cease. One sole idea conquers all hearts in the Movement - the idea of defence. The role of the Movement's emissaries on the *Aryan side* is, from now on, the acquisition of weapons and transferring them into the ghetto.

The question of armaments becomes even more pressing, particularly after the battle of 18<sup>th</sup> January. The mood in the ghetto is changing. The Jewish Council [*Judenrat*] loses its last remaining influence. The OD officers [Jewish police] have disappeared from the horizon - especially after death sentences were passed on several of their members (they were burned alive in their flat, by a bundle of “bottles”, which was thrown in during one of their frequent banquets). Opportunities arise to significantly expand the ranks of the Fighting Organisation. The emissaries of the Fighting

Organisation, on the *Aryan side*, take advantage of the strong echo which the January battles have caused amongst the Polish population and they forge ties with the Polish Underground Movement. The latter is full of admiration for the actions of the Jews in the ghetto, but is far from providing real help.

The gentlemen from [General Władysław] Sikorski's<sup>1</sup> camp content themselves with submitting - *plans* for the defence of the ghetto, which their officers draw up while staying on the *Aryan side*. Only afterwards did it become known that they had had clear instructions from their headquarters to not give any weapons to the Jews. The PPR showed better intent but, at that time (early 1943), their power was still very small. Most of their squads operated on their own initiative in the districts of Kielce-Radom and Lublin. Their main slogan was to "Get your weapons - from the enemy himself!" This was also difficult [even] for the Poles, although they operated in large areas and could engage small groups of police in combat in the villages and disarm them. For us, [this was] almost impossible.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: Prime Minister of the Polish Government-in-Exile and Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces during the Second World War.]