

The Poles

The attitude of the Polish population towards the Jews in Warsaw and in the provincial towns completed the horrific picture of the days of the German occupation.

As early as in the winter of 1941/42 - during the great famine in the ghetto, when thousands died of starvation and epidemics, and dozens of Jewish children were killed every day by the Germans as they left the ghetto to pick up leftover potatoes and bread to bring to their parents swollen with hunger - already in that winter, one could not pass down the street on the *Aryan side*, due to the Polish boys (and the adults also helped with the work), who immediately pointed out, to the German policeman, the "illegal" Jews. (For this offense, the Jew was shot on the spot or was sent to forced labour.) The Jews, who were disguised as Aryans and living outside the ghetto, needed to be on their guard not only from the Germans, but also from the Poles, who turned them over to the Gestapo. Whole gangs lived on blackmail and extorted from the Jews, living amongst them, a fixed tax. Tens of thousands could have hidden on the *Aryan side* in Warsaw and other cities, had the Polish populace treated them differently. It happened that Poles told their Jewish friends that they could not accommodate them, for fear of their Polish neighbours who would surely rush to turn the Jews and them over to the Gestapo.

The Polish Police excelled in this work in particular. They regularly engaged in the capture of the Jews on the *Aryan side* of the city, for which they received special rewards. Without this, it would have been easy to hide from the relatively few Germans, who also could not distinguish between a Jew and a Pole.

During the Great Deportation in the autumn of 1942, multitudes of Jews leave the ghetto, seeking refuge in the Aryan part. They fall prey to the blackmailers who infest the city in their hundreds. In time, these became organised gangs, called "*Szmalcownicy*"¹. Like hyenas living on carcasses, these people, too, closed in on the dying ghetto. Lurking near [both] the overt and the hidden openings of the ghetto, they look every passer-by in the eye, immediately spotting, with the skill of detectives, Semitic facial features. During the great battle of April and May, many Poles stood near the German artillery positions and enjoyed the sights of destruction and horror of the ghetto on fire. About fifteen thousand Jews fled during the revolt, in two large waves, to Aryan Warsaw. Their fate was extremely tragic. Dozens and hundreds of them were turned over to the Germans every day, until their numbers decreased, dwindling day by day.

Those, who displayed the best attitude towards the Jews, were the working intelligentsia and also certain circles of workers. These strata comprised Poles who cared for their Jewish friends and there were those among them who paid for it with their lives. But, all these were but a drop in the sea of hatred and malicious glee of the thousands and tens of thousands who benefited from plundering the property of those led to the massacre.

In the spring and summer of 1942, the Movement tried to establish ties with the Partisan Movement. These attempts failed. In a later period, after the great deportations, when all efforts were concentrated on bringing weapons into the ghetto and preparations for battle, the Jewish Fighting Organisation [ŻOB] tried to make contact with the Polish underground organisations so that they should help them obtain arms. The right-wing organisations (the Sikorski people and the ND

¹ [TN: "Lard-lovers"; see the book "*Czenstochov*" (1958), p.67: "The term denotes the Polish degenerates who gobbled up money from Jews who held up under Aryan papers, or who hid with Poles. They used to denounce to the Gestapo, and consequently many Jews were killed through their informing. The term originates in that when this type of degenerate would stop a Jew on the Aryan side, the first thing he would say is: "Daj na smalec" [Give me money for lard].]

[National Democracy, aka "*Endecja*") - the "crows", as they were called) were content with "expressing their admiration", especially after the January battle, whose echo on the Polish street was very strong. Aryje spent many hours in meetings with important figures from the Sikorski camp. The result was - many beautiful words and a few promises which were never fulfilled. During the uprising, the Central Command of the Fighting Organisation turned to the headquarters of the "*Armia Krajowa*" [Home Army] (Sikorski men), requesting tangible aid. The help did not arrive. In their press, only words of appreciation for the members of the [Jewish] resistance appeared, as well as condemnation of the base deeds of the "*Szmalcownicy*" gangs, but the latter were not impressed by this.

As we have already said, it later turned out that there had been explicit instructions from the Centre regarding this matter. There had even been directives from [Sikorski's] government [in exile] in London, which not only forbade them to render any aid to the warring ghetto, but which also adjured that the "Jewish rabble" be prevented from bursting out and fleeing towards the Aryan part of the city.

The people of the PPR², and some of the PPS*, displayed a different attitude, although their power was then (autumn and winter of 1942/3) much smaller than that of Sikorski's men. During the Warsaw Uprising, they provided some assistance to the fighters, especially when the two squads were taken out through the sewers.

The PPR operated in two divisions. One, the "municipal squads", carried out sabotage operations in the cities, punished the traitors (the killing of the Polish police chief in Częstochowa, Szabelski, who was killed along with his good friend, the Gestapo commander in the city, for instance, made a great echo), etc. We could not participate in this, as it was impossible to maintain Jewish squads on the *Aryan side*. The few agents of the Fighting Organisation, who operated in this part of the city, were in constant danger and spent most of their time in hiding. With the second division of the PPR, the partisan squads scattered in the forests and villages, we cooperated here and there, but this also came to us with great difficulty, due to the problems of coming to the Polish villages and living there. Furthermore, most of our efforts were focused not on partisan action, but on aiding the ghetto. And for that reason, too, we did not achieve a close cooperation. The PPR demanded that all the youth be taken to the forests, but we did not wish to do so - for obvious reasons. After it became clear that the Germans were preparing to physically destroy our entire nation, what was the point of a lone war in the forests and the abandonment of the ghettos? The Movement decided to protect the ghettos [and] to arouse resistance by force to the deportations and the extermination.

With the development of the PPR and the strengthening of the Jewish Resistance in the ghettos and even in partisan units, the depraved character and purpose of the men in the Sikorski Movement becomes evident. They return to their old ways of fighting against the "*Żydokomuna*" [Judeo-Communism]. In the winter of 1942/3, during the days when the Germans were carrying out mass deportations in Western and Central Poland (for example, around Zamość and Lublin), at a time when, every single day, trains with Polish peasants departed to forced labour in Germany and were replaced by German "settlers" - during this period, Sikorski's men saw their primary war as being against the PPR and the Jews fleeing the ghettos. Our company in the Koniecpol woods came upon - as we were told, [this was] back in 1943 - a company of Sikorski's men in the forest. They opened fire without exchanging any words, killing one comrade, wounding several and retreating only after our comrades, who were astonished at first, also returned fire. Such was the fate of all our squads, as well as the fate of individual Jews who fled the ghettos during the deportations or the death camps themselves.

² The Polish Communist Party

* The Polish Socialist Party

Our squads in the vicinity of Częstochowa, which initially numbered about sixty men, were reduced, according to the last news that arrived in Slovakia in early 1944, to only sixteen people. The news that described the terrible conditions, in which the members were living and fighting, ended with the words, "We are caught between two flames" (referring to the Germans and Sikorski's people). "The worse of the two is '*Sikora*' ..." [that of Sikorski?]

It is no coincidence that Hitler chose Poland as the killing field for the European Jewry. The attitude of the Poles - led by overt pro-Nazis and antisemites from the London camp - towards the Jews, made the measure of the Polish Jewry's pain, suffering and annihilation overflow.