

Harry Klein

## **“Bloody Purim” in the Częstochowa “Small Ghetto”**

Following the horrifying and bloody events of the days from 22<sup>nd</sup> September to 4<sup>th</sup> October 1942, during which the vast majority of Częstochowa Jewry perished in the Treblinka gas chambers, the “Big Ghetto” was liquidated. All the houses and dwellings stood empty, and a [wind of] terrible desolation blew with a dreadful, bereaved loneliness and fear. The nearly six thousand Jews, who were left for slave labour, were barracked, during this period, at the workplaces, in the worst inhuman conditions.

For these Jews, who were still alive at the time, witnesses of the horror, destruction and annihilation, the “Small Ghetto” was created. The “Small Ghetto” consisted of the murkiest and narrowest alleyways - Nadrzeczna, Garncarska, Kozia, half of Senatorska and half of Mostowa. It was fenced all around with barbed wire and had a single exit and entrance gate at the Rynek Warszawski. There were armed guards at this gate and surrounding the fences.

In the “Small Ghetto”, there was a resistance movement called the Jewish Combat Organisation, and the Nazis were aware of this. They, therefore, sought refined means of murdering a small quantity of Jews from time to time, thus avoiding an armed battle with the resistance movement.

A fortnight before Purim, the Chairman of the *Judenrat* was summoned out to the Gestapo, where he was informed that, based on an agreement with the British government, there would be an exchange of Jews for German prisoners of war, and that the Jews would be sent to Palestine. The Jews eligible for this exchange were those who had close family in Palestine. The *Judenrat* leadership, as well as a considerable section of the Jews in the “Small Ghetto”, [even] after so many bitter experiences with the Nazi ploys of malicious lies and trickery, did not take into account at all that, this time, it might also be a refined, Nazi ruse, but accepted it as absolute truth, because the Nazis at the time were already suffering defeats at the frontlines.

Registration ensued at the *Judenrat* offices and there were those who sought preferential treatment, for who did not wish to extricate himself from the claws of death and destruction? The only ones, who viewed this whole plan negatively, were the Jewish Combat Organisation because, in their opinion, such a thing was absolutely impossible, as the Nazis would not allow living eyewitnesses to the Nazi massacres to go out to the free world and tell the truth. Notwithstanding, the psychosis of registering to travel to Palestine reached [proportions] of quite simple insanity, until the whole registration madness stopped and was all but forgotten.

On the day before Purim, the chief Nazi hangman, *Hauptmann* Degenhardt, arrived in the “Small Ghetto” and, as if nothing, toured the institutions. He proceeded to the *Judenrat*, conducted conversations and, finally, “remembered” that the exchange of Jews for German POWs could be carried out. He proposed that the members of the *Judenrat*, with their families, and the intelligentsia be first on the list.

On the next day, Purim, when the entire population of the ghetto was already at forced, slave labour, the supposed “exchange” took place. Under “normal” circumstances, the “Small Ghetto” was more tightly encircled by armed destroyers during each *akcja*. However, this time, there were no signs of an *akcja*. Without suspecting anything bad, first the *Judenrat* members with their families, and then the professional intelligentsia - doctors and lawyers with their families, went from the “Small Ghetto” to the Rynek Warszawski. Once they were all assembled, Degenhardt ordered them to proceed in the direction of ul. Warszawska to the New Market Square [Nowy Rynek]. As they were, once again, absolutely unguarded, this could not arouse any suspicion.

As soon as the Jews arrived at ul. Warszawska, the entire situation changed completely. Gendarmes emerged from Lewkowicz’s building at ul. Warszawska 9 and forced the Jews to get into the covered police vans, which immediately drove off, not towards the railway station, but in the direction of Zawodzie, towards the Jewish cemetery. It was clear to all that they had been bitterly deceived, that the sweet Nazi words were nothing but a chain of lies, crimes and murder.

These Jews, the professional intelligentsia, sensed themselves in a vice and without any way out. They sensed that they were falling victim and were not even prepared for any resistance. Desperate wrangles ensued. A few leapt out from the speeding vans, while others committed suicide by swallowing Zyankali [Ger., potassium cyanide] tablets, bringing their own painful life to an end. The majority were shot at the cemetery.

That day cost 157 lives - the 157 lives of the Jewish intelligentsia of the “Small Ghetto”, further increasing the number of victims from the population of the “Small Ghetto”, which was perishing in blood. That Purim day, 20<sup>th</sup> March 1943, goes down in the history of the Częstochowa Holocaust as “Bloody Purim”.

## ***Yizkor***

### **The Holocaust of Częstochowa**

**50,000 Martyrs**