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The Beacon of Fire in the Dead of Night

Already, much has been told of this period but, in my opinion, not enough. This has not yet been done in its entire scope and I am quite convinced that, one day, some "Spiritual Giant" will arise, and not necessarily from among those who actually witnessed those events, who will contrive to gather all the archived materials and publish them, with all the conclusions thereof.

Whereas today [viz. 1968], logic dictates that one, setting about to write of these bygone days, ought to take his mind back to his emotions during those times and attempt to relive - and to revive - them.

And what is the image of terrors and horrors that appear before his eyes? Darkness - overcast skies enshroud the tortured Earth - all around are signs of a vast inferno, the flames of which have consumed everything.

Where once bustling civic centres had been and not a wide-open space of empty fields, a man walks with his head cast down and his arms hanging limply to the sides. He lifts his feet and marches, pace after pace, searching among the ruins for any trace of his lost days. He finds the life of a graveyard.

He bends over clusters of flowers, deeply inhaling their potent perfume and, with a light caress, picks them - the flowers which have grown here, despite everything. This place, which his feet tread heavily upon, had been destined exclusively for the eradication of all living things, for total ruin and annihilation. In a place such as this, it was impossible to conceive a concept of rebellion, except only in order to die a more honourable death – and a less humiliating one – but by no means in order to gain freedom towards life.

With all the responsibility of one who lived through those circumstances, and now that I am out of the oppressing darkness, in the light of day, where the sun again shines and warms and instils hope in the continuation of life and after a twenty-year-long period of being free, if I am required to give myself an answer to the question: **How did it happen that my people went to their own destruction? I shall clearly state that, deep inside the narrow ghettos, to which the multitudes of Jews were consigned prior to their complete physical annihilation, normal human life no longer existed.**

The accursed Germans succeeded in that their demented "idea" of a "Master Race". It made the entire German people lose their minds and they all believed that God had destined them to rule, to implement the loathsome and ghastly "German Order" throughout the entire world.

The nations, which experienced the same bitter tribulations under the German boot, were also unable to do anything.

After the Jews, they would have annihilated the Poles and the rest of the Slavic peoples and all those whose right to live was not "justified" by the "Master Race".

But nonetheless, in darkness and humiliation, in the raging sea of destruction, in which there was not the smallest crack through which could surge forth our will for rebellion, the match was lit.

It should also be made clear that we had no connection with events “outside”, and that the people outside also lived under the black boot of German terror. Besides the fact that the Jews did not have many true friends, the majority looked on with apathy at what was being done to us and only a few put their lives in jeopardy to save that which could be saved.

And then, in spite of everything, regardless of the lack of even the slightest power and on the brink of the gaping abyss of perdition and utter extinction, a gust of mighty and bracing wind brought us back and, with a great impetus, we were put once again on our feet.

This was the awakening of the force which arose and manifested itself. This minute particle – the smallest of the small – that yet remained in the battered, broken body which was indifferent to what was done with it – almost dead – stood up to prove its resolve to do battle!

The Jewish Fighting Organisation (ŻOB) arose and returned the humanity to those who were unwilling to accept the Germans’ verdict – which was humiliation and death – and blew into them the “Breath of Life”.

These wonderful people - with the very fact that they embraced the cause of rebellion - constituted within the camp, inside the ghetto - the side in opposition to the men of the *Judenrat*, who to the last moment disseminated false illusions and whose only purpose was to save themselves through collaboration.

Among the fighters were the remnants of the youth movements and the different political parties. A group of student youth joined them also, a youth which had matured before its time. Each and every one of them was prepared to sacrifice his life at any moment and to die honourably.

In this darkness, they were the beacon of fire illuminating the path to organisation and struggle, even if the purpose be a dignified death. These children, who just yesterday had been under the protection of their parents and had now remained on their own, began to unite with their own age group, to resist the enemy by force. They, these defenceless little ones, became the source from which the adults drew.

During that same terrible period, an extremely sad, but very illustrative event took place. The people at the head of Jewish public affairs, who had been elected as representatives before the War, were quickly broken and they had not the vigour and courage to stand in the breach in times of trouble. Others, who were appointed in their place, began cooperating with the Germans by facilitating the work of extermination.

The ŻOB, which arose and became a reality, operated inside the ghetto in an almost hostile environment. The Elders, who were seasoned public figures, cautioned and warned, “Do nothing”. They accused the youth of being irresponsible and lawless, which was prone to bring catastrophe and annihilation upon the general public.

Nevertheless, despite all the external and internal obstacles, this handful of chosen youngsters became the factor to heal the surroundings. The Fighting Organisation gradually became the address for those imprisoned inside the ghetto. The members of the *Judenrat*, who had started to fear for their own safety, considered no means too despicable to use in order to break it. The organisation was therefore forced to take drastic measures, to carry out preventive operations, to protect itself. It issued death warrants against Jewish informers, who even infiltrated the organisation’s groups. To our sorrow, the ŻOB was unable to thoroughly clear all these negative and base elements, which would

later come back to haunt them when they were put to test. Due to the denunciations, the Germans discovered the existence of the organisation.

One of the largest and most important works, which took long months of dedication and self-sacrifice, with superhuman efforts, was digging a tunnel connecting the ghetto to the "Aryan side" and building the central bunker which contained the arsenal.

All these plans fell into the hands of the Germans due to informing. And it happened that, when the organisation was already functioning in an orderly manner and was preparing dozens of combat units for the days they would be tested, at the time it had begun to purchase armaments and produce its own hand-grenades, and the herculean efforts had begun to bear fruits, the Germans delivered the devastating blow, when the detailed plans of the bunker fell into their hands.

On the other hand, it was impossible to retain all the members conscripted, because the majority of the ghetto's inhabitants went daily to work outside the sealed ghetto and, for our organisation, things were at a stage when it was still too early to arouse suspicions by not going out to work, which was liable to result in annihilation.

When the Germans took us by surprise, there were just a handful of people in the bunker. The Commander of the ŻOB – Mojtek – lay in bed with high fever. The Germans threw many grenades into the passages [and] blew up the arsenal. [But] as stated, most of the combatants were outside the ghetto at the time. The fighters' last desire, their dream to engage in open battle with the Nazi beast with weapons in their hands, was not fulfilled. We were unable to execute the will of our murdered brothers, friends, and parents, whose lips, in their final moment, murmured the last word – ***Revenge!!!***