

THE GHETTO

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Life in the Warsaw Ghetto

A representative of the Polish Socialist Party in Stockholm, Sweden, at a specially-convoled Press Conference, August 8th, 1943, introduced a Warsaw ghetto resident who had succeeded in fleeing the Nazi Hell in Europe. The following is an excerpt from his story, published in Sweden's largest newspapers.

The Warsaw ghetto is now a thing of the past, faded into oblivion. This large Jewish Community has been barbarously exterminated by the Nazis. A great deal has already been written on how the Jews lived in the ghetto, and yet the full story is still not known. We are revealing here a number of new facts, which help shed light on the life of the Jews in the ghetto of Warsaw.

A few months ago, Chaskel Litman, a Lodz Jew, who had lived among Warsaw Jews from September, 1939, to the end of August, 1942, succeeded in fleeing abroad. And here's how: during the mass deportation of Warsaw Jews, in the Summer of 1942, he escaped, fabricating a passport in which he designated himself an Aryan. For a time, he was in the employ of a Polish peasant, as a shepherd. After a brief period, however, the peasant refused to keep him any longer. Whereupon Litman returned to Warsaw, it being his intention that, during the roundup of Poles, he be apprehended and shipped off to Germany, for forced labor. He succeeded in carrying out the plan. The seized Jew, bearing the passport of an Aryan, worked for a while in the German city of Shtetin. Some time thereafter, he managed to quit the city and flee, via boat, to Sweden.

We are presenting here a series of facts which Litman disclosed at the Press Conference in Sweden.

The food with which the Germans provided the Jews, was far from sufficient. So smuggling, on a wide scale, was initiated. Thousands of Poles provided the Jews with food, principally flour. Flour-filled sacks would be tossed over the ghetto walls, while Jewish "carriers", lining the walls within the ghetto, would stand in readiness, carrying off the flour sacks to designated points.

For that purpose, large sums of money, including gold and jewelry for payoff to the Nazi guards, were

necessary. The ghetto had gold and money reserves, goods, and other commodities. From stored raw materials, Jewish artisans and workers turned out haberdashery articles, shoes, and other commodities, smuggling them into the Polish section of the city. In addition to food, the Poles provided the ghetto with news and reports of world events since the ghetto proper was without newspapers, and, ownership of radios was prohibited. So the Poles slid German newspapers, as well as their own illegal news sheets, into the ghetto, for distribution there.

Bread prices, within the ghetto, ranged from 10. to 35 Zlotys for 2 ½ lbs., depending upon the amount of the bribe which ghetto Jews were compelled to pay the Germans. A large bribe would result in the Nazi guards permitting passage, into the ghetto, of entire truckloads of food.

In the beginning, a ghetto Jew could still manage to solve the food problem, and would secure stocks of food to meet his needs. Restaurants and cafes were opened. Three Yiddish theatres played to attending audiences, and helped meet recreational needs. Hope prevailed that the ghetto Jews would endure and survive the war.

A network of schools — elementary, secondary, even colleges and trade schools — functioned in the ghetto. Lectures by prominent Jewish and non-Jewish scholars highlighted the ghetto's cultural activity. House committees arranged performances and entertainment programs in private homes. Thus the ghetto marked time.

One might say that, in the beginning, half of the Warsaw ghetto's Jewish population lived midst tolerable conditions. A new upper social strata — consisting of "carriers" and bakers — arose. Then followed the group which turned out haberdashery articles, as well as those engaged in the smuggling of commodities into the ghetto.

The remaining half of the ghetto Jews, however, suffered hunger. The mortality toll kept mounting, until it reached 8,000 to 10,000 per month.

This misery was somewhat eased by aid from abroad. From Switzerland, Portugal, U. S. and other neutral lands, tens of thousands of food packages flowed into the Warsaw ghetto. The Joint Distribution Committee spent huge sums for food relief.

During the second half of 1941, the situation grew worse. The Germans hindered smuggling activity. Within the ghetto walls — and without — Jewish "carriers" and Poles engaged in hauling food over the walls, would pay with their lives. But life just had to go on and nothing could halt the smuggling. Highest bribes were paid, vast reserves of men utilized. Other methods, too, were conceived, and employed. Tunnels were dug, through which food and goods were carted into the ghetto. By means of underground channels, illegal smuggling continued to flourish.

It is well to mention, particularly, two places where meetings between Jews and Poles took place. One was a massive courthouse, located on the streets Leshna-Ogrodova. One sector of that edifice was in the ghetto proper, the other in the Aryan part of the city. Jews and Poles alike would congregate there, with regards to court matters, and there, secretly, understandings would be reached on various matters, and commodity exchanges transacted. Serving as a meeting place, too, was the Gzhibov Square Catholic Church. Through one of its entrances, Poles would enter to pray; through another would come converted Jews, along with Poles, whose parents or grandparents were of Jewish descent. A few tens of thousands of such Gentiles — not pure Aryans — lived in the ghetto. In the Church, they would meet with their Aryan kin and would receive food from them. Oftentimes, an Aryan mother or father would bring food into the Church for their children, who, as "half Aryans", were compelled to live in the ghetto.

The Underground Movement. — Contact between Jews and Poles — contact between the ghetto sector and the Polish area — was maintained with the aid of the underground revolutionary movement. The Polish Socialist Movement and the "Bund" (General Jewish Workers' Union of Poland) worked along hand in hand, in close affiliation. The Polish Socialist Movement issued a proclamation to the Polish workers against creation of the ghetto. Streetcar, waterworks, and electro-technical employees who, by virtue of their jobs, had access to the ghetto, would bring us news of Polish society, along with word of the activities of the free world and of the Nazi plans against the Jews.

Illegal Press of the General Jewish Workers' Union of Poland ("Bund"). In the ghetto, the "Bund" published an illegal newspaper in Yiddish, along with various pamphlets, proclamations, and the like. Jews contributed funds not merely for the Jewish illegal press, but also for Polish illegal publications.

One day, during a search among Jewish bakers, Gestapo agents found a list of Jewish bakers who contributed to the Polish Underground Movement. The list revealed that the bakers contributed substantial sums for this cause. The bakers were regarded in the ghetto as the aristocracy among the population there. Following discovery of that list, the Gestapo executed 30 bakers, and that closed the incident.

Jewish children. Jewish children presented a grim, tragic picture. They would swarm the streets. Their legs were skeleton-like in appearance, their faces — swollen. They would plead and cry for bread.

Concluding his report, Litman described how Jews were shipped out of the Warsaw ghetto — in July-August, 1942.

JEWISH PRISONERS OF WAR IN GERMANY

The author of this article, Rafal Klinga, is a Polish flight officer who, after being imprisoned for three years in Germany, escaped and recently reached Great Britain. He tells of his experiences, particularly those relating to the brutal treatment of Jewish prisoners of war.

This happened near Ozarow in September, 1939, when after a fortnight's heavy fighting, my platoon was almost completely wiped out by the enemy in an attempt to break through a ring of German soldiers round our unit.

Those who were not killed by German bullets or artillery were crushed to death by German tanks. Of my platoon, only four were left alive and taken prisoner.

The Germans took us to a nearby farmhouse where the officers were separated from the men. Here we found other Poles who had been taken prisoner earlier. We stood there waiting, believing that we would be shot for so-called crimes on German prisoners of war. It was then that we first saw German brutality to Jewish prisoners.

"Juden austreten!" shouted several armed Germans. A number of Jewish soldiers stepped forward. The Germans fell on them, beating them mercilessly with their pistols and rendering some unconscious. While the Jews were being beaten into pulp, one of the Germans addressed us, shouting: "It is the Government of Jewish plutocrats that ruined Poland. The Jews are the misfortune of humanity."

In Rags With No Shoes

His shouts mingled with the cries of the beaten Jewish prisoners. After a while they were dragged into the orchard. We heard several shots and saw the German brutes returning alone.

Later in the afternoon the Germans found in the ranks of the prisoners one person who had a Jewish appearance and shot him in front of everybody.

In Stalag the Jews were kept in separate barracks and their fate was terrible. They were deprived of even the small amenities which other prisoners were granted. They had no overcoats and no shoes. The Germans compelled them to work in mud and rain and snow, dressed in rags and wearing wooden sabots.

The winter of 1940 in Meklemburg was a severe one. Large groups of prisoners were sent out by the Germans to clear the snow from roads and railway lines. We used to leave barracks for work early in the morning after a meagre ersatz cup of coffee and work the whole day on very little food.

One day the Germans added a dozen Jews to our group. My attention was particularly attracted to an eighteen year old Jewish student, weak and miserable looking, from Cracow University. He was shivering from cold and would continually empty the snow out of his wooden shoes. He had a ragged overcoat but underneath was wrapped in a piece of blanket.

All prisoners were treated badly and in the same boat as it were. But when I looked at this boy I felt ashamed that I had on a good pair of boots.

On returning to camp I was relieved to be able to give him a pair of socks which I had brought with me from Poland.

In March, 1940, the Germans took all Jews from

the "Arbeits Kommand" where we were and sent them all to Poland.

A few months later after the downfall of France, we could see on the main street near our Stalag four French prisoners of war forced to collect horses' manure. Every morning and evening these same prisoners had to clean all the lavatories. They were French Jews.

Two of them were brothers. They were engineers, highly cultured men. The third was a merchant, the fourth a consumptive student whom the others tried to help in every way possible.

I was at that time kept at the "Sonder Kompanie" waiting for a cell in the prison where I was to go as punishment for my first attempt at escape. Outside our barracks there were drainpipes where some of us sat down in the shade to rest when the guard was away.

Here I became friendly with Pierre, one of the two French Jewish brothers. It appeared that both of them had studied in England where they had also worked for some time in the textile industry.

At the outbreak of war, they had returned to serve in the French Army. They spoke, in addition to French and English, German and Russian. They were men of considerable education but above all of crystal character.

I would hardly say I was a philosemite — my attitude to men is not guided by religion, race or class but by human values — but I say Pierre is and will always remain my friend.

In those days French prisoners of war received no parcels from anywhere and went very hungry. Whenever Pierre was given a few spoonfuls of soup by any of us, he did not eat it up himself but took it to share with his brother.

This incident I must relate about Pierre. It moved us all very deeply. One evening he and his brother came into our barracks, very excited. They were holding a small box and told us they had received that day the first parcel. They had not opened it but brought it to share with us.

One has to be a prisoner and suffer hunger to realize what it means to receive the first food parcel. It is like the realization of a dream. We all thanked them for their kindness and offered them some of our ersatz coffee. I looked at the faces of my Christian fellow prisoners and could see their emotion. In Pierre's eyes I saw tears. Half of the parcel was consumed as they wished "en famille".

In passing through France last year, I visited their family. Pierre's wife was very apprehensive. She had just learned that her husband was organizing assistance to other prisoners of war in order to help them escape.

Sixteen-Year Old Escaped

In one house in the South of France where I spent the night, I met a sixteen-year-old boy who some three months earlier had been in Warsaw. He told me of the innumerable and terrible sufferings of the Jews in Poland, of how hundreds of them were dying of hunger and of the German brutalities towards them.

The time is drawing near when the Germans will have to pay for their crimes. Of all the vast suffering which they have caused, not only to individuals but to whole nations, those they have caused are the most terrible and have roused the sympathy of the whole world.

It is my weakness that I can never maintain a strong and lasting hatred. In writing the book about my experience in the German prisoners-of-war camp, I have met with the reproach that it lacks hatred and does not give the impression that it was written by one who had gone through such experiences.

It is a question not of hatred, but of justice.

SLAUGHTER OF JEWISH CHILDREN

A Pole who escaped from Poland and reached the Middle East has related in a report to the Polish authorities in London, new incidents of hideous German brutality towards Jewish children in Poland.

A certain day was set aside for killing Jewish children up to two years of age, he testifies, in the ghettos of Warsaw, Lodz, Cracow and other cities last spring.

On the day specified, armed Gestapo officers accompanied by Ukrainian and Latvian police entered all Jewish homes searching for and demanding the surrender of infants whom they shot on the spot. The same witness says, that according to his information, those mothers who refused to part with their children were also shot.

He also described a particular incident of a German officer's fiendish act he personally saw. He was walking through the Saski Park in the center of Warsaw when two small Jewish boys, ragged and starving, came out of some bushes and begged for bread. They first appealed to the Pole and then to the officer as he approached. He immediately took out his revolver and shot the boys dead.

MUTINY IN THE TREMBLINKA DEATH CAMP

In a previous issue of Ghetto Speaks we reported about a mutiny of the Jewish inmates in the Tremblinka Death Camp. The Jewish prisoners have burnt down practically all the facilities of the Camp, and many of them have escaped. The source of our first report was the Polish secret radio "Swit".

Now, we can not only verify this event, but supplement it. A deciding factor of the mutiny was the substantial aid, which the Jews received from Polish guerrilla detachments. The Gestapo in Poland has announced a reward of \$500 to any person giving information as to the whereabouts of those Jews, who escaped from the notorious Tremblinka Camp. A similar reward has been offered regarding the Polish guerrillas who aided their escape.

AN APPEAL TO THE HEROES OF THE BATTLE OF THE WARSAW GHETTO

The following is a complete translation of the appeal issued by the Underground Movement of Poland to the heroes of the Warsaw ghetto, while the battle was being waged there. This important document has just reached this country.

Comrades and Citizens!

Since April 18, when the occupant launched his drive to exterminate finally and completely the re-

maining Polish Jews, the Warsaw ghetto has been in arms against the brutal enemy. Condemned by Hitler to death, the Jews in the ghetto have refused to submit passively to the Nazi hangmen. They are resisting furiously the bloody ruffians in defense of their rights as citizens and their honor as human beings.

Risen in Armed Protest

Once more the glare of flames reddens the sky over Warsaw; once more the firing of rifles and guns, the explosions of grenades, resound in the streets of the city. Workers and professionals are the heart and soul of the groups of fighting Jews who have risen in armed protest against Nazi violence. The Polish national flag floats over their heads as they give battle to the enemy. Their action is not an isolated one; it is a link in the uninterrupted chain of resistance that for four years has been carried on throughout Poland.

It is most important, at the present historic moment, that all Poland and the entire world fully understand the significance of each episode in our struggle for liberation. The battle of Krasnobrod, the series of clashes between detachments of the Underground Armed Forces in Poland and the invader, the present armed fight of the Polish citizens confined within the walls of the Warsaw ghetto — all these testify to Poland's irreconcilable hatred of the occupant, to our unshakeable determination to win complete independence. No drop of blood spilled in these battles for freedom will be lost. Every new victim will cement more firmly the future edifice of liberty and social justice for all the citizens of New Poland.

Common Heritage of Polish People

We send our fraternal greetings to the Jewish workers and professionals who, in the face of certain and inevitable death, have chosen to perish with arms in hand rather than submit passively to the executioner.

We pledge solemnly to them that their deed will not be lost without an echo. It will join the heroic legends of Fighting Poland; it will become the common heritage of the Polish people, a heritage that will provide a firm foundation for the structure of the future reconstructed Polish Republic.

To the Peoples of the World

We appeal to the peoples of the world! In the face of the Nazis' brutal pattern of destruction, which they have consistently imposed upon our land for the past four years, since its defeat and occupation, in the face of unprecedented terror, our people, murdered, oppressed, and maltreated, have risen constantly in flaming protest. But we need help. This help must come soon. The enemy must be defeated before he crushes the vital forces of the land and finally destroys its people.

We call upon the fighting world for the earliest possible offensive against German power, but in the meantime we shall not remain passive. We shall redouble our efforts in order to prepare for the general uprising in Poland that, together with the Allied offensive, will strike the death blow at totalitarianism of all shades.

Freedom—Equality—Independence!

*The Underground Movement
of the Working Masses of Poland*

Warsaw, April, 1943.

JAN KWAPINSKI IN THE UNITED STATES

Jan Kwapinski, Polish Minister of Commerce and Industry, recently arrived here from London to head the Polish delegation to the United Nations Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Administration in Atlantic City.

In pre-war Poland, Minister Kwapinski was a prominent leader of the Polish Socialist Movement and president of the Polish National Council of Trade Unions. In this capacity he was well acquainted with the Jewish Labor Movement of Poland and on friendly terms with its leaders.

When Poland was over-run by Hitler Germany, he succeeded in escaping to the eastern part of that country, where he was arrested by Soviet authorities. Released from Russian imprisonment, at the same time as the two leaders of the Jewish Labor Movement of

Poland, H. Erlich and V. Alter were, Minister Kwapinski was permitted to proceed to London. In London he was appointed vice-premier of the Polish Government-in-Exile.

L. Honigwill, S. Mendelson, E. Nowogrodsky and Ch. Wasser visited Minister Kwapinski during his brief stay at the Hotel Tudor in New York, in behalf of the American Representation of the General Jewish Workers' Union of Poland. The following topics were discussed during this visit: the demand of the Jewish workers of Poland for the inclusion of representatives of the Jewish people in the Polish delegation to the U.N.R.R.A. at Atlantic City; the spread of anti-Semitism in the Polish Army; the agreement between four political parties of Poland; the Jews of Poland in the light of reports received by the Polish Government-in-Exile.

The American Representation of the General Jewish Workers' Union of Poland handed Minister Kwapinski a written memorandum containing the opinion of the Jewish working population of Poland concerning the methods of reconstruction and rehabilitation in their country when victory will have been achieved, stressing, that citizens of Poland, regardless of race or creed, should be granted equal rights for economic and cultural advancement.

POLISH SOCIALISTS IN LONDON PAY TRIBUTE TO THE JEWISH UNDERGROUND OF POLAND

Tribute was paid at a meeting in London recently to the Jewish Underground Movement of Poland, and particularly to the heroic battle of the ghetto of Warsaw. The meeting, called by Polish Socialists to commemorate the heroic resistance of Warsaw in 1939, was attended by several hundred persons.

In a moving speech, Adam Ciolkosz, leader of the Polish Socialist Party, said, that one of the greatest factors in this defense was the participation of the Jewish workers organized by the Jewish Socialist Party "Bund". Lucjan Blit, who spoke as a member of the "Bund" delegation in London said, that Jewish workers always have and always will participate, to the fullest extent, in the fight, together with Polish Socialists,

for Poland's independence and freedom, for a free and Socialist Poland, which will provide equal rights and opportunity for every citizen of Poland, regardless of race or creed.

JEWISH SOLDIERS IN THE POLISH ARMY

According to estimates made by the Polish Red Cross, more than 30,000 Polish soldiers of Jewish faith died fighting for Poland in 1939, and more than 60,000 were taken prisoner.

Thoughts of these Jews, who died in defense of their homeland, Poland, occurred to us as we were reading numerous letters from Jewish soldiers, members of the Polish Army stationed in the Middle East, complaining of symptoms of an anti-Semitic attitude towards them.

Apparently, high-ranking officials of the Polish Army are seeking to imbue the soldiers with the usual anti-Semitic poison. It is the duty of the Polish Government to put an end to this criminal procedure and to oust those, who are responsible, regardless of their position.

POLISH ANTI-SEMITES INCURABLE

According to a report published by the "Polish Jewish Observer" in London, on October 15, 1943, the well-known refugee from Poland, leader of Polish anti-Semites, Mr. Mackewicz, in his latest pamphlet, expresses anger with the Polish Government for having included Dr. Grosfeld in its Cabinet. This, he asserts, was absolutely unnecessary, since several Ministries are already governed, "de facto", by Jews.

The tragic death of General Sikorski caused a reshuffling in the Polish Government-in-Exile. Dr. Grosfeld and two other members of the Polish Socialist Party were then made ministers of the new Polish Cabinet. Dr. Grosfeld was not given this appointment as a representative of the Jewish population of Poland, and does not regard himself as such. However, his Jewish origin gives Polish anti-Semites the sought after opportunity to pursue their poisonous work of propagating hatred towards the Jews, even in exile.

MENTION OF JEWS OMITTED FROM THE DECLARATION OF THE MOSCOW CONFERENCE

The American Representation of the General Jewish Workers' Union of Poland issued the following statement in conjunction with the failure of the Moscow Conference declaration to give special mention to the atrocities perpetrated against the Jews.

The Moscow Conference's warning to the German people, that all participating in the Nazi-committed brutalities in the occupied lands, would bear full responsibility for their barbarous, inhuman acts against the defenseless population, and that all guilty would, after the war, be returned to the lands where they committed their crimes and there be harshly punished, according to the laws of the respective country, will, no doubt, fortify the courage of the plagued peoples in the Hitler-held lands of Europe. This warning may also move some of the Nazi henchmen to refrain from renewing their brutalities and crimes, in view of the planned infliction of harsh punishment, which will, most certainly, not evade them.

However, as spokesmen of the most severely-plagued and tortured of the Nazis' victims — the Jewish population of Poland — we must express our chagrin and protest, in cognizance of the fact that, with the exception of the general warning concerning all crimes — including also the crimes regarding the Jews — the Conference Declaration did not mention separately the extermination of the Jewish population in Europe generally and Poland in particular. This annihilation has no equal—even to the infamous Nazi-committed acts against all other victims of Hitler's bloody rule.

Hitler and his murderous gang are seeking to annihilate the entire Jewish people. They are carrying out this extermination in a systematic and horrible manner. The eyes of our plagued brothers and sisters in the ghettos of Poland and other subjugated countries, are turned to the freedom-loving nations which are fighting heroically on the battlefields, against the beastly Nazi armies. The armed resistance in the ghettos of Warsaw, Bialystok, and other centers has served as an arousing demand upon the conscience of mankind and as a heroic contribution of the doomed, for the liberation of the world from the bloody ulcer of Nazism and Fascism.

The tortured Jewish masses had the right to expect that, when the representatives of the United States, Soviet Russia, and Britain issued, in the name of the Conference, amongst their Statements, a Declaration concerning the crimes of Hitler's Reich, this document should give separate mention to the sufferings of the hardest-hit sector of Nazi-Europe, the Jews.

This grave error should be corrected with a supplementary Declaration by the participants in the Moscow Conference.

American Representation of the
General Jewish Workers' Union ("Bund")
of Poland

New York, November 6, 1943.

JEWS REFUGEES IN PALESTINE NOSTALGIC

Jan Stancyk, Polish Minister of Labor and Social Welfare, recently returned to London from an official visit to Palestine and the Middle East. At a reception tendered him by the administrative committee of "Ohel", in London, Minister Stancyk spoke of his experiences in Palestine and the Middle East. "The Jews' attachment to Poland," he said, "is very great." "Many of them are but hoping for the day when they will be able to return to Poland." (Quoted from the "Polish Jewish Observer", October 8, 1943.)

"BATTLE OF THE WARSAW GHETTO", BY BEN HECHT

The immortal spirit of the Jews of Warsaw, who took up arms to fight their Nazi oppressors, instead of allowing themselves to be slaughtered, passively, like slaves, has inspired many Polish and Jewish men of letters, who in their articles and poems expressed their esteem for those men and women who heroically, with meager arms, defended their dignity, against the Nazis.

Ben Hecht, well-known American playwright and scenarist recently published a supplementary act to his historical pageant "They Shall Never Die". This act, entitled "The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto", is dedicated to the memory of the millions of martyred Jews of Europe, and has received wide attention and acclaim.