

From Ringelblum's Diary: Thoughts About Resistance and its Consequences are Evoked When News About Massacre Reach the Ghetto

I had a talk the other day with a friend from Biala-Podlaska, head of the Social Relief organization. He had been assisting with the population "transfer" (it would be more correct to say "transfer to the other world") to Sobibor near Chelm, where Jews are choked to death with gases.¹ My friend asked in anger, up to when... how much longer will we go "as sheep to slaughter?" Why do we keep quiet? This question torments all of us,² but there is no answer to it because everyone knows that resistance, and particularly if even one single German is killed, its outcome may lead to a slaughter of a whole community, or even of many communities. The first who are sent to slaughter are the old, the sick, the children, those who are not able to resist. The strong ones, the workers, are left meanwhile to be, because they are needed for the time being. The evacuations are carried out in such a way that it is not always and not to everyone clear that a massacre is taking place. So strong is the instinct of life of workers, of the fortunate owner of J-cards that it overcomes the will to fight, the urge to defend the whole community, with no thought of consequences. And we are left to be led as sheep to a slaughterhouse. This is partly due to the complete spiritual break-down and disintegration, caused by unheard of terror which has been inflicted upon the Jews for 3 years and which comes to its climax in times of such evacuations. The effect of all of this taken together is that when a moment for some resistance arrives, we are completely powerless and the enemy does to us whatever he pleases. It will nonetheless remain completely incomprehensible, why were Jews from villages around Hrubieszow

¹ The first deportation of Jews from Biala Podlaska to the extermination camp of Sobibor took place on June 10 and 11, 1942 (and not on March 10, 1942, as indicated by the editors of the book of E. Ringelblum *Ktavim min Hageito* (Writings from the Ghetto), Vol. 1. p. 374); A.J. Feigenbaum, "Khurban ve-Kilayon" (Destruction and Ruin) in *Sefer Biala Podlaska* (Book of Biala Podlaska), Tel Aviv, 1961, pp. 57-58.

² After the deportations from Lublin and those from Cracow and Hrubieszow in the first days of June, days of shock and bereavement, and also of soul-searching came upon the Warsaw Jewry. Yet, only among the organized youth questions were asked, like "Is there not one single Jew among the tens of thousands, who will die honorably, who will make the German murderers pay with blood for blood?" From the clandestine weekly published in the Warsaw Ghetto, see *Yediot* (Hebrew), No. 6, June 9, 1942.

“evacuated”³, under a guard of Jewish policemen, and not one of them escaped while on their way, although each of them knew where and towards what they were going. There will not be an expert able to explain why 40 halutzim from an agricultural kibbutz³ consented to be led to slaughter, though they knew what had happened in Vilna, Slonim, Chelmno, and other places. One gendarme is sufficient to butcher a whole town... in Lublin four Gestapo-men set up and performed the entire “Action” [operation]. Of no use will be the lies that are being fabricated about Nowogrodek⁴ or the recent ones about Kowel⁵, in no place did Jews resist the slaughter. They went passively to death and they did it, so that the remnants of the people would be left to live, because every Jew knew that lifting a hand against a German would endanger his brothers from a different town or maybe from a different country. That is the reason why 300 prisoners of war let the Germans kill them on the way from Lublin to Biala; and these soldiers were known to have distinguished themselves in the fight for Poland’s freedom.⁶ Not to act, not to lift a hand against Germans, has since then become the quiet, passive heroism of a common Jew. This was perhaps the mute life instinct of the masses, which dictated to everybody, as if agreed upon, to behave thus and

³ On the “Action” in Hrubieszow see Chavka Folman “Ksharim b’Drakhim” (Contacts on the Roads), in *Sefer Milkhemet Hagetaoth* (Book of the War of the Ghetto), pp. 41-43. In his remarks on 40 halutzim from an agricultural kibbutz, Ringelblum had most probably in mind the pioneering kibbutz “Dror” in which there were 40 members and the secretary of which was Moshe Rubencyk. From 1941 the quarters of this kibbutz were at a saw-mill of the village Werbowice in the vicinity of Hrubieszow. Cf. the footnote in “Hairgun Hayehudi Halokhem” (The Jewish Fighting Organization), *Sefer Milkhemet Hagetaoth*, p. 106.

⁴ In March, 1942, news (never verified, in fact) spread throughout the Ghetto, that the Jews of Nowogrodek showed active resistance, killed over 10 German gendarmes and were killed in the fighting. This information excited the youth tremendously. It became the subject of many articles in the underground press and of talks and discussions in various groups. “Nowogrodek” became one of the most popular passwords in youth groups and workers’ parties. See A. Berman, “Al Tnuat Hameri b’Geto Varsha” (On the Resistance Movement in the Warsaw Ghetto), in the book *Hameri v’Hamered b’Geto Varsha* (Resistance and Revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto) edited by N. Blumental and J. Kermish, Yad Vashem, 1955, p. 53, Cf. “Heroes of Nowogrodek” in the journal “Jutrznia”, No. 28, March, 1942. (For Hebrew translation see in *Sefer Milkhemet Hagetaoth*, p. 63).

⁵ A single act of resistance occurred at the beginning of July, 1941, in Mielnica, near Kowel. Abraham Weintraub dashed out of a group drawn up for the massacre, pounced upon a Gestapo officer who was standing nearby, hit him and broke his teeth. Weintraub was shot dead on the spot (*Sefer Milkhemet Hagetaoth*, p. 494). It ought to be pointed out that the attitude of Warsaw Jews changed completely after it became known in the Ghetto that the people “deported” in summer of 1942 were all done to death in Treblinka.

⁶ In his records of January 17 and 19, 1940, Ringelblum reports on 167 soldiers that were killed (they were buried in Wlodawa), and some 200 who survived. See “Ktavim” op. cit [Vol. I], pp. 77, 78, Vol. II, p. 90.

not otherwise. And it seems to me that no incitements, no persuasion, will be of any use here; it is impossible to fight a mass-instinct – you must submit to it.

Source: Kermish, Joseph (Ed.), “Emmanuel Ringelblum’s Notes, Hitherto Unpublished”, *Yad Vashem Studies* VII, Jerusalem 1968, p.178-180.