

United Partisan Organization, Vilna

(*Fareynegte Partizaner Organizatsye*, FPO), underground Jewish organization active in the Vilna Ghetto. The FPO was established in January 1942; it consisted of members of the ghetto's Zionist youth movements. The FPO's first commander was Yitzhak Wittenberg.

FPO members mined railroad tracks used by trains going to the front lines; sabotaged weapons and equipment in German factories where underground members worked; and forged documents for fellow Jews. They also focused on obtaining weapons, which were very hard to come by. They bought some weapons from the local population, and FPO members who worked at the Germans' captured-weapons warehouse managed to smuggle some from there, too. The organization also assembled primitive Molotov cocktails and hand grenades inside the ghetto itself.

The FPO sent messengers to nearby ghettos to establish contact, warn them about the mass extermination of the Jews of Vilna and the rest of Lithuania, and spread the idea of armed revolt and resistance. The group also tried, unsuccessfully, to make contact with the Polish home army.

The FPO soon found itself at odds with the Vilna *Judenrat*. Jacob Gens, the *Judenrat* chairman, believed that the FPO endangered the ghetto with its activities. Based on a German order, Gens arrested Wittenberg in July 1943. Wittenberg managed to escape, but surrendered after he saw that most of the ghetto's inhabitants sided with Gens. Wittenberg committed suicide that night, and Abba Kovner took over the FPO's command.

In September 1943 the Nazis began liquidating the ghetto. The FPO prepared to fight and called on the ghetto's inhabitants to join the revolt. However, the inhabitants did not respond, thinking they were being sent elsewhere to work. The FPO then gave up on a ghetto uprising for lack of support, and began sending its members to the forest. Most managed to reach the Soviet Partisans, and establish themselves as Jewish battalions in the Soviet partisan movement. FPO members-turned-partisans participated in the liberation of Vilna by the Soviet army on July 13, 1944.

