

REMEMBERING

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Let us remember, let us remember. For that is all we can do for those young boys and girls who, on a sunny April day, 32 years ago, rose in the Warsaw ghetto and made a desperate last bid to live—or at least die—as free human beings.

They were few. Most of the ghetto population of 500,000 had already vanished into the death factories of Treblinka. Only some forty thousand were still alive.

Let us remember all of them—all the six million. Those who took up arms and fought but also those who did not, those who had the strength to resist but also those who chose to die in silence. For even the heroes perished as victims and even the victims were heroes.

The Warsaw ghetto was but a symbol. What happened there, happened everywhere. There were other Jews, in other ghettos. They all shared the same fate. All were condemned by the executioner not for what they had done but for what they were: Jews. Old and young, rich and poor, scholars and workers, beggars and dreamers, sages and artists—all were marked. And they were so many that they could people an entire kingdom which, indeed, they did. Theirs was the Kingdom of Night.

Forgotten by mankind, forsaken by God, they lived alone, suffered alone, fought alone. Alone they faced mighty legions—among the mightiest of all time. Alone—that is the key word, the haunting theme. Alone—with no allies, no friends. Totally, desperately alone.

Every underground movement received financial help and military assistance from special headquarters set up in London. Only the Jewish resistance organization received nothing. Its members were the loneliest and saddest soldiers of the war.

And they knew it. Read their appeals, their letters. Read the Ringelblum archives, miraculously preserved. The ghetto fighters, most of them in their early twenties and some of them in their teens, lived and died with no illusions; they knew that for the outside world they were expendable.

Their pleas—to the Allies and their leaders, to the free world and its conscience, to the Jews and their heart—leave one shivering. A single air-drop, a single rescue attempt would have shown them that their

struggle and their sacrifices were not in vain and that people—even if they could not effectively help—at least cared. But nobody cared.

It was April and the mood was festive in the sunny streets of Warsaw. Enjoying the spring weather, many strollers went to watch the burning ghetto: the most exciting spectacle in town. All over the world, Christians celebrated Easter and Jews observed Passover with song and prayer—as always. People attended theaters, concerts, movie premières; not one dinner party was cancelled. Uninformed? No: three days after the start of the uprising, reports about it were published in the *New York Times* and in every major American newspaper. Detailed accounts: the German onslaught, the fierce Jewish resistance, the step by step annihilation of the largest ghetto in Europe. It was all there. In print. People had but to read. They paid no attention. Warsaw was too far. And the victims were Jews. And anyway, the priorities were elsewhere. Roosevelt was busy fighting the war and so was Churchill. Everybody was too busy to remember the handful of Jewish warriors who had turned every house in the ghetto into a fortress. Unbelievable but true: the German attack against the Warsaw ghetto lasted longer than the initial invasion of sovereign Poland, with its armies and resources.

That the German leadership was concerned and even worried, has been ascertained. A frantic Governor General Hans Frank discussed the uprising with his military staff at an emergency meeting which had originally been scheduled to plan Hitler's birthday celebrations. Goebbels noted in his diary that the Führer was extremely disturbed by the Jewish rebellion and that he had asked to be kept constantly advised of its developments. Now we realize, wrote Goebbels, what we could expect from Jews if they were armed.

Unfortunately the impact was not as strong on the outside world. On April 26, as the insurrection entered its second week, Mordechai Anielewicz, the young Commander-in-Chief of the most extraordinary army in Jewish history, wrote a letter to a friend—Yitzhak Zuckerman (Antek)—on the Aryan side, a letter filled with prophetic anger:

"... For a week we have been involved in a life and death struggle. Our losses are enormous, our end is imminent... But while we are in possession of arms, we shall continue to resist. We have rejected the German ultimatum to capitulate because the enemy knows no pity and we have no choice... As we feel our last days approaching, we ask you to remember how we have been betrayed."

Yes—they were betrayed. The world knew and kept silent. In those days and nights of destiny, the solitude of the Jewish people was matched only by God's. We let them down. We let them suffer alone, fight alone. And yet, and yet. They did not die alone—not quite—for something of all of us died with them. ★

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