

ORIGIN OF A MIRACLE

By WILLIAM ZUKERMAN

THIS global war is rich in great events of historic significance and in epics of heroism. Some of these, like the epics of Dunkirk, of London under the first "Blitz," and Stalingrad have already transcended national frontiers and have become the spiritual heritage of the whole of mankind. But there are others, not less great and noble, which are still veiled in the semi-darkness of the enslaved torture-house of Nazi-occupied Europe and will come to full light in time.

Among these the Revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto, whose first anniversary is now being observed all over the world, stands out in a glory all its own. Judging even from the scanty reports of the event which have filtered through during the year, this was one of those rare collective upheavals which are nowadays fashionably described as acts of national regeneration; but they are more than that—they are manifestations of the spiritual affirmation of man, they are signs of the ascendancy of the human spirit above brute force. Its immediate effect will, of course, be felt first of all by the Jewish people. It will doubtless be recorded in Jewish history as an event in the same category as the last defense of Jerusalem and the other heroic acts of Jewish resistance to persecution and evil. But the influence of this act already reaches far beyond the Jewish ken; it is being felt by the entire anti-Nazi movement in eastern Europe, by the guerrilla fighters in the forests of Poland, in the marshes of White Russia and in the plains of eastern Galicia. Eventually this simple tale of the most helpless victims of Nazism who laid down their lives to show that the dignity of man cannot be suppressed, will become known the world over and will rank with the greatest epics of this war.

One thing the revolt in the Warsaw ghetto was not—it was not a local and accidental uprising. It was not a mere upheaval of oppressed men and women who could no longer stand their suffering and rose against their tormenters. It was that, but also something else. It was the accumulated reply of an entire people which for more than a decade had been

subjected to a persecution and humiliation such as no other group of people ever had to undergo. The event was the culmination of Hitler's policy of annihilating the Jews and it cannot be seen in all its magnitude without the background of the almost unbelievable bestiality with which that policy has been pursued since the beginning of the war.

As far back as the winter of 1939, the Nazis began to carry out Hitler's repeated promise to wipe out all of Europe's Jews. It began with the now famous deportations of Jews from Germany, Austria, and Czechia to the ghettos of Poland. At first these deportations were represented as a kind of transfer of population—a favorite Hitler theory for the solution of many other European problems, even non-Jewish. But soon the awful truth came out: these Jewish "deportations" were not the usual Nazi transfers of people from west to east and from north to south; they were something more cruel. The "deported" Jews were not sent to the Polish ghettos to settle, or to attempt to live there no matter under what difficult circumstances. The "deported" Jews were shifted to Poland for the most bestial kind of mass-murder ever known in history.

From three to four million helpless unarmed men, women, and children were torn from their homes in all countries of Europe, were placed in sealed cattle trucks, were sent to unknown destinations in Poland, and from there taken to camps specially equipped with death-chambers and there killed off by machine guns, gas, electricity and poison on a scale which staggers

the imagination. Mr. A. A. Berle, Under-Secretary of State, described the event most graphically when he said that "A supposedly civilized nation has set aside certain localities in Europe as human abattoirs and has formulated, planned and was systematically carrying out a program of national murder."

The Warsaw ghetto was the center of this "human abattoir," the headquarters to which most of the Jewish victims were brought for a temporary stay and from which they were then taken daily for slaughter. The ghetto, which had been converted into a huge, walled-in prison, at one time had as many as six hundred thousand Jews packed into it. In the spring of 1943, the number had been reduced by executions, starvation, and epidemics to about thirty-five thousand. These were mostly young people, tough and hardened, who had been employed by the Germans in factories and in war plants until such time as their turn came to be exterminated like vermin.

In the early months of 1943, the Nazis noticed a change of mood in the ghetto. There were mutinies in a number of factories; guards were attacked and killed, and in February a hunger strike took place. The Nazi governor of Warsaw, Dr. H. Fischer, decided to hasten the ghetto's "liquidation." But the decision evidently was made too late. When, on April 19 at four o'clock in the morning, several detachments of the Gestapo and Storm Troopers came to finish off the ghetto, they found it an armed fortress with Jews behind machine guns and standing ready at barricades. One of the most unusual spectacles of our age, the Revolt of the Warsaw Ghetto, broke out.

There is only one event in contemporary history that came near to the heroic uprising. This is the 1916 Easter Rebellion in Dublin. But the points of difference between these two are greater than the likenesses. The Irish Rebellion lasted a week. The Revolt in the Ghetto lasted for five. The number of Irish rebels who participated was, according to British sources, about two thousand men;



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the rebel losses were trifling and the British lost 106 killed and 207 wounded. The number of Jewish men and women who were in the Warsaw uprising is variously estimated by the Polish Underground as between twenty to thirty-five thousand. The number of Jews killed and burned alive is given by the same source as from six to ten thousand. Over a thousand Germans were killed; eight hundred Nazi war factories and the entire ghetto were left a mass of ruins and rubble.

The defenders barricaded themselves in the huge tenement houses and fought from every room and corner, from the roofs and cellars; they fought with guns, knives, pieces of furniture, and with their bare hands. Women poured hot water on Nazis who tried to approach them. The Nazis used tanks, armored cars, artillery, and even bombers, but they could not crush the defenders. On the twentieth day of the revolt, the Germans set fire to the houses by dropping incendiary bombs from planes. The entire ghetto was aflame; hundreds of Jews were burned alive, or suffocated, but the fight went on. The defenders hid in the cellars, in the sewerage system, in underground caves. And from there they came out again to take a heavy toll of Nazis. "The Warsaw ghetto has been transformed into a miniature Stalingrad," the Polish Underground radio station *Swit* reported on the seventeenth day of the battle; on the twentieth day it broadcast: "The heroic resistance in the ghetto is still continuing. The Jews are still holding several strongly defended positions and are fighting with great courage and military efficiency. The Nazis are using flame-throwers and block-busters." Only on the twenty-fifth of May, thirty-two days after the outbreak of the revolt, the ghetto was proclaimed by the Nazis to have been fully "liquidated."

These are the bare facts of the event as revealed mostly by the Polish Underground, which played an important part in the revolt by supplying the Jews with arms and by helping many to escape when the fight was over. Reports which have filtered through during the year show that the revolt was not a sudden and unexpected outbreak. It was carefully planned and prepared. At first the older men and the Rabbis opposed the undertaking on the ground that it was obviously an attempt at mass suicide forbidden by the Jewish religion. But later they joined the younger men and fought on the barricades and in the houses as bravely as the others. The Rabbis not only gave their consent, but blessed the enterprise as a holy deed undertaken for the "Sanctification of God's name."

Lists of the names of the fallen heroes which have been coming from Poland uninterruptedly, reveal that men of all parties participated in the revolt. Socialists and Zionists, Communists and Orthodox Jews, nationalists and internationalists, all

fought together for the common cause. A feature of the event was also the prominent part played in it by women.

The men and women of the ghetto demanded nothing and expected nothing. They laid down their lives deliberately and willingly to protest against the most inhuman persecution, and to remind the world that no amount of suffering and humiliation can break the inherent dignity of man.

It can be said with certainty that the Revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto forms a conspicuous landmark not only in the history of the Polish Jews, but also of the Polish anti-Nazi movement. In some mysterious way the heroism of the defenders of the ghetto electrified the Poles as no other event of resistance of their own. The Polish underground movement, which had hitherto been cautious and worked mostly under cover, suddenly sprang into life with a new force. The legend of the invincibility of the Nazis had been broken. "If the Jews could fight the Nazis for five weeks in the open, we, too, can do it," seemed to be the feeling which swept Poland. The acts of the Underground have since then become more daring and more widespread; Polish guerrillas have started to attack German transports and convoys in the open, and the number of executions of Nazi hangmen and of their Polish quislings has increased enormously. The Polish underground movement left its hiding place and came into the open with the Warsaw revolt. Of course, much of this was due to the Red Army victories and to the German retreat, which had assumed large proportions.

BUT most significant of all has been the effect of the Revolt on the Jews themselves. All reports that have come from eastern Europe since that fateful May indicate that a remarkable change has come over the Jews. They are no longer meek and submissive, and they no longer accept death as their fate. They are hitting back everywhere and hitting hard. Two months after the outbreak in the Warsaw ghetto, there was a similar upheaval in the ghetto of Bialystok in which five thousand Jews fought the Nazis for a week; in the last months of 1943 an uprising occurred in the ghetto of Lodz which was in some respects even more remarkable than that of Warsaw because there the Nazis, after a week of fighting, were actually obliged to yield and to give up their executions. Similar uprisings occurred also in a number of smaller ghettos, such as those of Lublin, Chelm, and others. The last report from Poland told of a mutiny of 1,500 Jewish slave workers in the dreaded concentration camp of Treblinka. There the Jews threw themselves on the German guards, killed most of them, and set fire to the crematoria and gas chambers where the Jews had been exterminated at the rate of seven thousand a week.

All over Poland Jews, instead of remaining in the ghettos and waiting for the Nazis to kill them, escape into the woods and there form guerrilla bands. There are now hundreds of such small bands which roam the country, sometimes in company with Polish guerrillas, but mostly on their own. A good many of these bands are being led by former fighters of the Warsaw ghetto, and they have become the scourge of the Germans; they attack German food transports, derail the trains, blow up munition dumps, and often fight Germans in the open. It so happened that this new movement synchronized with the advance of the Red Army into Byelorussia. The Soviet guerrillas, who are much better organized and equipped than the Polish, are making good use of the Jewish bands for work behind the German lines. There can be no doubt that the spirit engendered among the Polish Jews by the revolt in the Warsaw ghetto plays no insignificant part in the present rapid disintegration of the German Army in Byelorussia and Poland.

For the Warsaw revolt seems to have transformed the remaining Jews in eastern Europe and has imbued them with a spirit which cannot be described otherwise than miraculous. It was one of those rare events which sometimes happens in the lives of individuals and nations who stand on the very edge of despair and hopelessness and seem to be doomed to destruction. Suddenly some hidden source of power is tapped and the individual or people is revived; new springs of energy and hope are discovered and the people rise to a strength and glory which they had never suspected that they could achieve. This happened to France in the days of Joan of Arc, to England at Dunkirk, to the Soviet Union at Stalingrad. The Revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto is an experience of the same kind for the Jews. For ten years, since the rise of Hitlerism, they had been subjected to an ordeal of suffering that has no parallel in history. It seemed that the inner force of the people had given out; that they could no longer do anything for themselves and could only cry to the outside world for help. Suddenly there came that miracle of Warsaw and everything was transformed. Out of the greatest weakness came strength; out of utter despair sprang hope. The European Jews, battered, beaten, and well-nigh exterminated, had discovered the great secret of all dignified survival—self help—and rose in a glorious victory over their enemies. Hitler has failed in his drive against the Jews, even as he has failed in his drive against the world.

A meeting to commemorate the Revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto is being held Sunday, April 30, in Manhattan Center, New York, under the auspices of the Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists, and Scientists.

WOE TO THE MISLEADERS!

By SHOLEM ASCH

WHEN an idea, summoned by need and discontent, fails to be realized, an alien dark force, conceived by the devil, arrives and bestially throws itself into the void left by the ideal. It utilizes the despair created by the unrealized ideal, often operates with the same phrases, sows the same hopes until it wins over the deceived masses to its side. Like Satan, it stands upon the structure erected by the ideal, to usurp power. A clear example of this is the rise of Hitlerism in Germany.

Nazism was made ripe by the leadership of German Social Democracy which had failed to fulfill its duty towards the embittered German masses. If German Social Democracy had used the power which bankrupt German Junkerdom so completely delivered over to it, if German Social Democracy had realized the revolutionary program which it had preached for generations, Hitler could not have deceived the German masses with a promise that he would realize the program in his own manner.

Considering the world scene in this light, one can say with certainty that if Lenin had not succeeded in carrying through the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, and power had remained in the weak, half-traitorous hands of Russian Social Democracy, a Russian Hitler and a Russian Nazism would have arisen a decade earlier than in Germany. There would have been no Red Army to destroy Nazism and fascism today.

The world is only now beginning to enjoy the fruit of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. It is thanks only to the Bolshevik Revolution that the world will arise cleansed of Hitler, even if wounded and bloody.

The same crime committed by German Social Democracy at the end of the first World War, a bankrupt Social Democracy wants to commit again today, even before the war has been completed. Just as Noske surrendered to the German Junkers—the cat was trusted with the milk—and put himself with his entire machinery at the service of the German army which had nurtured Hitler in its bosom; and just as Kerensky wanted to entrust the safety of the Russian Revolution to the hands of the Russian Junkers; so Social Democracy today wants to surrender to the fascists. It is such an alliance that the leadership of the

Jewish Bund (the Jewish Social Democratic organization), has formed with the Polish government-in-exile.

Social Democratic leaders have learned nothing and forgotten nothing. The few remaining Jewish leaders are blindly giving themselves up to the Polish government, to put power into the hands of the fascists. They, the Narodova Democrats, with Sosnkowski at the head, will take care of the Polish masses, particularly of the Jews. They will hold the power, and they will dispense justice which will suffice for the leaders of the Bund. Woe to such justice as this will be! Woe to the countenance that the Bund will have in the eyes of the Jewish masses and to the fate which the Jew will meet at the hands of Polish reaction!

Yes, this is a play for the devil, which they have made to save their own skins. But it will never succeed.

THE masses have learned the great lesson of what happens to an ideal when traitors abandon it to the enemy. German Social Democracy, Noske and Hitler, will forever stand before the eyes of the people like black shadows to teach them in whose hands to entrust power.

And in the meantime the Red Army is moving nearer and nearer. . . . Its boots tread upon the body of the enemy, it hammers at the walls of the prison into which Hitler has thrust the world. The thundering steps of the Red Army awaken hope, strengthen hands, fill hearts with courage and power.

"Hold out, we are coming," the steps call—"we are near; we are here already."

The joy and hope which the Red Army marching forward calls forth in the hearts of the tortured masses, also throws fear and dread into the enemy's heart, into the hearts of the fascists of all colors, into the hearts of all the debased human worms who have the sorry courage to aid fascism, to give it comfort, to whitewash it and to deliver into its hands the fate of the Jewish masses.

Woe to such misleaders!



"My People," by Isaac Friedlander.