



A SUMMONS TO RESISTANCE IN
THE VILNA GHETTO, JANUARY 1942

Let us not be led like sheep to the slaughter!

Jewish youth!

In a time of unparalleled national misfortune we appeal to you!

We do not yet have the words to express the whole tragic struggle which transpires before our eyes. Our language has no words to probe the depths to which our life has fallen nor to vociferate the anguish which strangles us.

It is still too hard to find the proper definition for the state in which we find ourselves, for the extraordinary cruelty with which the annihilation of the local Jewish population has been carried out.

The community of Jerusalem of Lithuania¹ numbered 75,000. On entering the ghetto, 25,000 were already missing, and today only 12,000 remain. All the others have been killed! Death strolls in our streets; in our tents—powerlessness. But the anguish at this huge misfortune is much greater in the light of the ignoble conduct of the Jews at the present time. Never in its long history of martyrdom has the Jewish people shown such abjectness, such a lack of human dignity, national pride, and unity, such communal inertia and submissiveness to the murderers.

The heart aches even more at the conduct of Jewish youth, reared for twenty years in the ideals of upbuilding and halutz defense, which now is apathetic, lost, and does not respond to the tragic struggle.

There are, however, occasions in the life of a people, of a collective, as in the life of an individual, which seize you by the hair of your head, shake you up, and force you to gird up all your strength to keep alive. We are now experiencing such an occasion.

With what can we defend ourselves? We are helpless, we have no possibilities of organizing any defense of our existence. Even if we are deprived of the possibility of an armed defense in this un-

1. Vilna was called "the Jerusalem of Lithuania," an epithet attributed to Napoleon, when he passed there in 1815 in the retreat from Moscow.

equal contest of strength, we nevertheless can still defend ourselves. Defend ourselves with all means—and moral defense above all—is the command of the hour.

Jewish youth!

On none but you rests the national duty to be the pillar of the communal defense of the Jewish collective which stands on the brink of annihilation!

I *Let us defend ourselves during a deportation!*

For several months now, day and night, thousands and tens of thousands have been torn away from our midst, men, the aged, women, and children, led away like cattle—and we, the remainder, are numbed. The illusion still lives within us that they are still alive somewhere, in an undisclosed concentration camp, in a ghetto.

You believe and hope to see your mother, your father, your brother who was seized and has disappeared.

In the face of the next day which arrives with the horror of deportation and murder, the hour has struck to dispel the illusion: There is no way out of the ghetto, except the way to death!

No illusion greater than that our dear ones are alive.

No illusion more harmful than that. It deadens our feelings, shatters our national unity in the moments before death.

Before our eyes they led away our mother, our father, our sisters—enough!

We will not go!

Comrades! Uphold this awareness and impart to your families, to the remnants of the Jerusalem of Lithuania.

—Do not surrender into the hands of the kidnappers!

—Do not hand over any other Jews!

—If you are caught, you have nothing to lose!

—Let us defend ourselves, and not go!

Better to fall with honor in the ghetto than to be led like sheep to Ponary!

II *On guard over national honor and dignity*

We work for Germans and Lithuanians. Everyday we come face to face with our employers, the murderers of our brothers. Great the shame and pain, observing the conduct of Jews, stripped of the awareness of human dignity.

Comrades!

—Don't give the foe the chance to ridicule you!

—When a German ridicules a Jew—don't help him laugh!

—Don't play up to your murderers!

—Denounce the bootlickers at work!
 —Denounce the girls who flirt with Gestapo men!
 —Work slowly, don't speed!
 —Show solidarity! If misfortune befalls one of you—don't be vile egotists—all of you help him. Be united in work and misfortunes!
 —Jewish agents of the Gestapo and informers of all sorts walk the streets. If you get hold of one such, sentence him—to be beaten until death!

III *In the presence of the German soldier*

Instead of submissiveness and repulsive bootlicking, you are given the possibility in daily encounters with German soldiers to perform an important national deed. Not every German soldier is a sworn enemy of the Jews, not every German soldier is a sworn Hitlerite. But many have false ideas about Jews. We, the youth, by our conduct, in word and deed, can create in the mind of the German soldier another image of a Jew, a productive one, a Jew who has national and human dignity.

Comrades, show the Jews with whom you work and live together that this is the approach to the German soldier.

IV *To the Jewish police*

Most tragic is the role of the Jewish police—to be a blind tool in the hands of our murderers. But you, Jewish policemen, have at least a chance to demonstrate your personal integrity and national responsibility!

—Any act which threatens Jewish life should not be performed!
 —No actions of mass deportation should be carried out!
 —Refuse to carry out the orders which bring death to Jews and their families! . . .
 —Do not let service in the police be turned into national disgrace for you!
 —Jewish policeman, sooner risk your own life than dozens of Jewish lives!

Comrades!

Convey your hatred of the foe in every place and at every moment!
 Never lose the awareness that you are working for your murderers!

Better to fall in the fight for human dignity than to live at the mercy of the murderer!

Let us defend ourselves! Defend ourselves until the last minute!



THE STRUCTURE OF JEWISH RESISTANCE IN POLAND, 1942

Bylaws of the Coordinating Commission and the Jewish Combat Organization

In order to organize the Jewish population of Warsaw against the annihilation drive by the occupant and in order to protect the Jewish population of Warsaw against traitors and police agents who collaborate with the occupant, a Coordinating Commission² is created which includes the Bund and the Jewish National Committee whose composition is made up of the following parties: the Zionist Organization, Right Labor Zionists, Left Labor Zionists, the Revisionist Party, Hehalutz, Hashomer Hatzair, Dror.³

The activities of the Coordinating Commission are based on the following bylaws:

COORDINATING COMMISSION

- (1) On the basis of the agreement concluded between the Jewish National Committee and the Bund, a Coordinating Commission has been established in Warsaw.
 - (2) The purpose of the Coordinating Commission is:
 - a. To organize the defense of the ghetto in case of a further deportation action.
 - b. To protect the Jewish masses of the ghetto against the hirelings and flunkies of the occupant.
 - (3) The Coordinating Commission summons into being a combat organization, sets the guidelines for its activities, and supervises it.
 - (4) The Coordinating Commission is composed of one delegate of each political party.
2. In later documents this body is designated as the Coordinating Committee, not Commission.
 3. At the time these bylaws were prepared, the Revisionists had agreed to join both the Combat Organization and the Jewish National Committee. Subsequently, breaches of security by the Revisionists and differences between them and the other parties about arms supplies created tension and open conflict. After a short while, relations were severed and the Revisionists later formed their own combat organization. As for the Communists (PPR), informal coordination between their fighting units and the Jewish Combat Organization was regularly maintained.