

# 80 years since the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

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Last Wednesday, April 19, marked the 80th anniversary of the beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943. The uprising was the first act of large-scale urban armed resistance to Nazi rule on the continent.

A few hundred poorly armed fighters, many of them in their teens or early twenties, were able to resist the Nazis' brutal SS forces for several weeks. The uprising was led by a coalition of communist youth and Jewish socialist parties, including the socialist Zionist Hashomer Hatzair, Left Poalei Tsiyon and Jewish Labor Bund, all of which were fervently pro-Soviet and convinced that the fight against antisemitism and fascism was indissolubly tied to the fight against capitalism. The Nazis only managed to suppress the uprising by setting the ghetto aflame and killing some 13,000 people, about half of whom were burned alive or suffocated.

While it could not halt or change the course of the Holocaust, the uprising shook the Nazi occupiers to the core. It came just over two months after the defeat of Nazi Germany by the Red Army at Stalingrad, where an entire German army had been wiped out. The uprising earned the Warsaw Ghetto the term "little Stalingrad" among contemporaries. Along with the now beginning advance of the Red Army, it heralded the eruption of social and revolutionary struggles against the Nazi regime and its allies across Europe. It has since become one of the best known episodes in the history of the Nazi-led genocide of 6 million European Jews and a symbol of courageous defiance in the face of the seemingly overwhelming armed power of fascism.

Despite its enormous historic and political significance—or rather because of it—the commemorations of the 80th anniversary were extremely muted. Germany's President Frank-Walter Steinmeier uttered a number of platitudes and asked for "forgiveness" in Warsaw, under conditions where the German government is again sending tanks to fight a war against Russia in Ukraine and the Polish government is playing a central role in falsifying history, promoting antisemitism and advancing the NATO war against Russia.

In Germany itself, there were very few commemorations, almost all of which were organized by Jewish communities. A notable exception was a three-day academic conference organized by the Simon Dubnow Institute in Leipzig, which featured many of the preeminent historians in the field of Polish Jewish history and reviewed recent historical findings about the uprising, including the different political tendencies involved in it.

In the context of the conference, students at the University of Leipzig also organized a moving concert with works by composers who had been persecuted, killed or driven into exile by Nazism. The pieces had been picked by the students themselves with an eye not only to conveying the great variety and richness of the musical culture that had been destroyed by the Nazis but also to give a sense of the lives lived by these composers before they were persecuted. Particularly striking were the first three movements of the String Quartet in D Major, one of the earliest works by Ignatz Waghalter, a Polish-Jewish composer who was born in Warsaw and played a major role in the musical life of Berlin in the 1920s but was then forced to emigrate to the US. Also performed were three short but innovative piano pieces for four hands from the "Ironies" by Erwin

Schulhoff, a Czech-Jewish composer who was murdered by the Nazis.

The students played the pieces with great enthusiasm, and one student offered a thoughtful introduction to each composer and each piece played. The concert, held at the Leipzig Museum for Musical Instruments, attracted so much interest that additional chairs had to be brought in to accommodate the audience.

There is a marked contrast between the evident urge among young people and workers to come to grips with the ongoing intellectual and cultural impact of the Holocaust and the efforts by governments to suppress and distort the historical truth and downplay or avoid any commemoration of what happened. It is precisely because of the contemporary political relevance of the historical lessons from the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising that capitalist governments have no interest in commemorating it.

But workers, who are today confronted with the unfolding maelstrom of a new imperialist redivision of the world, the buildup of fascist forces, social counterrevolution and an ongoing pandemic and climate catastrophe, have a tremendous amount to learn from the heroic but also tragic experience of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Holocaust.

## The origins of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

The immediate origins of the plans for armed resistance in the ghetto lay in the devastating experience of the "Great Action" of July 22-September 8, 1942, when, in the space of only six weeks, an estimated 265,000 Jews were deported from the ghetto to the death camp Treblinka and gassed immediately upon arrival. Ukrainian mercenaries, the so-called "Trawniki," who had been trained by the Nazis to help guard ghettos and concentration camps throughout Eastern Europe, played a significant role in the systematic roundup of the Jews and their transport to Treblinka.

The "Great Deportation" was part of so-called "Operation Reinhard" (Aktion Reinhard), the code name for the systematic industrial murder of the entire Jewish population of 2 million that lived in ghettos in the Nazi-occupied General Government of Poland. Aktion Reinhard was initiated in March 1942, a few weeks after the notorious Wannsee Conference of January 1942, at which leading Nazi and German state officials agreed upon the industrial annihilation of all of Europe's Jews. In the one year between March 1942 and March 1943, over half of the 6 million victims of the Holocaust were murdered. The industrialized killing reached its peak in the three months between August and November of 1942, when 1.47 million Jews were gassed to death—a fourth of the total number of victims of the Holocaust and the highest per capita kill rate ever recorded in history.

Among the victims were the majority of Warsaw's Jewish community. Before the war, Warsaw had been home to the largest Jewish community in the world, comprising 400,000 people, or a third of the city's total population. The ghetto, set up in November 1940, was the largest of its kind in occupied Europe and effectively functioned as a giant

concentration camp. While a wall separated the ghetto from the so-called “Aryan side” of Warsaw, trade and smuggling continued between the two sides throughout the ghetto’s existence. Its inhabitants were forced to subsist on starvation rations of about 184 calories a day. Plagued by hunger, typhus and other diseases, about a fourth of the ghetto’s inhabitants died before the Great Deportation.

Despite the horrifying living conditions and perpetual terror from the Nazis, the ghetto became the site of remarkable cultural and political work, reflecting the rich intellectual and cultural traditions of Polish Jewry.

Of the greatest political and cultural significance was the work of Emanuel Ringelblum, a socialist Zionist historian, who founded and led the Oyneg Shabbes Archive. From 1940 through the liquidation of the ghetto, the Oyneg Shabbes gathered a vast array of information about the ongoing destruction of Polish Jewry by Nazism but also the everyday life and cultural and political activities in the ghetto.

The archive demonstrates, in particular, the immense impact of Marxism and socialism on Polish Jewry and ghetto life, without which the political origins of the uprising cannot be understood. Among the most active political tendencies in the ghetto were the socialist Zionist scout movement Hashomer Hatzair and the Left Poalei Tsyion, with which Ringelblum was associated, as well as communists. The Jewish social democratic Labor Bund, which had significant influence among the largely artisan Jewish population of inter-war Poland and, for several decades, had spearheaded the formation of self-defense units in Jewish communities against pogroms, also played a prominent role. These tendencies would co-lead the uprising.

The Ringelblum Archive also shows that the Trotskyist movement remained politically active in the Warsaw Ghetto almost until the Great Deportation, and some sources indicate that Trotskyists were involved in the uprising.<sup>[1]</sup>

Between 1940 and 1941, the Trotskyists published two Polish-language journals in the Warsaw Ghetto, *Czerwony Sztandar* (Red Banner) and the theoretical journal *Preg??d Marksistowski* (Marxist Review), which were distributed on both sides of the ghetto wall. Their publications included essays by Leon Trotsky, including a pamphlet dedicated to the first anniversary of his assassination issued in August 1941, as well as theoretical and political analyses of contemporary and historical events, including the lessons of the October Revolution and the Paris Commune and the difference between revolutionary Marxism and Stalinism. The leader and “father of Polish Trotskyism,” Solomon Ehrlich (1907-1942), was deported and gassed in Treblinka in the summer of 1942.<sup>[2]</sup>

The last preserved publication of the Polish Trotskyists is a May Day leaflet from May 1, 1942. Written as an appeal to workers in Poland of all nationalities, it was a powerful call for organized, armed resistance to the occupiers, for the international unity of the working class of Europe in the struggle against capitalism, and the building of the Fourth International across Europe. The Trotskyists stressed, in particular, the need for the unity of Polish, Jewish and German workers:

In the depth of its heart, the German working class has remained true to the ideals of socialism and strives to, alongside us, do away with Hitlerism and capitalism. On May Day, we extend our brotherly hand to our German class comrades, we extend our hand to workers across the world, together with whom we will take complete and merciless revenge against our common enemy.<sup>[3]</sup>

Even among the socialist tendencies where Jewish cultural nationalism played a significant role, there was an understanding that the fate of the Jews depended above all on help from the peoples of Europe and the

development of social revolution. Hopes ran high, especially in the spring of 1942, that a revolution in Europe might be imminent. Abraham Lewin, like Ringelblum a member of the Left Poalei Tsyion and the Oyneg Shabbes Archive, noted in his diary on May 16, 1942:

The abyss is getting ever closer to each one of us, the bestial visage of the Nazi apocalypse, with the words death, destruction, doom, death-agony written on its forehead. An unremitting insecurity, a never-ending fear, is the most terrible aspect of all our tragic and bitter experiences ... the truth is nowadays our hearts beat in time with the events taking place on Russian territory, where a life and death struggle is being waged between man and beast, between hope for a better tomorrow for a harried and bloodied humanity and fear of the victory of the most bloodthirsty Nero the world has ever seen.<sup>[4]</sup>

Lewin and others eagerly followed news about unrest in fascist-ruled Italy and reports by newly arrived deportees, especially from Germany, about signs of economic crisis and political unrest in the Reich. On June 3, 1942, six weeks before the beginning of the Great Deportation, Lewin noted:

The letters that arrive from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia testify to a certain revolutionary ferment throughout the whole Reich. For instance, from Berlin we hear that proclamations are pasted up in the street with the following content: “We demand peace, we demand the return of our husbands and sons.” The letters from Czechoslovakia also have this strongly revolutionary character. ... All these letters pulsate with the belief in a swift end to this worldwide slaughter. Is it possible that the whole of oppressed Europe could be mistaken? The heart longs so deeply for salvation. We go to sleep with this dream; we wake with this dream. Is it possible that the most passionate yearning of 95 percent of all inhabitants of the globe should go unfulfilled and the evil power of a band of degenerates and savage murderers should triumph? Reason and the heart tell us that humankind, embodied in the peoples of Soviet Russia, England and America, will be victorious and not the wild animals of Hitler and Mussolini-land.<sup>[5]</sup>

In the Great Deportation, Lewin would lose his wife and daughter. He himself was murdered in early 1943. Virtually everyone who survived the Great Deportation in the ghetto had lost most of his or her family. Those who survived, on average, were young and considered “useful” as workers and were therefore temporarily exempt from the deportations.

## The Uprising

The Great Deportation left no doubt that the Nazis were seeking to destroy all of Jewry. It also reenforced a sense of terrible isolation from and abandonment by the outside world among the few remaining Jews in the ghetto. The plans for an uprising were born out of a combination of political heroism and despair over the inevitability of death. Based on the accounts of the few survivors of the Uprising, Marek Edelman, Yitzhak Zuckerman and Tzivia Lubetkins, they were motivated by a determination

to die fighting—“to live with honor and to die with honor”—and to send a signal to the outside world about what was being done to the Jewish people. No one expected to survive the uprising, let alone be able to defeat the Germans, but the hope was that their symbolic act of resistance would help spark a broader movement.

Marek Edelman, a Bundist and one of the few surviving leaders of the uprising, later stated, “... one should die only after having called other people into struggle. We were convinced that it was necessary to die publicly, under the world’s eyes.”<sup>[6]</sup>

On July 23, 1942, the second day of the “Great Deportation,” representatives of all political parties gathered for the first time to discuss armed resistance. Earlier that year, under the influence of the newly formed Polish Workers’ Party, founded with the approval of the Kremlin bureaucracy, the socialist Zionist Hashomer Hatzair and the left-wing Zionist youth movement Dor, as well as a number of other organizations, had already formed an anti-fascist bloc in the Warsaw Ghetto and had begun preparations for armed resistance.

A few days later, on July 28, the Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa (ŻOB, Jewish Combat Organization) was formed. Whatever their political differences, the overwhelming majority of the left-wing political parties in the ŻOB were both socialist and pro-Soviet.

Another fighting organization was formed by followers of the far-right Zionist Vladimir Jabotinsky, an admirer of Benito Mussolini. While involved in the uprising and heavy fighting with the Nazi troops, the Jewish Military Union (Żydowski Związek Wojskowy, ŻZW) acted independently of the ŻOB because of its overwhelming political disagreements. Due to its anticommunist orientation, the ŻZW received much more support from the Polish nationalist Armija Krajowa, which was reluctant to support any uprising that could benefit the Red Army.

For the ŻOB, obtaining weapons and training was extremely difficult. Among the first to offer assistance, if on a limited scale, was the Armia Ludowa, a guerrilla movement affiliated with the Polish Workers’ Party, the successor of the Polish Communist Party that had been destroyed by Stalin in 1938. For months, members of the 22 units of the ŻOB (numbering only about 600 people) trained themselves on the few available weapons.

In January 1943, a first uprising occurred during a round-up of thousands of ghetto inhabitants.

A unit of the ŻOB, which included the legendary Mordechai Anielewicz (a member of the Hashomer Hatzair), began shooting at the Germans and Ukrainians who were trying to bring them to the notorious Umschlagplatz, from where trains left for Treblinka. Almost all members of the ŻOB unit were killed. Anielewicz only narrowly escaped.

Although it came at a terrible price, the uprising made a big impression on both the Nazis and the inhabitants of the ghetto and Warsaw more broadly. After this first uprising, the Polish nationalist underground led by the Armija Krajowa agreed to a limited supply of weapons and explosives. Among the ghetto fighters, it boosted morale. If they had not already done so, those sympathizing with or involved in the ŻOB went underground; many dug out basements and prepared bunkers for the coming uprising.

The poet Władysław Szlengel described the aftermath of the January uprising and the preparations for the big uprising as follows:

Cement and bricks are being brought, the nights resound with the pounding of hammers and pick axes. Water is pumped, wells are dug in basements. The shelters. A mania, a rush, a cardiac neurosis of the Warsaw Ghetto. Lighting, underground cables, drilling the passages, bricks again, ropes, sand ... lots of sand. Sand. Bunks, cots. Supplies sufficient for months. Electricity, waterworks. ... Twenty centuries are written off by the SS man’s whip. The cave epoch returns, oil lamps, village type wells. The long night has

begun. People are going back under the ground. To escape from animals.<sup>[7]</sup>

On April 18, the commanding staff of the ŻOB met. It included Marek Edelman, then 22 years old, and Mordechai Anielewicz, then 21 years old, who would later be remembered as the main leader of the uprising.

The next day, the uprising began. When SS and police units entered the ghetto for yet another mass deportation, the ŻOB met them with Molotov cocktails and hand grenades thrown at the baffled SS units from sewers, windows and alleyways. The SS units were unable to deal with the unexpected attack, suffered serious losses and had to retreat. On April 22, the SS Officer Jürgen Stroop, who had been put in charge of the suppression of the uprising, issued an ultimatum to the fighters to surrender. When it was rejected, he ordered his troops to burn down all the houses, block by block, with flamethrowers and fire bottles and to blow up basements and sewers. Thousands of ghetto inhabitants were burned alive or suffocated from the flames.

Edelman later said in an interview, “The sea of flames flooded houses and courtyards. ... There was no air, only black, choking smoke and heavy burning heat radiating from the red-hot walls, from the glowing stone stairs.”

On May 8, the SS discovered the dugout of the ŻOB command. Anielewicz and most of the survivors of the ŻOB present committed suicide—perhaps up to 80 people. Edelman and a few others were able to find their way to the sewers and managed to escape the burning ghetto. The official date for the final suppression of the uprising is given as May 16, when SS Commander Jürgen Stroop personally blew up the historic Great Synagogue.

Although some fighting occurred during the uprising outside of the ghetto walls—principally by the communist Armia Ludowa and the nationalist Armija Krajowa—the ghetto uprising ultimately remained isolated. In a characteristic display of the indifference by the imperialist powers to the fate of Europe’s Jews, on April 19, 1943, the same day that the uprising began, representatives of the UK and the US met in a luxury hotel on the island of Bermuda to discuss their response to the European refugee crisis. Both countries refused to lift their quotas for refugees. By then, multiple reports of the unfolding destruction of Polish Jewry had already reached the White House. As for the Polish bourgeois government-in-exile, Emanuel Ringelblum would note soberly “... at a time when extermination threatens the Jewish people, the Government has done nothing to save at least a remnant of Polish Jewry.”<sup>[8]</sup>

In the Polish population that witnessed the destruction of the ghetto, attitudes ranged from indifference and silent or open approval among antisemites, to horror and empathy with the victims. The Polish poet Czesław Miłosz, who was involved in the anti-Nazi resistance movement, saw the burning ghetto from the Aryan side in Warsaw. In his famous poem “Campo Dei Fiori,” he compared the burning of the ghetto and the fighters to the burning of the great philosopher and scientist Giordano Bruno by the Catholic Inquisition on the Campo Dei Fiore in Rome in 1600:

I thought of the Campo dei Fiori  
in Warsaw by the sky-carousel  
one clear spring evening  
to the strains of a carnival tune.  
The bright melody drowned  
the salvos from the ghetto wall,  
and couples were flying  
high in the cloudless sky.

At times wind from the burning

would drift dark kites along  
and riders on the carousel  
caught petals in midair.  
That same hot wind  
blew open the skirts of the girls  
and the crowds were laughing  
on that beautiful Warsaw Sunday.

...

But that day I thought only  
of the loneliness of the dying,  
of how, when Giordano  
climbed to his burning  
he could not find  
in any human tongue  
words for mankind,  
mankind who live on.

...

Those dying here, the lonely  
forgotten by the world,  
our tongue becomes for them  
the language of an ancient planet.  
Until, when all is legend  
and many years have passed,  
on a new Campo dei Fiori  
rage will kindle at a poet's word.<sup>[9]</sup>

To this day, the question of why the Holocaust was not prevented and why there was no mass movement to overthrow Nazism in time to save millions of Jews and other victims of fascism remains one of the central questions of the 20th century.

### **The fate of the October Revolution, the Left Opposition and the Holocaust**

The political origins of the Holocaust cannot be understood outside an examination of the fate of the October Revolution. While the emancipation of the Jews of Western Europe was bound up with the French Revolution, which provided the basis for their large-scale assimilation in the 19th century, the much larger Jewish population in the Russian Empire remained an oppressed and persecuted minority that preserved its own language (Yiddish). It was only the 1917 revolutions that brought emancipation for the vast majority of European Jewry.

For historical reasons, the fate of the Jews and the advance of social revolution had thus become intrinsically intertwined. For the forces of political reaction, hostility to the revolutionary movement became in turn intertwined with antisemitism. In the Russian Empire, medieval antisemitism fused with hatred of the developing workers' movement, and from 1881 onward the Tsarist state regularly encouraged pogroms against the Jewish population as part of its efforts to suppress the revolutionary movement and divide the multi-ethnic and multi-religious working class of the region.

For the German and Russian socialist movement, in particular, the fight against antisemitism became a matter of principle and a central touchstone of the struggle for internationalism.<sup>[10]</sup> In 1918-1921, the Russian, Ukrainian and Polish nationalist counter-revolutionary forces that fought against the Red Army and the fledgling Soviet state systematically resorted to pogroms as part of their fight against the socialist revolution. It is estimated that some 200,000 Jews, most of them in what is now

Ukraine, were brutally slaughtered.

The Red Army and the Bolsheviks systematically and successfully fought for an end to these pogroms—the largest anti-Jewish massacres in Europe before the Holocaust—and against anti-Semitism more broadly. In the 1920s, the Soviet state was the only country in the world that provided state funding for Yiddish-language publications and instructions in Yiddish in schools. These historical experiences left a profound mark on the consciousness and politics of the Jewish working class and socialist intelligentsia of Eastern Europe and, in particular, Poland. The Zionist movement and the social democratic Labor Bund, which had opposed Bolshevism since 1903, split over the October Revolution, with large sections of both tendencies now either directly entering the Bolshevik Party in the newly formed Soviet Union or taking a fervently pro-Soviet stance in inter-war Poland.

The conviction of the socialists in the Warsaw Ghetto that their salvation would lie in the development of a revolutionary movement against fascist rule was thus neither “utopian” nor mistaken. It was rooted in the historical experience of the October Revolution, which had brought an end to World War I, and the successful struggle of the Red Army against anti-Semitism in the ensuing civil war. Both had occurred just a little over 20 years before.

The same dynamic did indeed develop in World War II. A revolutionary movement began to develop first in Italy and Yugoslavia in 1943. By 1944, much of the continent, including Poland, became engulfed in civil war-like conditions, fueled by the expanding advances of the Red Army. Tragically, however, this movement came too late to save the 6 million European Jews and many more victims of fascism. And in contrast to the revolutionary movement of workers in Russia in 1917 and the Red Army in the civil war, it lacked the necessary Marxist and internationalist leadership and was eventually strangled by Stalinism.

A historical explanation for this can only be found in the emergence of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and the growing isolation and then systematic destruction of the Trotskyist opposition in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1917-1920, much of Eastern and Central Europe was swept by revolutionary struggles, and the Bolsheviks were able to extend the conquests of the October Revolution to large portions of the former Russian Empire. Outside of Russia, however, the revolutionary struggles of the working class ended in defeats and betrayals by their own predominantly social democratic leaderships. By 1923, the delay of the international revolution had brought about a dramatic shift in the world situation.

In the Bolshevik Party leadership, the internationalist tendency represented by Trotsky and the now fatally ill Lenin had become a minority. The social basis for the strengthening of the nationalist opportunist wing within the party lay in the growing bureaucratization of the state and the party, itself a process that was fostered above all by the international isolation of the still very impoverished and economically backward workers' state. Amidst the defeat of the aborted German revolution in the fall of 1923, the Left Opposition was formed under Trotsky's leadership to combat the growing national opportunist tendencies within the party leadership.

By the fall of 1924, the Stalin faction that spoke for the interests of this bureaucratic layer articulated the political basis for a nationalist reaction against the October Revolution in the program of building “socialism in one country.” In the years that followed, the Left Opposition waged a systematic struggle against the betrayal of the world socialist revolution by the Soviet bureaucracy, including in the British general strike of 1926 and the Chinese revolution of 1926-27. However, the defeats of the international revolution strengthened the position of the Soviet bureaucracy and the Stalin faction. In December 1927, the Left Opposition was expelled from the party and most of its leaders and members were either arrested or exiled. In 1929, Trotsky was expelled

from the USSR.

The rise of Stalinism and dominance of national opportunism in the line of the Communist International had particularly disastrous consequences for the Polish workers' movement, in which the internationalist and revolutionary traditions of Rosa Luxemburg had for decades played a central role. The Polish Communist Party leadership initially sympathized with Trotsky in the inner-party struggle. It was then subjected to particularly aggressive interventions by the Stalin faction, leading to a series of disorienting zigzags in its political line, culminating in the Polish CP's support for the 1926 coup d'état by the far-right General Józef Piłsudski, whose dictatorship went on to imprison and persecute the Polish communists en masse.<sup>[11]</sup>

By the early 1930s, the Polish CP was politically paralyzed and staggered from one crisis to another. In Germany, the disastrously misguided theory of "social fascism" promoted by the Stalinized Communist International prevented a joint struggle by the country's 6 million social democratic and communist workers against the rise of Hitler's Nazi movement. In January 1933, the Nazis came to power without a single shot being fired. This historic defeat of the German working class formed the basis for Trotsky's call to found a Fourth International. It was also the formative experience and main accelerator for the emergence of an organized Trotskyist Left Opposition in Poland.

In 1937-1938, the counterrevolutionary politics of Stalinism culminated in the Great Terror, in which generations of revolutionaries, including thousands of Soviet Trotskyists and much of the leadership of the October Revolution, were murdered. The Terror also wiped out much of the cadre of the Communist International.

The Polish Communist Party, for which Stalin had particular hatred ever since its declaration of support for Trotsky in 1924, was dissolved by the Kremlin in 1938. Virtually its entire leading cadre and thousands of Polish communists who lived in the USSR were murdered. The political confusion and despair caused by these developments are difficult to overstate, particularly their impact on a new generation of radicalized and militant socialist youth who were drawn to the communist movement but left without any political or even physical leadership.

In August 1939, Stalin concluded a pact with Hitler. Fearing the development of a social revolution in Europe that would threaten the position of the Soviet bureaucracy, Stalin resorted to this bankrupt maneuver in a desperate attempt to preempt or at least delay an invasion of the Soviet Union by German imperialism. The pact facilitated Hitler's assault on Poland, which was temporarily divided between Nazi Germany, which set up the General Government (including Warsaw), and the eastern parts of the country, which were now ruled by the Soviet Union. Politically, the pact paralyzed and numbed both the Red Army in the Soviet Union, leading to devastating losses following the Nazi invasion in June 1941, and the European communist movement under Nazi occupation in 1939-1941.

The Trotskyist movement in Poland was destroyed by a combination of the Stalinist terror in eastern Poland in 1939-1941 and the terror of the Nazis, particularly the Holocaust. The Polish Workers' Party, which would play an important role in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, was set up under the Kremlin bureaucracy's control in early 1942 and developed entirely in the shadow of the destruction of the Polish Communist cadre and the Trotskyist movement by Stalinism.

Ultimately, the Holocaust can only be explained as the tragic result of the systematic betrayals and resulting paralysis of the European socialist movement by Stalinism, which both delayed and beheaded the revolutionary movement of the working class against fascism and capitalism.

In his writings on the October Revolution and the aborted German revolution, Leon Trotsky stressed the immense significance of time in politics, above all in periods of revolutionary upheaval. The 20th century

has shown that it is impossible to build a revolutionary party in the midst of a revolution. The necessary preparations and the political training of the cadre need to be undertaken beforehand. By extension, the tragic experiences of the 20th century show that counterrevolution, of which both the Stalinist Great Terror and the murder of European Jewry were part, can unfold at a stunning speed, undermining the work of generations and making the fight for a revolutionary leadership exceptionally hard.

Under conditions of a developing new world conflagration and the building of fascist forces by ruling classes on all continents, workers and socialist youth must draw far-reaching lessons from the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. History shows that the current crisis of world capitalism will inevitably lead to the emergence of a revolutionary movement by the international working class. But it also shows that no time must be lost in the fight to build a revolutionary, Trotskyist leadership that can lead these struggles to victory.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/Polish/1992/xx/1941p11d.html>

[2] The publications of the Trotskyists in the Warsaw Ghetto were published in *Archiwum Ringelbluma, Tom 21, Prasa Getta Warszawskiego: Radykalna lewica niesyjonistyczna*, opracowali: Piotr Laskowski, Sebastian Matuszewski, Warszawa 2016. The volume is available online at <http://www.ghetto.pl/documents/940239/19/>

[3] Ulotka "1 Maja 1942" in: *Ibid.*, p. 279. Translation by this author.

[4] Abraham Lewin, *A Cup of Tears: A Diary of the Warsaw Ghetto*, edited and translated by Antony Polonsky, Blackwell Publishers, 1988, pp. 73, 74.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 115.

[6] Hanna Krall, *Shielding the Flame. An Intimate Conversation With Dr. Marek Edelman, the Last Surviving Leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, Henry Holt & Company 1986, p. 10.

[7] Quoted in: Samuel Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Oyneg Shabes Archive*, Indiana University Press 2018, p. 323.

[8] Emanuel Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War*, Northwestern University Press 1992, p. 223.

[9] Czesław Miłosz, *Il Campo dei Fiori*, Warsaw, 1943. Translated by David Borok, <http://www.foundlib.org/URLs/49751/campo-dei-fiori>

[10] On this, see in particular: David North, "The Myth of 'Ordinary Germans': A Review of Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*", in: *The Russian Revolution and the Unfinished Twentieth Century*, <https://www.wsws.org/en/2014/01/15/russian-revolution-unfinished-twentieth-century/15.html>.

[11] The political struggle over the assessment of Piłsudski and his coup d'état was an important episode in the struggle of the Left Opposition. Of particular significance is Trotsky's *Piłsudskism, Fascism, and the Character of Our Epoch*, a speech he gave in the wake of the coup at a session of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) in July 1926. URL: [https://wikirouge.net/texts/en/Pi%27sudskism,\\_Fascism,\\_and\\_the\\_Character\\_of\\_Our\\_Epoch](https://wikirouge.net/texts/en/Pi%27sudskism,_Fascism,_and_the_Character_of_Our_Epoch)



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