

Comments on the Program of the F.P.O. in Vilna

Comments on the Program

During the study of the program [for fighting], which was on the whole well received by the organization and taken seriously, questions of fundamental importance were raised by some groups. Some of these questions were based on doubts, and derived from weakness and *inadequate* preparation for the *realities* of the *direct* struggle.

Without reference to the question of which groups had posed these questions, the Command Staff considered it necessary to answer these questions as follows:

- A. *How will the F.P.O. react in the event of a partial destruction of the ghetto?*
- B. *What should a single fighter do if he remains alone in a battle without any possibility of carrying on the battle alone?*
- C. *Should we not go to the forest immediately?*
- D. *What is the aim of the battle (the ultimate goal)?*
- E. *Is there a necessity to hide in a maline?*

Answers

A. *How will the F.P.O. react in the event of a partial destruction?*

- 1) The F.P.O. *will move out into battle when the existence of the ghetto as a whole is threatened.*
- 2) It may be that there will be various kinds of murder-*Aktionen* of a local character or reprisals by the Gestapo for "crimes," that may cost the lives of individuals, or of tens or hundreds of Jews.
- 3) It is our view that the life of every single Jew is worthy of defense and must not be abandoned to the murderers without resistance.
- 4) The F.P.O., however, is not a large military force which can enter into a battle of equals with the enemy, and it cannot and *will not come out* in defense of each, *single* Jewish life.
- 5) The F.P.O., which is the spearhead of the remainder of the Jewish Community (not only in Vilna) could, *by premature* action, bring about its own premature destruction, leaving the ghetto without any defense at all, without the F.P.O., the only organization capable of fighting.

- 6) This kind of action would be quixotic, a suicidal tactic. Furthermore, Jews might condemn us as provocateurs, and this might cause us to fight against our own brethren.
- 7) But just as premature action would be irresponsible so action delayed too *long* would be criminal.
- 8) The F.P.O. will move out in such an *Aktion* when it is estimated that the *beginning of the end* has come; at that point it will no longer be a question of the numbers involved in the *Aktion*.
- 9) The *Command Staff* will decide when the time has come to move into battle. It will judge the situation on the basis of sources of information which are available and open to it.
- 10) Our inadequate supply of arms justifies the fact that the F.P.O. cannot go into action *at all times*. But our inadequate arms cannot justify under any circumstances the avoiding of fighting when the whole existence of the ghetto is threatened.

When total destruction threatens us we must come out to fight whatever the position regarding weapons; we must come out even if we have no arms and must fight with our bare hands.

B. What shall a single fighter do if he remains alone in the battle, after he has used up all his fighting possibilities, without contact or prospects of continuing to fight against overwhelming enemy forces?

- 11) Where such a situation *is the result of battle*, the singlefighter can and must *retreat*.
- 12) In the event of there still being other fighting groups, the individual must at all costs reach them and join them.
- 13) If no other groups have survived, the individual should save himself by whatever means possible at that time.
- 14) Although prepared to fall in battle - *it is not the F.P.O.'s aim to fall fighting for the last positions in the ghetto.*

15) The aim of the F.P.O. is *resistance as such*, and not the defense of the ghetto to the end.

16) The aim of the F.P.O. is *resistance, struggle and rescue*.

17) The above does not mean that anyone who observes the unequal forces and the inadequate arms in his possession should give up the battle *from the beginning*.

18) *Avoidance of the battle while fighting is in progress, for whatever reason (inadequate arms, lack of favorable prospects, etc.) is treason.*

C. *Should we not go to the forest immediately?*

19) No. The wish to go to the forests now is evidence of failure to understand the idea of the F.P.O.

20) The principle of the *Jewish Partisans Organization is social and national*, to organize the struggle of the Jews and to defend our lives and our honor.

21) To go to the forests at this time would mean the search for individual *security*, individual escape, just as hiding in a *maline* means search for *individual security*.

22) We will go to the forests, but as a *result of battle*. When we have carried out our purpose here, we will take with us as great a number of Jews as possible, and continue our struggle against the murdering occupier as part of the partisan movement.

23) It is only through battle, and as a result of our resistance, that we shall be able to save large numbers of Jews.

This is also a reply to Question D.

E. *Is there a necessity to hide in the maline?*

24) No. This question receives the same vigorous treatment as in the orders: *It is treason under all circumstances to go to a maline.*

The Commander

April 4, 1943, Vilna Ghetto

Source: Y. Arad, Y. Gutman, A. Margaliot (Eds.), *Documents on the Holocaust. Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland and the Soviet Union*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 1981, Document no. 197, pp. 435-438.