

# ZYGIELBOJM'S LAST LETTERS

On Sunday 12 May Westminster Council will unveil a plaque to commemorate Szmul 'Artur' Zygielbojm, the Polish-Jewish socialist and anti-fascist. Zygielbojm took his own life at his London flat in May 1943 as a final protest against the passivity with which the world was permitting the Nazis to slaughter the Jews of Europe.

Zygielbojm was a leading member of the Jewish Workers' Bund in Poland. He was smuggled out of Warsaw in 1940, across Nazi occupied lands, to America where he continued his work for Polish Jewry. In 1942 he was invited to Britain to represent the Bund in the Polish Parliament-in-Exile, in recognition that

the Bund was the leading political force in the Poland's Jewish community before the Nazi invasion. Receiving regular underground reports, he spent 14 months lobbying government ministers, ambassadors, the press and trades unions urging exceptional measures to save the remnant of Polish Jewry from complete destruction. In May 1943, after the Bermuda Conference failed to respond to the desperate needs for refuge, and as the Warsaw Ghetto uprising was being extinguished, Zygielbojm committed suicide in the hope that by his death he would stir those powers that could do something into action.

Here are some of Zygielbojm's last letters.



Szmul Zygielbojm

## TELEGRAM DATED 24TH DECEMBER 1942

Handwritten in pencil to Winston Churchill, 10 Downing Street (Public Record Office reference C12895)

Dear PM, As the authorised representative of the Jewish workers movement in Poland - the secret organisations of which were still active late in summer 1942, and were at that time the only organised body of Polish Jewry - I address to you and to your government this last appeal of despair which amidst the mass slaughter came out of the ghetto walls. I quote excerpts from their last report from Warsaw I received dated August 31st 1942:

'The fury of the storm unleashed upon the Jewish Community in Poland is devastating and gaining in strength everyday. Blow after blow is falling upon towns no longer thousands or tens of thousands but this time hundreds of thousands are perishing - the whole population is being exterminated - children, women and men. Out of three and a half million Jews, only one million to one million and a quarter are still alive while the slaughter goes on.'

They beg you to find means to save those few Polish Jews who may still have survived. As a man who directly represents the unfortunate Jewish population of Poland I convey to you as well as to President Roosevelt their last appeal for help.

SZMUL ZYGIELBOJM - Member of Polish National Council, London

## ZYGIELBOJM'S SUICIDE NOTE

I cannot be silent - I cannot live - while remnants of the Jewish people of Poland are dying in their desperate struggle. My comrades in the Warsaw Ghetto died guns in hand in the last heroic battle. It was not my destiny to die as they did, together with them, but I belong to them and in their mass graves.

By my death I wish to make the strongest possible protest against the passivity with which the world is looking on and permitting the extermination of my people.

I know how little human life is worth today, but as I was unable to do anything positive during my life, perhaps by my death I shall contribute to breaking down the indifference of those who may be able now - at the last moment - to rescue the few Polish Jews still alive from certain annihilation. My life belongs to the Jewish people of Poland, and I therefore give it to them gladly. I wish that the remaining handful of several millions of Polish Jews could live to see the liberation of a new world of freedom and justice and socialism. I believe that such a Poland will arise, and that such a world will come!

## A LAST LETTER TO HIS BROTHER

Dear Fayvel,  
Your letter dated 24 December has only just reached me...

I am tired and almost at the end of my tether as all of my work seems to be ineffective and just leaves me with an unbearable feeling of helplessness. The reports I get from home are getting worse by the day and here people are making beautiful speeches and often use the dreadful facts to promote their own party politics. They delude themselves...and draw attention away from the real issues at stake and the steps that should be taken... According to the latest news that reached me this week, some 300,000 Jews are still alive in Poland but the slaughter continues steadily. The Zionists are using the Jewish martyrdom as part of their fund-raising campaign...for Palestine.

It's been a long time since I had any news from my family. You can imagine what I lived through in November on receiving a detailed account of the slaughter in the Medem Sanatorium, knowing full well that Manya and Artek were amongst the inhabitants there...Some time later news reached me that Manya and Artek had escaped this particular slaughter but where they are now and whether they are still alive I don't know. I don't even dare to imagine about Rifke...I also don't dare enquire about Mother. By the way, there is no one left whom I could ask.

It is a great tragedy and I have a heavy heart. Those who were not there can cheat themselves and their conscience - but not me. My conscience is burdened. I was there with everybody. What right did I have to save myself. Why should I not have shared their fate? I can't even ease my conscience by pretending that the work I am doing...has saved anybody from this merciless extermination...

What do you say to the murder of Erlich and Alter? Job's sufferings have descended on us.

## REMEMBER SZMUL ZYGIELBOJM

Come to the unveiling of his memorial plaque  
1pm Sunday 12 May, Corner of Porchester  
Road and Porchester Square, London W2  
Organised by the Szmul Zygielbojm Memorial  
Committee and Westminster Council