

C. The Aid Money's Roundabout Paths

In a report from the Bund Centre in Warsaw (from July to mid-November 1943) sent to London, it is mentioned that contact was made with several camps in the Radom district, including in Częstochowa,

“... where Bund members, Motek Kuszniar, Lajb [sic Liber] Brenner and others are located. We are now receiving larger sums from abroad and transferring more money to the council's treasury (*Żegota*). We are also sending large grants to the camps in Radom, Kielce, **Częstochowa** and others.”¹

Any attempt to investigate and explain the ways in which the money was transferred, how it arrived at the camp, and the method of its distribution encounters many difficulties - those involved reveal little information, others do not speak at all.

Szymon Gelbard rightly writes:

“The underground was severe. That is why one group did not know about the other and, therefore, it is so difficult to get a complete picture of the intentions today, the attempts to carry it out, and the connections between the people. But there was no choice, because there were many scoundrels, who informed on their friends.”

The first renewed contacts were with the *Konieczpol* people, thanks to the Bund liaison Władka Międzyrzecka (better known as Władka Meed). The information and help which she provided them with had breathed new life into them and, from them, she learned how it was possible to contact Apparatebau.

In Częstochowa, she managed to send a letter to Cwi Wiernik (“Jacek”), who worked in Raków. From him, she received the address of Marian Brust, whose underground nickname was “Janek” and, for this reason, he is probably called “Jan” in some sources.² Marian worked as a foreman in the foundry at Raków and was an active member of the “Home Army” (AK), together with his wife Lucyna, known in the underground as “Mila”.

The Brusts had a bloody personal score with the Germans. Their son, born in 1921, who was also named Marian, was a member of the AK and participated in many operations against the occupier. In September 1943, he was incarcerated by the Schupo when, together with his friends, he erased the German addresses on the streets of the city.

During the interrogation, he was subjected to terrible torture and died in prison.³ His parents never found his body and, since then, they were involved in anti-Nazi activity.

¹ Bund Pisma do Londynu, Sprawozdanie za czas od 1/7 do 15/11/ 1943, YVA, 0-25/97

² Władka Meed, *On Both Sides of the Wall*, Beit Lohamei Hagethaot, 1972, p.304

³ Pietrzykowski, Cień swastyki, p.100

When a Jewish camp was established in Raków, Marian Brust joined the Żegota movement and established contacts with Jewish workers. In cooperation with Tzvi Wiernik and his friends, he organised the supply of food, medicine, clothing, documents and money. He also helped in the organising of escapes.

His assistant was his youngest son, Lucian, who, among other things, was engaged in preparing various German documents, with stamps and photos.⁴

According to Liber Brener and researcher Wila Orbach's version, Brust would hand over the letters and money he received from the liaison "Władka" into the hands of "Jacek". He would leave part of the money for the Jews of Raków and give the other part to the Pole, Wojciech Nabiałek, who also worked in Raków.

His nephew Eugeniusz, who worked in Apparatebau, passed the money and letters to Wiernik's wife, Natka, who worked in the factory.⁵ Liber Brener writes that the money for distribution was passed on by a Pole named Dziuba, who gave those funds to Helman, "who passed them on to the members of the underground."⁶

On 28th March 1944, disaster struck. Marian Brust was shot by the *Werkschutz*, while attempting to deliver the letters and money. Before being incarcerated, he managed to tear up and swallow some documents. When he was interrogated at the hospital, he revealed nothing. But all attempts to save Marian were in vain and he passed away.

For the Jewish underground, this was a very difficult loss of a noble man, who sacrificed his life for his Jewish comrades. Marian Brust and his wife Lucyna were both awarded the title of "Righteous Among the Nations". After him, the Polish foreman, Mędrzec, and his daughter committed to the task.⁷

The ties with ŻKN held up and no immediate danger was in sight. But, on 1st August 1944, the Polish uprising against the Germans broke out in Warsaw and the ties were cut off again.

At that time, as mentioned before, Jews from Skarżysko arrived in Apparatebau, among whom were Majer Wajsblum (Bnei Akiva) and the engineer Dawid Efrat (Poalei Zion). In Skarżysko, both were members of the public committee, which dealt with the distribution of funds that came from Warsaw.

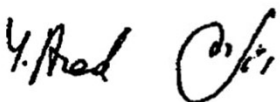
A heated debate broke out there about this matter, because Fajner and Berman were, at that time, putting large sums into the ŻKN coffers, and they demanded that the money be distributed in the camps to their party members according to the rate of their participation in the funds of the National Committee.

⁴ Testimony of Lucian Kempinski-Brust, YVA, 0-33/7236.

⁵ Orbach, *History of the Jews of Częstochowa*, p. 143.

⁶ Brener, *Resistance and Destruction*, p. 80.

⁷ Sztajnbrecher, YVA, 0.3/1351.

YAD VASHEM Har Hazikaron Jérusalem		יד ושם הר הזיכרון ירושלים
תעודה ATTESTATION Marian et Lucyna Brust		
שמו נפשו בכפם להצלת יהודים בחקופת השואה. AU PERIL DE SA VIE SAUVE DES JUIFS PENDANT L'HOLOCAUSTE		
נטע עץ בשדרת חסידי אומות העולם PLANTE UN ARBRE DANS L'ALLEE DES JUSTES		
ביום כב סיון תשמ"ד LE 22 Juin 1984		
בשם רשות הזיכרון יד ושם Pour l'Institut du Souvenir Yad Vashem	בשם הוועדה לציון חסידי אומות העולם Pour la Commission des Justes	
		
...ונחמי להם בבית' ובחומותי יד ושם... אשר לא יכרת. ישיבת ניו ...JE LEUR DONNERAI UNE PLACE ET UN NOM... QUI NE PERDRA PAS... 1984, 16		

Certificate on planting a tree

on the "Avenue of the Righteous Among Nations"

by Marian and Lucyna Brust

Both Skarżysko's people and the liaisons opposed the distribution of funds according to a party-based quota and, in the end, an individual distribution was established.⁸ The problem was also known in Apparatebau. Dawid Efrat writes:

"As soon as I arrived in Częstochowa, I made contact with underground circles which, until now, had also received money from Warsaw. Here the distribution is carried out according to the party quota.

"A joint *Komitet* (committee) was established - from Skarżysko, those who were (with Efrat at the head - F.K.) continued to serve, from Częstochowa, according to the party quota, were elected Motek Kuszniir (Bund), Abram Czarny, Izrael Szymonowicz (Poalei Zion Left), Rajek, a non-partisan, who was elected by ŻOB.

"The ŻOB sent the money from Warsaw to Częstochowa. Here, it was handed over to our trustee, and he would hand it over to us, according to the quota: 50% went to the people of Skarżysko and 50% to the people of Częstochowa."⁹

In the end, who would receive the aid money and according to what criteria would it be distributed?

As for the Bund, the formal person in charge of the distribution was Motek Kuszniir. He also helped others. In the "Big Ghetto", he lived with his brother Lajbek with the Cyttter family. The relations between the hosts and the tenants were very good and this was not forgotten.

When they learned that little Rut Cyttter (Sztern) was left alone, without parents and without support, they made sure to bring her aid. Tola Szyjek also received support thanks to an acquaintance with a Bund member.¹⁰ The main recipients were the Bund youth, who organised themselves into a collective. It was headed by the activists Eli Sztajnic, Leib Leber, Josel Krauze and the baker Bezalel Altman.

Brener writes very little about the activities of the various activists. The activity also included those, who were not members of the underground and was done through the mediation of kapos, who bought bread and distributed it to their people. The aid was also given in the form of loans – and all this "so that those in need would not know the source of the funds".¹¹ It is no wonder, that all those involved were afraid of informers.

But, on the other hand, various rumours about the aid money spread among the "masses". Hala Order testifies:

"I do not remember that I received any help in the camp. I had to manage on my own. I heard that there was mutual help in the camp, that people would receive money. I do not know from where and to whom they would give it".¹²

⁸ Karay, *Death Comes in Yellow*, p. 203.

⁹ Relacja Dawida Efrata, AŻIH, sygn. 301/2816

¹⁰ Testimony of Tola Szyjek, YVA, 0.3/5063.

¹¹ Brener, *Resistance and Destruction*, pp. 80, 64.

¹² Hala Order, YVA, 0-33/7152.

Szymon Gelbard reveals more:

“After the liquidation of the ghetto, Poalei Zion maintained its ties with Warsaw, with Adolf Berman. We would receive large sums of money every month for distribution. I don’t know exactly who would receive them, probably Szymonowicz. I never asked about it, because it was a matter of trust and secrecy.

“From time to time, we would receive underground newspapers, which we read in my carpentry shop. Szymonowicz, Dawid Jakubowicz and Aron and my brother were with me. They would also receive dollars, which they distributed according to the party quota. I think Bund received the most. The dollars were also distributed amongst the needy. I hardly took advantage of it. Once, Fela Hofmanowa, who handles aid matters, approached me and offered me a larger sum. I refused, because I thought there were those who needed help more than I did. I recommended that she provide aid to the carpenter Aron Rothschild.

“They did not conduct any special underground activity in HASAG, the purpose of the ties with Warsaw was to provide material aid and deliver information.”¹³

Another group, organised in the form of a collective, were former members of the ŻOB. Here, the distribution of money was supervised, first by Natka Wiernik, and after her by Abram Czarny. The distribution was made according to ŻOB membership. Sara Edelist would share the money she received with a friend and there was mutual help in general. She did not know about the existence of the Jewish underground in the camp, but she had heard about the connections with the Polish underground. The popular figure in the group was Różka Działowska, a PPR member.¹⁴

The communists were also organised into five “cells”, totalling more than thirty people. They also received their share of the aid money, but Sztajnbrecher does not provide any details about them. Neither does Majer Wajsblum, the leader of the Bnei Akiva group. Majer writes:

“In our group, there were ten members who helped each other. In Częstochowa, too, as in Skarżysko, Warsaw’s ties with the committee continued and they sent help from time to time. We had to be very careful about reports of the distribution of funds or mutual aid, because Jews would be handed over.”

And, in this matter, was the agreement on the fifty-fifty division of the aid money between Dawid Efrat and Motek Kuszniur fully implemented?

Among those who came from Skarżysko, the Jews of Kraków felt particularly deprived. Feliks Rogowski testifies:

“The person in charge of the public bathhouse in the camp was Brenner. His wife was a kapo in the department where my wife worked. They did not live in general barracks like other prisoners.

¹³ Gelbard, YVA, 0.3/1574, p. 33.

¹⁴ Sara Edelist, YVA, 0-33/6848 PPR (Polish Workers’ Party) included Communists, founded in 1944.

“A few weeks before the evacuation of the camp, Brener was searched by the SS man Michalski. During the search, several hundred dollars were found on Brener. As they told in the camp, this money was intended for providing aid to the prisoners. They, especially the prisoners from Skarżysko and Łódź, were outraged that, instead of distributing the money among the prisoners, Brener had hidden it.

“As I mentioned, the money was not found in a hiding place, but was simply placed in a bag in a suitcase. Neither I, nor my wife, nor any of my acquaintances in the camp ever received any help from Liber Brener. No one even knew that he had any amount of money intended for aid purposes. This was only known after the aforementioned search.”¹⁵

Among the testimonies known to me, no additional information was found regarding what was said in this quote.

Even those, who complained, admitted that they had done at least one thing for the public good. They are referring **to the underground kitchen**, which was run in complete secrecy. As mentioned, it was run by Zosia Weksztajn, Berek Wolkowicz from Łódź and others. It was now supported more by financial aid and less by donations. Those, who were saved thanks to the kitchen’s help, praise the people who were willing to help others at their own risk.

Over time, the kitchen also distributed additional rations to the disorganised youth. Abram Wirsztel mentions:

“I was going through a difficult typhus and I was powerless. I met Menachem Birenholz at the time and he gave me ten coupons for a secret kitchen, and I am alive thanks to that.”¹⁶

Autumn arrived. The news from the front forecast good things. But the underground movement had several failures - the Germans discovered and confiscated a collection of “escape devices”. In addition, a wave of arrests came - Wojciech and Eugeniusz Nubiętek were arrested. The letters found on them led to the arrest of “Jacek” Wiernik and his wife. Her position, as mentioned, was transferred to Abram Czarny. Even before this incident, on 11th October, a suspicious letter was seized from Dawid Efrat and he was also arrested. Fortunately for him, he was released after three days.

Despite all the troubles, the general mood improved.

With joy, the prisoners looked at the Germans running to the shelters. The opinion grew that, if Jews were brought from Skarżysko, it meant that they were still needed and the hope of survival rose. But, when the leaders of the underground turned to the members of the centre in Warsaw with the question of what the chances of survival were, they received an answer that the extermination policy had not changed and that, if it was not possible to organise an uprising, it is recommended for the people of the underground to flee into the forests.

¹⁵ Feliks Rogowski, YVA, 0.3/614

¹⁶ Testimony of Abram Wirsztel, YVA, 0.3/5855.

Ultimately, because of the principle of collective responsibility, it was decided that the underground activists would not flee and that the underground would not take any action against the Germans.¹⁷

¹⁷ Brener, *Resistance and Destruction*, p. 85.