

BRENER Liber (1897-1986), teacher, social activist, chronicler. He was born on 4th November 1897 in Turzysk (Wołyń), the son of Naftali and Chana. The Breners were a poor Hasidic family. His father was a *gabbai* (managing the court) of the son of the Turzysk *tzaddik*, reb Dodie, → Dawid Aron Twerski, later *tzaddik* in Żarki and Częstochowa. His mother owned a small stall selling flour.

Brener attended *chederim* and *yeshivot*. The outbreak of World War I forced the family to leave Turzysk and to settle in Zwiahle (Nowogród Wołyński) in the Zhytomyr oblast and in Szepetuka in the Zasław District, which is where he attended a Russian gimnazjum. He remained there until 1919.

From 1920/21, he settled permanently in Turzysk and, there, he organised a secular, seven-class Jewish school, in which he worked as a teacher until 1930. During that time, in Warsaw, he completed an introductory course in accounting and teaching (humanities and pedagogy). The school, established by Brener, was part of the CISZO [Central Jewish Schools Organisation], which was a movement with a resolute position. (It had an anti-Hebrew, anti-Zionist and anti-clerical attitude.) The “Polish” subjects were taught in Polish, while the others were taught in Yiddish. From the beginning, the dominant force within the CISZO was the Bund, the Jewish socialist party with an extremely secular worldview. His activity within the CISZO school brought Brener closer to the Bund.

Brener is described as one of the founders of Yiddish education in the Wołyń and Lublin region. One city, where he was active and where he worked, is supposed to have been Hrubieszów, a town in the Lublin region. According to another version, in 1930 or even 1929, Brener moved to Częstochowa “where his father, a clerk, lived”. At that time, and for a short time, the *Tzaddik* of Turzysk lived in Żarki and, soon after, moved to Częstochowa. The *Tzaddik* was, probably, accompanied by his *gabbai*, Naftali Brener.

The son joined his parents and, there, found a job in the I. L. Percec Jewish Elementary School in Częstochowa, at ul. Krótka 22. He worked there as a teacher of Yiddish. He also worked as a teacher of Yiddish literature at the *Kultur-Liga* association in Częstochowa - he worked there until 1933. From 1934, he worked with the Society for the Protection of the Health of the Jewish Population TOZ in Częstochowa, where he ran summer camps for the children of working-class families. In 1936, he headed the I.L. Percec School in Lublin. It was there that he was deprived of his rights as a teacher “for political appearances as a supporter of one front in the workers’ ranks in Poland”. He then returned to Częstochowa and to his work in TOZ. The outbreak of World

War II found him near Częstochowa. He returned to the city when travelling, once again, became possible.

He soon also returned to his social and political activities. His work in TOZ made it easier for Bund members to enter the underground. In the Częstochowa ghetto, he was one of those most active in the underground, contrary to what he wrote after the war - that he was never a fighter. Until the end of the existence of the "Big Ghetto", the Bund, like other Jewish parties and groupings, was reluctant to form military units in order to take on defence activities. Opposition activities were directed mainly against the Council of Elders (*Judenrat*), the legal Jewish representative to the German authorities and which was completely submissive towards those authorities.

Many doctors, nurses and young volunteers were recruited to work at TOZ. Outpatient clinics and doctors' offices were opened, where sick Jews were treated for free. Common rooms were created to feed children, provide them with care and offer them practical classes to learn basic subjects. (In Częstochowa, the Germans did not permit Jewish schools to operate.) The soul of many of these endeavours was Liber Brener.

The Bund members gathered around → Dr. Adam Wolberg, a former doctor in the Polish Army. He was seen as the head of a future combat organisation. However, the liquidation of the Częstochowa ghetto, in September 1942, surprised all the Jews., They were disorganised, defenceless and unable to resist. SO that everyone endeavoured to save themselves. Liber Brener was "selected" on ul. Krótka, because he had a certificate stating that he was a brush maker. Later, as a former activist and as an efficient organiser, he was employed by the *Judenrat*. He received a horse-drawn cart which he used to bring produce, from the former TOZ warehouses, to the "Metalurgija" kitchen. During these trips, he would witness selections. Sometimes, he would manage to smuggle someone past the police cordons.

The Jewish Fighting Organisation [*ŻOB - Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa*] was established inside the "Small Ghetto", in which the surviving Jewish workers were imprisoned. Bund members also participated in its creation. The meeting was held at the camp laundry at ul. Garncarska 56, where Brener worked. However, ŻOB split into party groupings and the left-wing Zionists took over command. Grenade production commenced and weapons were obtained in preparation to defend the "Small Ghetto" in the event of its liquidation. The Bund supported this option.

On 25th June 1943, the Germans began the liquidation of the “Small Ghetto”. Left alive were only those employed in the German armaments plants. Brener found himself in the HASAG Pelcery factory camp, working in the camp’s bathhouse and delousing room under the supervision of the engineer Horowicz. Contrary to reports written after the war, no underground activity was carried out inside the camp. The watchword was to keep alive as many people as possible in the organisation. Helping in this were funds received from the “*Żegota*” Council to Aid Jews and central party authorities in Warsaw. The funds were taken over by party representatives in the camps and then were divided amongst their members. Towards the end of the camp’s existence, Brener was searched by an SS-man, who found several hundred dollars, not hidden in a party hiding-place, but in a suitcase. This could not have been an arbitrary seizure of money, since it was not him, but → Motek Kuznir, who acted as the Bund representative in the aid distribution decisions.

On 15th January 1945, the Germans began the evacuation of the factory camps. Brener remained in the camp and was released at night on 16th [January]. Three days after leaving the camp, Brener met with J. Krauze, Herszel Prozer and Eliaz Sztajnic who, together with him, were active in the Bund underground committee. They decided to resume party activity in Częstochowa. When the party committee was formed, Liber Brener was elected as its chairman.

He was also involved in the creation of the *Okręgowy Komitet Żydowski* [District Jewish Committee] in Częstochowa. Its task was to ensure a basic existence for the released Jewish prisoners, as well as for those Jews who had survived the occupation in hiding. Brener was elected as chairman of this committee. In this role, he proved himself to be an experienced social and political activist. One of the tasks was to take care of the damaged Jewish cemetery and to rebuild the wall around it.

Brener and his companions also considered as to how to commemorate the tragic history. They took over the files of the German-created *Judenrat* from the former German administrative premises. They intended to write a historical monograph. Liber Brener was the best prepared for this task. All the more so as he was soon to become a member of the Bund Central Committee in Poland and was one of those most active in the Historical Commission of the Central Jewish Committee in Poland (later transformed into the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw). Liber Brener was an ideological and active opponent of Zionism. He believed in the possibility of creating Jewish life in Poland and, after the Holocaust, he remained in Poland with a group of intellectuals.

The Communist Party soon forced the liquidation of other political parties and their ‘unification’ into the Polish United Workers’ Party. Brener took no active part in this process and went to work for the Social-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland [TSKŻ]. With his family, he moved permanently to Warsaw. It was probably there, at the Jewish Historical Institute, that he wrote the final version of the wartime history of the Częstochowa Jewish community. He gave it the title *Umkum un widersztand in czenstochower geto*. [*Fighting and Martyrdom in the Częstochowa Ghetto*]. The book appeared in 1950 or early 1951.

Brener remained the author of one book. Articles published later for the “Biuletyn ŻIH”, which were only translations of and amendments to chapters of his monograph were made, quite ineptly, by someone else. This attempt to write a short history of the Częstochowa Jewish community - *Di antsztajung fun jidisn jiszew in Czenstochow 1700–1939* - was unsuccessful and showed a lack of historiographic skills, unfamiliarity with the techniques and a lack of criticism. He could only write about the times and events known to him.

With time, Brener went to work for the *Yiddish-Buch* publishing house in Warsaw. He was the editor of books published, in Yiddish, for schools and adult readers. The party’s antisemitic campaign in 1967 and 1968 forced Brener to leave Poland for Israel. There, he was received very badly. He worked as a bookkeeper. As one of the authors, he also participated in the preparation of the *Yizkor Book* of his hometown of Turzysk. He was also co-editor of the *Brzesko Yizkor Book*.

In 1986, Brener died in an aged care home, a few months after the death of his wife Jadwiga née Szajn (1909 Częstochowa - 1986?). She graduated from the famous seminary in Wilno with a diploma as a teacher in Jewish schools. During the occupation, she gave birth to a daughter Liliana, whom she hid with the Joresz Polish family. After the war, the Breners regained their daughter. Later, they had a second daughter, Aneta, married name Chęcińska.

W. Paszkowski, *Kronikarze częstochowskiego getta*, “Rocznik Muzeum Częstochowskiego” 2014, pp. 68–81. - Brener, *Widersztand*, pp. 46, 52, 53, 54, 114; *Czenstochower Jidn*, pp. XIII–XIV; *Pinkas ha-kehila Trisk. Sefer izkor*, ed. Natan Liwneh, Tel Awiw 1975, pp. 353–354. - http://www.turisk.org/en_bio_brenner.php [accessed 10th November 2014]. – TSKŻ Archives in Warsaw, L. Brener’s autobiography.

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