

Rajzla and Mojsze Berkensztadt

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Rajzla was born about 1902* in Częstochowa, her husband Mojsze - in around 1894, in a small community near the city. Both, as well as their two children, were annihilated by the Nazis during the Second World War,.

In 1912, when in a loft room in the poor streets of Częstochowa an illegal general meeting of leather workers was held, Mojsze Berkensztadt was already among its organisers. (He was a maker of shoe uppers).

During the First World War, they both joined the movement which concentrated around the SS Party, and later, the *Vereinigte*. In 1922, when *Vereinigte* together with Dr Bolesław Drobner's group formed the Independent Socialist Labour Party, they both, being already husband and wife, switched to the Bund, where they held leading positions - Mojsze as leader and secretary of the Bundist Organisation in Częstochowa [and] Rajzla as the Medem Library's librarian.

Mojsze Berkensztadt was the child of poor parents. In his eyes, the great light of joy of a young and renewed Jewish life burned, which he and hundreds of others like him symbolised and embodied. His demeanour was marked by simplicity and gentleness. Never did the calmness of his face [nor] the smile on his lips leave him.



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She, Rajzla (née Fajertag) was a child of the "Meat-market Street", a daughter of Nuta the butcher, but she was like a wonder in her surroundings - as if not from this earth at all. She lived in a world of books. She found her redemption in the Jewish Workers' Movement and in the Jewish Workers' School, in particular. She was amongst the first group of Jewish girls to become Fröbelian Children's Home teachers and she was one of the founders of the I.L. Peretz Children's Home in Częstochowa. The Jewish child and this school became the new content of her life.

Afterwards, she became a mother herself and her first son, Ajzik, was educated and grew up in this school which she had created with such motherly devotion. A second child arrived. Mojsze and Rajzla continued serving their ideals and working for the movement with extraordinary loyalty.

Another World War ensued. The German army of murderers occupied Częstochowa. On 6th June 1941, the Gestapo arrested the couple in connection with the downfall of Maria Szczęsna, a Polish messenger for the Central Committee of the underground Bund. What they had to endure at the Gestapo was told later by Comrade M. Kuszniur, who was also detained in connection to that same matter and who witnessed the tortures during the interrogation. He recounted:

The worst pain was for Comrade Rajzla Berkensztadt, when the Gestapo officers crushed her breasts in the door of a cupboard. I [myself] was placed, tied up, with my head under a tap and, every second, a drop of water dripped onto the middle of my head. They did the same

* [TN: She was born on 4th May 1899, according to the official records.]

with Comrade Berkensztadt. In this manner, they tormented us from nine in the morning to late in the evening.

After various efforts, Rajzla was successfully torn out of the Gestapo's clutches, whereas her husband was sent, swollen and with ruined kidneys, to Oświęcim, where he was killed. Rajzla later shared the fate of the large majority of Częstochowa Jews.