

Dr B. Orenstein

The Activity of the *Częstochower Landsmannschaft* in Montreal*

1) Two Phases

The *Częstochower Landsmannschaft* in Montreal has had two distinct phases - the first, up to 1947 and - the second, from 1947 [till now, during] which [we] shall hopefully [continue] leading fruitful activity for long years.

The first phase began on 16th December 1945, when the *Częstochower Landsmannschaft* was organised by longstanding residents of Montreal, who had a profound sentiment for their city which had been destroyed [and who wished] to succour the *Surviving Remnant*. The name of the *Landsmannschaft* then was the "Czenstochover Regional Aid Society in Montreal". Over the course of two years, this Aid Society held frequent gatherings, collected money and [other] things, conducted a memorial function and participated in the operation to publish the book *Czenstochover Yidn* in New York.

With the stream of immigration to Canada, a many of our *landsleit* arrived who, in their hearts, carried the pain of their *Częstochower landsleit*, together with a reverent awe for the annihilated, sacred ones and martyrs. The Society's entire work was reorganised and it received the name of the "Czenstochover Society of Montreal". The longstanding *Częstochower* residents in Montreal, who had founded the Aid Society, became what one calls "seniors", who assist with advice and financial means, but they handed the leadership over to the newly-arrived.

2) The *Landsmannschaft's* Basic Principles

The basic principles of the *Landsmannschaft* are:

- to hold an annual *Yuhrzeit* function honouring the heroes and martyrs of *Częstochowa*;
- to send aid to *landsleit* in the State of Israel and other countries;
- to maintain contact with all the *Częstochower* institutions throughout the world;
- to immortalise the history of *Częstochowa* Jewry;
- to maintain familiar and friendly contact with the members of the *Landsmannschaft*, and
- [to do all such] that the *Landsmannschaft* should constitute a symbol and a spiritual centre of the once kaleidoscopic Jewish community in *Częstochowa*.

3) Ceremonies

Each Memorial Service, which the *Landsmannschaft*, arranges includes three parts:

- the first - a religious one, which consists of lighting candles. A cantor [then] recites [E/] *Moleh* [*Rachamim*^{*1}] and *Kaddish*, and a eulogy is delivered by a rabbi - this already belongs

* [TN: See p.10 of "Czenstochover Landsmannschaft of Montreal," the 418-page book which the author, Benjamin Orenstein, published in 1966 regarding the *Częstochowa* organisation in Montreal, and other prominent institutions.]

^{*1} [TN: "God Full of Mercy," a prayer said for the souls of the departed.]

to the *chazokeh*^{*2} of the *Częstochower landsmann*, Rabbi Benjamin Borzykowski, who is Dean of the *Meor HaG'olah* [Light of the Exile] Yeshiva^{*3}.

- the second part consists of two lectures. One encompasses the Destruction and the second – the resistance and fight of *Częstochowa* Jewry during the Nazi period.
- the third [involves] recitations and the singing of ghetto songs.

The ceremony always closes with the singing of the [Jewish] Partisan's Anthem^{*4}.

Experience has shown that this manner of organising a programme is of great importance and is very successful. It would be advisable that every *Częstochower landsmannschaft* in the world take this programme up as the content of all the Memorial Services. It also should be mentioned that no appeals or fundraisers are conducted during such ceremonies, due to the sanctity of the whole event. An exception was made and this was a flower at the entrance for a voluntary fee. A sign hangs [stating] "*Mazkir-neshumes-gelt*" [Money for the Commemoration of Souls], and each one puts, onto an open plate, as much as he wishes. The Treasurer, with his assistants, sits at the little table by the open plate.



Executive of the Częstochower Landsmannschaft in Montreal

First row, seated (L-R): B. Ickowicz - Vice-Chairman; Sz. Waga - Chairman; Bernard Fajtek - guest from Chicago; J. Silver- President; Dr B. Orenstein - General Secretary; L. Buchwalter - Organisation.
Second row, standing (L-R): Sz. Lerner— Organisation; L. Jakubowicz - Assistant Secretary; Sz. Zilberberg - Functions; J. Konarski - Secretary; M. Frydlander - Functions; H. Klajn - Treasurer; Herszl Kowicz - Telephone Communications

4) Relief Operations

The relief operations are carried out by sending money certificates, parcels of food and clothing to *landsleit* in Poland and in Israel. The fact is that, every year, the number of *Częstochower landsleit* in Poland decreases, mainly due to the fact that, with every year, Jewish life there is extinguished [even] further. Therefore, the majority of the aid is sent to Israel.

The *Częstochower Landsmannschaft* in Montreal has, over the course of its existence, sent one-hundred or more certificates or parcels a year. It was therefore necessary to consider the form of aid. An entire array of discussions has taken place surrounding this question and the *Landsmannschaft* has even sent out a survey to the majority of the *landsleit* regarding this matter. The question is, namely, whether the relief operations should be in the form of constructive aid or personal support.

What is meant by "constructive aid" is that all *Częstochower landsmannschaften* and societies should generate a decent sum and establish a loans fund in Israel, where *landsleit* will be able to borrow money, without interest, for constructive aid and this money will always be like a permanent capital.

^{*2} [TN: Halachic status of permanence that is established when an event repeats itself three times.]

^{*3} [TN: The yeshiva was founded in Rome in the aftermath of the Holocaust, to provide a religious educational framework for young orthodox survivors.]

^{*4} [TN: "Zog nit keyn mol" ("Never Say"); composed by Hirsch Glick in 1943, in the Wilno Ghetto.]

Individual aid consists of sending money certificates or parcels [directly] to *landsleit*.

It is self-evident that the plan of constructive aid must be carried out collectively by all the societies in the American continent. Life, however, is stronger than any hypothetical contingency and, for the time being, the *Landsmannschaft* is being pelted with masses of letters concerning individual support. Practice has shown that all forms of individual support come to a proper fruition and this is confirmed by the hundreds of letters which the *Landsmannschaft* receives. One *landsmann*, for instance, who received a package of clothing for his children, wrote:

Haifa, 10th June 1957.

Esteemed Cześćochower Landsmannschaft, goodhearted brothers and sisters,

May you be blessed with everything which is good. When I received your package, a ray of fortune arrived. You cannot imagine the joy of the children and my wife. I can write to you that I had never thought that my children would be so well clothed, in these times when everything is so expensive. Once more, I thank you for the package and you should know that you have fulfilled a great mitzvah, because my children were going about naked.

Remain in good health, together with your families,

With great respect for you..."

An excerpt from a letter from a *landsmann*, who received a cheque:

10th June 1957.

Dear Cześćochower landsleit,

*I have received your letter with the cheque, for which my dear family and I thank you very heartily [and] for your devotion towards us, [the] Cześćochower landsleit who are in Israel. Dear friends, we know that a sack with holes cannot be filled - but this gift **has a very great significance** for us.*

Apart from suchlike letters of a personal character, the *Landsmannschaft* also receives countless letters of a communal character, which express bitterness and which protest against this form of individual aid. A Cześćochower *landsmann*, a paediatrician, writes:

*I've not just had a bellyful of this 'parcel system' - I'm utterly fed up with it! We cannot be permanent scroungers, beggars, etc. Were our landsleit abroad willing to cease sending packages (they surely do this with all their naïve hearts), this would salvage our communal morale. You remember, after all, how Bialik ends his poem "In the City of Slaughter" - "And as you have been wretched, so are you wretched..."^{*1}*

In another letter, which is also of a social character, a *landsmann* writes a thank-you for a cheque received. The letter reads:

^{*1} [TN: Viz. once a beggar, always a beggar.]

Tel-Aviv, 7th April 1957.

Dear friends, Cześćochower landsleite,

I was very touched when I received your letter, especially seeing the picture of the Cześćochowa Synagogue on the letterhead. You deserve great credit for this fine idea, [seeing as how] it serves as a symbol of the bygone life in our common hometown. Perhaps it is no coincidence at all that it was you - the Canadian landsleit - who hit upon this idea. It corresponds fully with your activity, which time has not made you forget. Heartfelt thanks for the cheque you have enclosed. I wish all the Cześćochower landsleit in Canada a happy Pesach.

Letters from *landsmann* Dawid Koniecpoler, from Holon (Israel), are of a very special character. He does not write, Heaven forbid, about aid - he does not want it, nor need it. He wrote that he had noted down more than one-hundred names of bygone communal activists of the destroyed city of Cześćochowa. It is understood that his letter aroused great interest in the *Landsmannschaft* and, after an exchange of letters, he writes in a letter dated Holon, 18th May 1957, the following:

I have received your important letter, dated 14th April, for which I thank you heartily. I am particularly pleased that, as you write, my letter was read aloud at a plenary meeting of the Executive. Memories surface of the decades of vigorous political and social work and we, once, more re-live our dark tragedy. Everything has been torn out almost by the roots. It is my deep conviction that it is very good that, here and there, [material] is noted down and printed, which will enable the future historian of our epoch to compile the most tragic chapter of our history.

These few excerpts characterise the diverse standpoints and interests of the *landsleit* in the State of Israel and, namely, to engage in individual relief, or to not do so. Dawid Koniecpoler's standpoint is that it is more relevant to engage in immortalising the history of Cześćochowa Jewry. The *Cześćochower Landsmannschaft's* opinion is that the *Cześćochower* societies must coordinate their activity for constructive aid and, concurrently in exceptional cases, conduct individual relief. The *Cześćochower Landsmannschaft* in Montreal is in complete agreement with Flw. Dawid Koniecpoler's opinion, as one of the tasks of the activities.

5) Financial Means

How does the *Landsmannschaft* acquire financial means? A system of charging membership fees has been implemented. [Additional] revenue comes from a one-off campaign called "*Mo'os Chittin*,^{*2}" which is conducted during the time between *Purim* and *Pesach*. Every year a raffle is held. The Women's Division conducts a large-scale "money shower" and a ball celebrating the liberation of the concentration camps and, as mentioned above, [funds come] from the *Mazkir-neshumes-gelt* at the entrance to the Memorial Services.

6) Communal Activities

The *Cześćochower Landsmannschaft* in Montreal has no official representative in [local] social institutions, but members of the Executive are [also] members of an entire array of institutions and, consequently, they are indirect representatives of the *Cześćochower Landsmannschaft*. These

^{*2} [TN: "Wheat Money," or relief for the poor with which to purchase the necessities for Passover.]

institutions are the Canadian Jewish Congress, *Va'ad Ha'Ir*^{*3} in Montreal, the Jewish People's Library, *Histadrut*, the Workers Committee and and others.

The Executive arranges special meeting sessions for arriving guests, such as, for instance, Mrs Hela Sznur from Israel (held on 11th March 1956), Flw Raphael Federman (29th July 1956), Flw Rajzman from Israel and Flw Bernard Fajtek from Chicago (15th March 1957), as well as many others. Welcoming ceremonies are held in honour of newly-arrived *landsleit* and farewell evenings also such as, for example, a very impressive going-away party for Flw and Mrs Kuba Goldberg, upon their travelling away to New York (held on 17th November 1957) and many others.

The Executive also takes part in the *landsleit's* festive occasions, such as weddings, circumcisions, graduations, etc. Because Flw Wolf Gliksman from Philadelphia had been in Montreal and had participated in a meeting of the Executive, he was accordingly congratulated in the *Keneder Odler* [Canadian Eagle (Yiddish newspaper)] upon receiving his PhD degree. (This was printed in the Friday issue of 21st June 1957). Congratulatory telegrams and letters are sent on various occasions.

A completely separate chapter are the letters of condolence and participation in funerals.

7) Losses

Over the course of the last few years, the *Częstochower Landsmannschaft* in Montreal has suffered the painful losses of still young, active Executive members - newcomers, who had passed through the tortures of the Nazi hell and who departed prematurely from this world, thus increasing the pantheon of annihilated victims of the Nazis. They are Szlojme Dilewski z''l, Josef Zilberberg z''l, as well as Rajnherc, Rubinski and Chaim Klajman z''l. **May their memories be eternal.**

8) Publications

The publications of the Executive members of the *Częstochower Landsmannschaft* in Montreal are listed in Dr Phillip Friedman's very detailed and extremely important bibliographical work in this book, *Czenstochov* – it is therefore unnecessary to enumerate them once again. However, the Executive is planning to publish a special souvenir-book, which will primarily encompass the history of the Montreal *Landsmannschaft* and an entire array of other works [also]. (* This work has no pretensions of constituting a detailed history, even though it was written based on minutes and an extensive correspondence, because this article is only a report - and especially when dealing with the first phase, with the [Society's] foundation. Flw Szlomo Waga is in possession of those archival documents which have a bearing on this matter. The history of the *Landsmannschaft* [contains] accurate portrayals of the founders of the *Landsmannschaft* with their characteristics, as well as [of] all the officials during the entire period - biographic outlines of the deceased [and] speeches which were delivered at the ceremonies and eulogies. Flw Szlomo Waga and his wife are currently on their trip to Israel and this report was written in his absence. He has also been occupied with the results of the survey.

The decision to publish a souvenir-book was unanimously approved at a plenary session held on 1st February 1957, on the basis that the Executive does not see, in the second generation, viz. the children of the newly-arrived, any activities of a continuation as a *landsmannschaft* - the Executive therefore wishes to leave behind a printed historical document of its activities. This same souvenir-

^{*3} [TN: Heb. City Council; the Jewish Community Council of Montreal.]

* [TN: It is apparent from the context that the section inside parentheses was added once the original article had been already submitted, by which time the text in question had already been published.]

book, of thirty-two pages, was published in the spring of 1958, under the title “*Częstochower Landsmannschaft*,” on the occasion of the anniversary of two books and for the journey of Szlomo Waga to Israel.)

9) The Executive of the *Częstochower Landsmannschaft* in 1957

President: Ch. Silver
Chairman: Sz. Waga
Vice-President: B. Ickowicz
General Secretary: Dr B. Orenstein
Assistant Secretary: L. Jakubowicz
Relief Secretary: Tz. Konarski
Treasurer: H. Klein

Board of Directors:

L. Buchwalter - undertakings [i.e., functions]
M. Frydlender - undertakings
M. Herszlikowicz - Telephonic Connections
S. Lerner - Campaign Manager
B. Fefer - Campaign Manager
S. Silver - Controller
H. Rozenblum Controller

Presidium of the Ladies Auxiliary:

Mrs S. Ickowicz
Mrs M. Zilberberg
Mrs R. Waga

10) The Book of Merit

The *Częstochower Landsmannschaft* in Montreal keeps a special book, in which are inscribed the names of those to whom material aid is sent and also the response [thereof]. This book has columns: name, surname, on what date the letter was received, when it was sent, and what was sent – and also the response. The handling of this book is considered an extremely prestigious office, which is carried out very conscientiously by Mrs S. Ickowicz. As this position requires specific qualifications which Mrs S. Ickowicz possesses, this office has therefore become a *chazokeh* [viz. her permanent position].

Taking into account that all the broad, expansive activities mentioned are conducted without any administrative allocations, meetings take place in private homes, where the wives of the *landsleit* not only receive the Executive in a welcoming manner, but also serve rather fine refreshments. Each time, stronger ties of familiarity and a friendly attitude are woven towards the activities of the *Landsmannschaft*. It is therefore to be hoped that the *Landsmannschaft* in Montreal will lead its social-cultural and relief work for our *landsleit* in the State of Israel for [many] long years.