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## People and Times (Częstochowa Memoirs)

### A



I arrived in Częstochowa in the spring of 1905 and started working in Markusfeld's *Malarnia* [wallpaper, coloured paper and paint factory]. I had been shown favour by the renowned social activist Sz. Chajutin. Chajutin was the factory's sales representative and he would sell wallpaper and coloured paper in the furthest corners of great Russia.

*Malarnia* was already then a gigantic factory with several hundred employees, managed by Henryk's younger brother Józef. A couple of dozen Jewish workers from the olden days were employed in handicraft. They rested on *Shabbes* and worked on Sundays. Henryk Markusfeld protected them.

The most prominent personnel in the factory, who also played a certain role in community life, were Stanisław Herc, Wajzer, Jan Pruszycki and Adolf Bryl.

The latter was one of the theoreticians of the SDKPL [Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy; Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania]. He had great influence over Częstochowa's assimilationist intelligentsia. Contrary to the others, he did not later become a communist. Those same elements later established a Polish library named for him.

The bookkeeping for another of Markusfeld's factories - the *Klejarnia* [glue factory] - was also conducted at *Malarnia*'s office. Hela Birman, later Hela Gurski, worked there as an accountant. She was, as they say in America, the "sweetheart" of SS in those times. I was her secret admirer.

I received my first indoctrination as a SS supporter in Wilczyński's building, at ul. Krótka 21. Dawid Richter ran his box factory there. His two children, Kopl and Róża, were ardent SS advocates. Chaim'I Litwak also ran a small factory there in the building. His brother-in-law, a perpetually blackened labourer in a black shirt, was my first agitator.

Another building with which I became familiar at the time was on the corner of ul. Ogrodowa and the *Nowy Rynek*. Jakub Icek Zarnowiecki lived there with his mother and sister. We remained comrades and friends until I left them in 1926.

Two of my closest friends were Moniek Rotszyld (Stanisław Herc's cousin, who worked in the counting-room in *Malarnia*) and Gutek Borsztajn from Zawiercie. Moniek Rotszyld was, at the beginning, a supporter of SS, despite being completely assimilated. He later joined the Social Democrats and remained thus all his life. He and his wife, Leosia Frymorgen (the soloist at *Lira*), with their two daughters and grandchildren, are in America and we still recall the love of our youth.

The second, Gutek Borsztajn from Zawiercie, was employed in the counting-room of Landau's celluloid factory where, at the time, the great fire took place in which numerous Jewish girls were killed. This was Częstochowa's greatest tragedy during that period.

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\* [TN: The author himself spelt his name Alkona Chrobolovsky once in the US, but it was originally Elkune (Kune) Chrobołowski.]

[Then] came the numbered days of the "Constitution" [viz. the October Manifesto], followed by the long [1905-6] winter in a state of war [viz. martial law] and murky reactionism and, once again, [came] the spring. My parents moved from Zawiercie to Częstochowa. Our house was on ul. Spadek. It soon became the Party's headquarters. My sister Fanny cooked for and fed the intellectuals from other cities who lodged with us.

In the summertime, we had Sz. Chajutin's spacious house at our disposal, when Chajutin and his household would travel to Ostrów. There, we housed the female members who came to Częstochowa from other cities.

I belonged to the circle of half-intellectuals, along with Herszl Gotajner, Moryc Jarecki, Katz, Skowronek (he worked at the lithograph in *Malarnia*), Kuba Goldberg and many others.

As on many others, Comrade Aron [Singalowsky's] dramatic speeches at the mass demonstrations had the strongest effect on me. He gave one of his most vigorous addresses at the cemetery, at the funeral of the six victims from Landau's celluloid factory. He comforted us then with the faith that we, the Socialists, now persecuted, would become, in the future, the rulers of the world. I, like thousands of other people, later preached the same ideal. Nowadays, I am convinced that every idea that emerges on this earth, which entails "world domination", is of the greatest peril for the world.

Comrade "Aleksander" (Leibisch Lehrer [from Mogilev]) also influenced us greatly. With his head of curly, black-brown hair, his light-brown eyes and his polished voice, he was a magnetic force. He was already then a good instructor and a capable organiser. Under his guidance, in the summer of 1906, numerous professions were organised, which had, until then, not been touched by the Workers' Movement.

Once, sitting with a self-defence group in a house on the *Stary Rynek*, I met Comrade Mendel Szuchter for the first time. He had then just returned from London. So as not to just idle the time away, he gave the group a talk on Anarchism and Social Democracy.

At the end of summer, the organisation appointed me the librarian of the illegal library in Berliner's building on ul. Ogrodowa. The library consisted of a large chest of books, mainly scientific and of *belles-lettres*, which had just been purchased from the Jewish book dealers in Warsaw. I was assisted by Aleksander Broniatowski, then a medical student. He later practised as a physician in Bulgaria, where he died at a young age.

There was no longer a [labour] exchange then, but the [workers'] circles operated intensively. We used to gather in Wolberg's garden on the First Aleja and, later, at Kohn's confectionery, in a courtyard on the Second Aleja. Boys and girls began romancing and [the number of] couples increased.

After the summer, I left Częstochowa to present myself at the recruitment office in the Grodno *gubernia*, where our origins lay. In Białystok, I became acquainted with, the still very young, Jacob Pat, who had already published a section in *Neuer Weg* [New Way]. Dr Józef Kruk later told me that Pat was one of the best Yiddish stylists.

In 1909, I came to Częstochowa as a Russian soldier on leave. There was no longer any Revolutionary Movement. Instead, I found many male and female comrades at the cinema. The only social point in Częstochowa was the newly-organised *Lira*, on the Second Aleja, led by Hebraists and Assimilationists. When I visited there once, the manager, Zelikowicz, asked me to leave the hall,

because soldiers were not allowed. I also had a nasty incident with an officer at the cinema. Luckily, Comrade Maks Dankowicz, who knew the officer, saved me from trouble that time.

It was precisely then, that comrade Mendel Szuchter was deported to Siberia. At the station, the gendarmes did not allow anyone to approach him. Szajndla Pakuła, later Szuchter, asked me to hand him three roubles for the road. I freely marched through the ring of gendarmes and soldiers and said farewell to Mendel Szuchter. He did not take the money.

In the winter of 1911, I was released from the military and returned to Częstochowa. Through the efforts of our friends Szmerl and Berta Chajutin, I was once more engaged as a labourer in *Malarnia*. But it was already a completely different factory than in 1905-1906. There was no longer any importance [for me] in being a worker. It was gloomier than in the barracks, where I had been a successful writer and had many privileges. In the evenings, we would sometimes meet up with Jakub Goldsztajn - the only one among the group of intellectuals who had remained in Częstochowa - and with Madzia Zalcman. We would drink tea at Błaszczynski's café. Madzia, who later became "the mother of the Częstochowa Fröbelian [teachers]", was one of the most intelligent girls in Częstochowa. But, due to her disabled face, her life was a great tragedy. She died prematurely and, fortunately for her, before the Hitler destruction.

At the end of the winter of 1911, [things] began to stir at the [*Lira*] Literary Society and life became more cheerful. Meetings, entertainments, performances, lectures, discussions and many, many new friends, such as Mojsze Cieszyński, Jankel Kopiński, Wolf Lewenhof, Dawid Borzykowski, Chaim Dawidowicz, Szyferblat, Jancze [Jankiel] Pakuła, Dora Szacher, Cesia Szajn, Rotbard and Sara Awner. Raphael Federman was already a member of SS and he headed the SS group remaining in Częstochowa. Afterwards, Jakub Rozenberg and his wife arrived and I became close friends with Józef Aronowicz (teacher in a state school), Izraïl Sobol, Róża Kopinski, Aron Percec and "Perecowa" [viz. Mrs Percec].

Then came the *Lira* period. The "men and women of letters" (members of the Literary Society), who were mostly socialists from various parties, met with the Assimilationists and Zionists. And, although we waged a fierce battle against the former and argued with the "*Chovevim*" ([*Agudat*] *Chovevei Sfat Ever* [Society of Lovers of the Hebrew Language]), whose leader was Leon Kopiński – nevertheless, one "Great Ideal" united us all - **Youth**. We were all young men and women and we enjoyed the joy of life in a social manner.

*Lira's* patron was Henryk Markusfeld, and, as long as he gave enough money, everything was good. Except [with] his hundreds of workers in the factories, he held by the motto "Live and let live" and it pleased him that the youth spent time at his *Lira*. His *Lira* manager was Józefowicz, an insurance agent who, with his broad moustache, resembled a Polish nobleman. The "men of letters" waged a war against him, until he was dismissed.

Heniek Szmulewicz, Gucia Bem and Jancze Jarecki (who were later married), Lala Szpigelman, Gucia Sztajnic, Nuta Kromołowski, Markus Herszlikowicz and I had our own little table in a corner by the cooker. In the free evenings, we drank tea there, which Bornsztajn served. We chatted and then strolled on the *deptak* (the promenade in the Second Aleja).

We had our great festivities, such as a lecture by I.L. Peretz, [at] the inauguration of the library, which was taken over from the [Częstochowa branch of The Jewish] Literary Society [of St. Petersburg] which had been closed down. At the banquet that was held in Peretz's honour, champagne was drunk, but the enthusiasm was stronger than the best wine. The youth sat at a

separate table and sang. Raphael Federman led the singing. He had just brought a new song from Kraków - Morris Rosenfeld's *With the Wanderer's Staff*:

<i>"With the wanderer's staff in hand,</i>	<i>Always woe, woe, woe,</i>
<i>Without a home and without a land,</i>	<i>Always go, go, go...</i>
<i>Without a saviour, without a friend,</i>	<i>Always walk, walk, walk,</i>
<i>Without a tomorrow, without a today.</i>	<i>While there is still strength...</i>

But this was just a song. In the hall with Peretz, with the festive crowd in the greatest ecstasy over the greetings [speeches], it was a true *Yom-tov* [holiday].

One summer night, we went to a field behind the city to watch the falling of a comet. The group comprised Federman with his inseparable "quartet" [viz. ensemble] - himself, Dorka Szacher, Jancze Pakuła, Leizer Berkowicz, Fajtel Szmulewicz, Gradon, and others. All night long, we lay on the moist grass under the starry sky, singing:

*The moon is shining, the stars are bright,  
The night sleeps over mountains and valleys,  
The little old book lies open before me,  
I read it and read it a thousand times... and so on.*

And here a gang of us young ones – Jankiel, Moryc, Róża Kopinski, Izraïl Sobol, Mojsze Goldberg, the Oderbergs, Wajdenfeld, and many more – got together, and travelled out to Złoty Potok. Gutek Bornsztajn from Zawiercie also came. We hiked about in the mountains two days and two nights, and we sang. The youth was singing out from within ourselves. Moryc Kopinski was the conductor.

We sang a never-ending song [in Russian]:

*"The priest had a dog – he loved it;  
It ate a piece of meat – he killed it.  
In the ground he buried it,  
And an inscription he wrote,  
THAT: [The priest had a dog, etc.]"*

And the same over and over again, endlessly. Or [this one]:

*"A goy goes into the pub, into the pub,  
He drinks a glass of wine, a glass of wine,  
Oy, a drunk is the goy,  
He is a drunk, he has to have a drink,  
Because he is a goy.*

*A Jew goes into the study-hall,  
He takes in a bit of holiness..." and so on.*

One of our pastimes was going boating in the evenings on the Warta. The group consisted mainly of Herszle Fajwlowicz, Dawid Borzykowski, Jankiel and Róża Kopinski, the red-haired Oderberg [and] Nuta Kromołowski. The Warta was obstructed by fences and with a bridge. The boat often capsized and we got a bit of a soaking.



The *Częstochower Reklamen-blatt* [Advertisements Page] began appearing. I, Jakub Rozenberg, Mojsze Ceszynski [and] Herszle Fajwlowicz stood at the cradle of the Jewish press in Częstochowa. The only one who could form a good sentence and correct the newspaper was Herszle. But, we gradually learned to write a good Yiddish for the times. Later, Raphael Federman arrived. Afterwards, when it had already become a daily called "*Częstochower Tageblatt*" [Cz. Daily], J. Abramson came from Łódź and took over the editorship.

My first success, a short article which made an impression among the youth, was titled "*Before the Grave*". It was about a young Częstochowa lad, M. Szczekacz, who had poisoned himself because his highborn parents were opposed to his love with a girl of a lowlier lineage. My article was both a protest against suicide for reasons of love and [also] an expression of deep regret that a young bachelor had, unopposed, so easily given himself over to Death and had not fought for his love. This made a strong impression on the youth because, like everywhere [else], in Częstochowa there were, at the time, many such instances of dramatic love - a tailor's apprentice fell hopelessly in love with his master's daughter. My friend Heniek Szmulewicz, whose father was a tinsmith, was in love with the highborn Gucia Bem. Her parents, naturally, were opposed to the match, although Heniek and Gucia did eventually get married. There were many similar cases in those romantic years.

The second article that made an impression was a protest against conversion [to Christianity]. It was after the Jews in Warsaw, unwilling to vote for the *Endecja* [National Democratic Party] candidate, helped elect the Polish Labour's Jagiello. Antisemitism then spread and intensified. In Wieluń, a *shtetl* not far from Częstochowa, an entire Jewish family was killed - the antisemites had trapped them inside a house and set it on fire.

In that period, an assimilated Jew, a director of the Commercial Bank, took his six-year-old son to the church of St. Zygmunt and had him converted. The notice about it, in the antisemitic newspaper *Goniec Częstochowski* [Cz. Herald], created a great stir amid the Jewish population and this was very sharply expressed in said article.



The Beilis trial [then] began. All other affairs were moved aside. For several weeks on end, our columns in the *Częstochower Wochenblatt* [Cz. Weekly], like our hearts, were feverish with the blood-libel that was being pinned upon all Jews. We breathed more freely once Beilis was acquitted. Once more, we took to the day-to-day issues - the Horticultural Farm has [only] produced a few numbers of pupils in the course of years; there is no interest in the evening courses at the Craftsmen's Club; inside the New Mikvah building it is not so clean. The "culture" at the Craftsmen's Club has deteriorated into dirty jokes, the interest in *Lira* is so weak that even for a lecture by I.L. Peretz, funds had to be arranged. The *cheders* are antiquated. The Jewish manufacturers are firing the Jewish workers from their factories and the Jewish *gmina* [*kehilla* management] is doing nothing for the Jewish *émigrés*.

In 1913, the legal professional unions began to be organised. There was no longer any intellectual to assist with the work. But the seeds, which had been sown among the workers in the years of the war for liberty, now emerged. In the Jewish trades of tailors, cobblers, woodworkers, bakers, box-makers [and] celluloid and toy [industry] workers, more developed labourers emerged and helped organise their professions. An entire array of professional unions was founded. We aided them with articles and notices in the press. We often chaired their meetings and gave speeches. For one such speech Mojsze Ceszynski was arrested and sat in the slammer for several weeks.

In the large factories, a revival started. The workers began striking for higher wages. In 1914, when the battle at the [River] Lena gold mines in Siberia took place, the factories' sirens signalled the protest of Cześćochowa's workers.

The First World War approached. A couple of weeks before its outbreak, a fire destroyed the larger part of Markusfeld's *Malarnia*. A few weeks later, I was already trudging along with the Russian Army over the fields of Lublin and then Galicia.

Together with me were Dawid Guterman, Gabryjel Szwarzensztajn, Pejsach Hirszman (a joiner at the Crafts School) [and] two porters [in civilian life] - Raszkin (later an administration member in the Porters' Union) and Zaywen.

At the [Austrian] POW camp, we, a group of Cześćochowers - Pejsach Hirszman, Apter, Goldman and Weltman - stuck together at first. It took a long time before we started receiving letters from Cześćochowa. The first letter in the camp and the first parcel with linens, I received from my old comrades and friends, Izaak and Hela Gurski. Izaak was a censor in Vienna. So my first letter to Cześćochowa fell into his [hands]. In Vienna, there was also Masza Berman, an active *Poalei Zion* member. From America, I received frequent letters from Mojsze Ce[szynski], Jankiel Kopinski, Hela Sercarz, Simche Kulka, peace be upon him and, of course, from my sister Fanny. Two Cześćochowers, together with whom I worked at the chancellery during the entire time at the POW camp and who participated in the cultural and auxiliary work we were carrying out, were Lederman (the owner of a small factory) and Jakub Strosman.

In the final years of the First World War, contacts with Cześćochowa improved. In the POW camp, many letters arrived from comrades and friends, among them from Hela Hasenfeld, Sara Awner and from Heniek and Gucza Szmulewicz. But Moryc Jarecki wrote the most, on behalf of the SS Organisation, which had then [been] revived. He, our old comrade Moryc, together with Herszl Gotajner, ran a bureau which carried out, in German, all the formalities that the German occupation authorities required. The Organisation made efforts to have me released from the camp. This task was carried out by my dear, good comrade Nuta Szwarcbbaum. I was freed a bit before the end of the First World War, but I only returned back in Cześćochowa once Austria had collapsed.

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A few days after my arrival in Cześćochowa, the news came that, in Germany, a revolution had broken out and that Kaiser Wilhelm had abdicated. This was on a Saturday night. The clubs on Aleja 43 were jam-packed with people. We held a deliberation - Raphael Federman, who stood at the pinnacle of the Organisation, proposed arranging a demonstration. Herszl Gotajner was opposed. I supported Raphael. We went out onto the street with a red flag. From Aleja 43 to ul. Teatralna, the crowd of demonstrators constantly increased. Provocateurs, or "leftist revolutionaries", began yelling "Precz z polską armią!" (Down with the Polish Army!). A group of Polish youths immediately set upon the demonstrators with sticks and the demonstration came to an end. Afterwards, the Polish newspapers wrote that the Jews had organised a protest against the Polish Army.

The premises on Aleja 43 soon became the centre of a tumultuous activity. There, in the premises, we painted the red flags for the PPS, gathered weapons from the disarmed Germans and there we organised a Jewish militia. Two different militia groups were organised in the city. One was of the *Endecja* and the other of the PPS, named the *Milicja Ludowa* (People's Militia). Several attempts were made to stir up trouble against the Jews, but the intervention of the Workers Council and the People's Militia prevented pogroms. The People's Militia was only disbanded later, under *Endecja* rule, in 1920, before the second pogrom in Częstochowa.

At the leadership of the SS Organisation were mainly comrades from 1905. Raphael Federman (in those years a Social Democrat) held the reins of the whole organisation in his hands and he led it with his strong willpower and organisational talent. Together with him, there were Herszl Gotajner (this student of philosophy in Kraków had now become an economist) who managed the cooperatives and bakeries. Michał Alter and Jakub Icek Zarnowiecki were active in the professional unions [and] I soon took over the secretariat and the writing. The newcomers were Dawid Szlezyngier [who had] a fiery temperament (he had studied engineering in Belgium), Mojsze Berkensztadt (a *kamaszn-stepper*\*), Rajzla Fajertag, Chaja'le Waga and Abram Wenger. Szyja Nirenberg was the "Minister of Provisions" - he supplied the workers' kitchens, the workers' restaurant and the day-care centres with food. Polish-speaking (he did not know Yiddish) Józek Finkelsztajn return from Russia. Together with Dudek Szlezyngier, he played an important role in the Workers' Council.

The former foursome - Federman, Dorka Szacher, Leizer Berkowicz and Jancze Pakuła - was now replaced by another - Federman, Chaja'le Waga, Rajzla Fajertag and Estera Fuks. The latter had studied in a Warsaw university and was later a professor/teacher in the Soviet Union. Her close friend was Landau, a [shoe-]stitching worker, who alongside Izydor Horowic, led the leftist group. Landau later moved to Russia.



The first overt antisemitic blow in the New Poland we received was when the Workers Council elected an Executive. The workers in town, embittered due to the unemployment (all the factories were closed then) and inflamed by the antisemitic elements, were at first unwilling to allow any representative of the Jewish workers into the Executive. Following vehement speeches by Raphael Federman and Józek Finkelsztajn, supported by delegates of the SD [Social Democrats] [and] later also by [those] of the PPS, this mood changed. Dudek Szlezyngier and Józek Finkelsztajn entered the Executive and [began] steering the wheel there.

Jewish workers received a very strong blow on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1919. The Workers Council had planned a general demonstration of all the parties. But, when the Jewish workers came to the assembly square, those keeping order did not let them in. The leaders had allowed themselves to be controlled by the antisemitic mood of the masses and decided, unofficially, to hold the demonstration without the Jewish workers.

The first City Council was elected, with an *Endecja* majority. The chairman was the antisemite, Dr Nowak. The City Council's *Endecja* majority never passed up an opportunity to implement limitations against Jews. When the proposal of a municipal loan for public works was conceived, it was decided not to give the Jews any work to carry out. When five people are dismissed from the Provisions Committee, all those sacked were Jews, who had been there since the time of the German occupation.

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\* [TN: Tradesman who stitches the shoe/boot uppers to the soles.]

All this, along with the constant antisemitic hatred from the two Polish newspapers, led to the horrific pogrom of 19<sup>th</sup> May 1920<sup>\*\*</sup>.

When [Symon] Petlura's *pogromchiks* suffered a defeat in Ukraine and Petlura, with his staff, found a place of refuge in Poland, he was given lodgings in Częstochowa's finest hotel. R. Federman, representative of the *Vereinigte* faction on the City Council, then lodged a complaint with the City Council. Federman and Szyja Nirenberg were those who led the war against the *Endecja* members within the City Council. But they could do no more than speak, shout and protest.

In Częstochowa, the "beloved" figures of other bandit armies from Russia also frequently showed themselves. This is what a notice in *Dos Naje Wort* [The New Word] tells regarding these fellows:

*Week in and week out, we see on our streets the beloved figures of [Anton] Denikin's men. These dear, noble faces evoke such feelings of affection. The heart simply goes out, seeing how from them shine forth the broad souls, purified in entire seas of human blood and tears, in which they bathed in the fields and the towns of Ukraine.*

*We are especially gladdened by our hospitality [towards them]. Oh, no, these are not Red barbarians that we [should] send them to the world beyond. We shall not rumple a single hair of theirs. Far away from their homes, poor things, we open our doors wide to them, [saying], "Lay down as if in your father's vineyard, feel like in your own home, know and feel who we are."*

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On 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1923, General [Ferdinand] Foch visited Częstochowa. The city was decorated with dozens of triumphal arches - a Florentine one, a castle-gate, a Greek one, a Venetian one and so on. They cost millions of *złoty*. In the streets, expensive carriages, teams of horses, automobiles, rich dresses, a forest of steel helmets, and columns of schoolchildren paraded.

One day earlier, on 1<sup>st</sup> May, poverty, need [and] hunger demonstrated in the streets. Mounted police fell upon part of the demonstrators - the Communist faction - and arrested many of them. Both days showed "liberated" Poland in its true colours.

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Inflation arrived - slowly at first and then at full gallop. The *Narodowa* [Demokracja; National Democracy] government printed an infinite amount of paper money and workers were perpetually on strike. Following each augmentation of 100%, there came a multiple increase in the prices of things and food. For a while, the poor population lived on *darmocha* [Pol., charity] - the white flour and lard arriving from America. Once this stopped, people starved.

The black [currency] exchange was on the First Aleja. It was always flooded with people. Most of the trade was in *lokshn* [pasta] (American dollars), but business was also done in currencies from the entire world and with whatever it was only possible.

*Malarnia* operated on a limited scale. The incinerated section was never rebuilt. Henryk Markusfeld died. His children were impoverished moguls. A large proportion of the labourers sold cigarettes on ul. Dojazdowa. In the evening, one could also sometimes find some of the girls who worked at the

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\*\* [TN: The date of the pogrom is given in historical sources (including in *Czenstochover Yidn*) as 27<sup>th</sup> May 1919. In *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. I, col. 765, it appears as 20<sup>th</sup> May 1919.]



factory walking about. Others became stallholders and began hating their Jewish competitors. Several PPS members, former leaders of the factory, served in the [political] defence and the criminal police forces.



The atmosphere of panic, which had reigned since Poland had gained its independence, reached its peak when the Polish armies began fleeing back from Ukraine and White Russia [Belarus]. The Red Army was approaching the city of Warsaw. The reactionaries raged - workers' locales were closed down [and] party activists arrested. R. Federman was drafted into the Polish Army. It seemed as if all that the working masses had built up with so much idealism and exertion was going under. The Jewish populace lived in mortal fear. Student hooligans revelled in the streets.

In those days, I found myself in great peril, sitting [once] at the Press table of the City Council. The Chairman, Dr Nowak, announced, in an exuberant voice, that Piłsudski had entered Kiev with his army. Councillors sprang up from their seats and, in unison, began shouting "Hurrah!" For a lack of another enemy in the hall to fall upon, dozens turned around to face me with bloodshot eyes, because I had remained seated during the cheering. In front of me sat [Feliks] Misiowski, the savagely antisemitic leader of the ChD [Christian Democracy] people and, although he wore dark glasses, I still felt that surely this must be what a wolf looks like before pouncing on his prey. To this day, I consider it a miracle that I emerged from the City Council alive.

Mendel Szuchter's arrival in Częstochowa from America was timely. He held a meeting with us, left us the money he had brought for communal institutions and for individuals, and quickly fled. He took with him Federman's plan to build our own building for day-care centres and schools which, by the way, were later carried out.

After peace was sealed between Poland and Russia, the aftermath of the war began. A large section of Jewish soldiers in the Polish Army were picked out from their regiments and interned in the Jabłonna camp, behind [viz. to the north of] Warsaw. When this camp was liquidated, many of these soldiers were brought to Częstochowa. They brought with them the song which they had composed there to the melody of the Polish legionaries in the First World War, *My, Pierwsza Brygada* [We, the First Brigade]. The song of the Jabłonna Internment Camp began like this - *My, obóz Jabłonna, to nadzieja płonna...* (We, Camp Jabłonna, are a radiant\* hope...). All the Częstochowa girls sang this song.



Despite all this, we diverted ourselves, laughed and, most importantly, danced - everyone sought a little entertainment.

The foremost amusements were the masquerade [balls]. Mostly, they were held on New Year's Eve and at Purim time. The masquerades and dance evenings were arranged by the parties, professional unions and philanthropic societies. The aristocratic functions were held at the Strażacki\*\* Hall, the proletarian events at the New World Hall (formerly Kupiecki [Merchants']) [and] the middle-class events at the Harmonia Hall. The same also occurred with the dance evenings.

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\* [TN: Presumably a humoristic euphemism by the author, as "nadzieja płonna" denotes the exact opposite: a vain hope.]

\*\* [TN: The venue was presumably on ul. Strażacka.]

Theatrical performances lost the allure which they had in the pre-War “cultural epoch”. The cinemas were always packed. The finest among them was the Odeon, on the Second Aleja. The movies featured actresses, mostly with second-rate actors from Warsaw cabarets. Many sang lewd ditties. The younger generation, boys and girls - and even the older ones - licked their fingers with this, as they say.

The Jewish masses always received the [folkloric] concerts of M. Kipnis and [his wife] Z. Zeligfeld with boisterous enthusiasm. It seems that their manager, Jankele Dancyger, was fond of Częstochowa and he treated us to several concerts a year. The Strażacki Hall was always overfilled. In some popular songs, such as Ванька, не шали [Ru., *Vanka, Don't be Naughty*], a choir of a thousand voices sang along with Kipnis. One “Tunkel\* Evening”, with the humourist Josef Tunkel (who was also a frequent guest in Częstochowa), was particularly unique. The electric lights at the venue went out and the evening was truly a *tunkel* one.



Oftentimes the cherished police interfered, and disrupted the merrymaking. One *Purim* evening, the Harmonia Hall was dispersed, because it coincided with a Catholic fast-day. The crowd celebrated *Purim* on the *Aleja's* promenade. Lectures and concerts were frequently stopped, because the police required a special permit to speak or to sing in Yiddish. The assembled audience often sat for hours on end in the cold halls, while the organisers ran about in the police stations to call off the decree.

But the best was summertime in the Old or the New Park, and Sundays in the Ostrowy forest. The trouble with the parks was that they were locked at ten o'clock in the evening. Anyone wishing to [continue] romancing there longer [than that], was forced to jump over the tall fence.



The most tempestuous and tumultuous events were the electoral wars.

First was the election battle for the workers' councils, then the elections to the *Sejm* [and] elections to the City Council. In the later years, there were no longer any workers' councils, but elections to the *Sejm*, the City Council and the Jewish *gmina* always took place.

Stormy gatherings and mass meetings were held at the hall of the Craftsmen's Club, at the Harmonia Hall and, most of all, at the New World Hall.

Here is an example of two electoral events:

The Zionists [once] arranged a *B'noth Zion* [Daughters of Zion] women's gathering. But the venue was jam-packed with worker girls from the Garncarska, Nadrzeczna [and] Senatorska streets. People stood on the benches and [up] in the gallery. Zionist youth guarded the stairs so that no speaker from the workers' parties could disturb. But, after the speaker from Kraków had concluded her speech, a workers' speaker appeared on the platform, as if he had fallen from heaven. The hall's walls started shaking from the applause. The Zionists with the *B'noth Zion* were utterly outnumbered here.

At a second Zionist mass assembly for men, the doors were already completely locked - but not for the meat-workers, porters, etc. They launched an attack, stormed the doors and after them, masses followed whom the organisers did not want there. This crowd made a

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\* [TN: Dark, in Yiddish. Josef Tunkel was known as “Der Tunkeler” (The Dark One).]

noise and clamoured, not permitting the first speaker to have a word, until Dudek Szlezyngier appeared on the platform, raised his hand and silence fell.

The owners of the halls [and] of the printing presses did the best business during elections. The city was on the move. Orators became hoarse. The poor women, who would to be called together from the remotest corners, would later say that “he spoke for fire and for water”<sup>\*\*</sup>. This was often very much the case. But it was a rather agitated [and] heated life.

Twice, during this period, elections were held to the *Sejm*. On both occasion, the candidate to the *Sejm*, which the *Vereinigte* nominated, was Dr Józef Kruk. The counter-candidate, from all the bourgeois elements, was Dr Majer Bałaban. For a long time, he was Director of the Jewish *gymnazjum* in Częstochowa and was highly respected in town. But Dr Józef Kruk wore the halo of the fight for [the] freedom and social rights of the Jewish masses, [which] he had begun precisely in Częstochowa, in the years of Tsarist rule. Dr Józef Kruk was the finest Jewish-Socialist personality, of worldwide renown, which Częstochowa had produced. Therefore, he had many enthusiastic followers amongst the Jewish workers and intelligentsia. But, both candidates lost on both occasions and each side blamed the other that Częstochowa did not have any Jewish representative elected to the *Sejm*.

Parties fought one against the other, sometimes more fiercely, sometimes less so and sometimes they united - such as on 1<sup>st</sup> May, for instance. These were the most beautiful moments in political life. But within the narrow circle of each party were true comradeship, often very deep friendship and bonding between one another. This, too, was the most beautiful in political life.



New ideas [and] new aspirations existed side-by-side with the old lifestyle and old traditions. Just like many, many years before, there were study-hall lads - *Chassidim* of Ger, Aleksander, Nowo Radomsko, [etc.], with their *shtieblech*. The porters, for instance, organised their professional union at the same venue where they had formerly had their prayer-group. They would pray there on *Shabbes*, calling people up to the Torah, who pledged pictures of Karl Marx, so that their “Socialist Trade Union” should not be disgraced without Marx. Every evening, Koblenz, the city’s *maggid* [preacher], studied a page of Talmud or [some] *mishnayos* with his *Chevra Kadisha*<sup>\*</sup>. The *Talmud Torahs* [public *cheders*] were brimming with children and [private] *melamdim* [continued] teaching like in the very old days, even though there was already a Jewish, secular, primary school, Children’s Homes of all the parties, day-care centres and a few Polish schools for Jewish children, with the teachers Miss Szacher, Fela Kiak, the old Awner, his youngest daughter and others. At the Polish schools, too, a *melamed* would teach the Jewish children “Jewish Religion”.

The overwhelming majority of Jews did not work Saturday. The workers’ newspapers, one of which was *Dos Naje Wort* of the *Vereinigte*, fought to the utmost against the law of compulsory repose on Sundays, which targeted Jewish commerce, Jewish industry and Jewish craftsmen. Jewish shops in the Old and New Markets [and] on the First and Second Aleje were closed on *Shabbes*. And, if a dry-goods shop on the Second Aleja was open on *Shabbes*, a delegation of respected Jews in satin *Shabbes* caftans would proceed along the Aleja, [which was] full of Jews on their *Shabbes* promenade, to demand that the *Shabbes*-desecrator lock up his shop. At the workers’ clubs, on Saturdays, there were party assemblies [and] party lectures, just like the Polish workers held their gatherings on Sundays. On Saturday afternoons, the party venues were packed.

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<sup>\*\*</sup> [TN: Yiddish expression meaning to talk nonsense, to babble incoherently, or to exaggerate.]

<sup>\*</sup> [TN: Rabbi Koblenz was in charge of the *Chevra Kadisha*; see *Sefer Częstochowa Vol. I, col. 650*.]

Of all the Jewish holidays, which were celebrated by old and young, the festival of Passover occupied the foremost position. Like hundreds of years ago, people prepared for weeks for the festival of *Pesach*, cleaning houses, scrubbing floors, scouring utensils and making them kosher - and baking *matzes*.

Here is a characteristic depiction of a Passover Eve, printed in *Dos Naje Wort* of 1921:

*On Garncarska, Nadrzeczna, Senatorska, Warszawska and other streets, people are preparing for Pesach and baking matzes. Everyone is baking matzes - fathers, mothers, daughters, sons and small children. The latter are flour-throwers and water-pourers. Old Jews with beards and strong youths turn the matze machines \*\*. Older ladies and young girls knead [balls of] dough. The experienced hands of the rollers fly over the matzes. Little boys snatch them up [and] take them to the oven-tender, who stands by the burning oven, incessantly thrusting in and thrusting out.*

*At the craftsmen's matze bakeries, it goes a bit according to the old ways. There, the old tradition is still observed and, when the butchers bake their matzes, they make merry together with the matze workers over a little glass of liquor and let their hearts be contented.*

*On that same street, a large number of pastry bakeries are seen through the windows of the cellars. The aroma of cakes and pastries hits one's nose. Passover foods are being prepared for the New Market [and] the First and Second Aleje.*

Together with this, the 1<sup>st</sup> of May was celebrated with mass meetings, demonstrations in the streets and ceremonies in the evenings. All the workers' venues were decorated and draped with red paper ribbons. Regardless of all the disturbances endured from the police and other troubles, it was still a holiday.

Great festive occasions, mostly on poor Jewish streets, were the I.L. Peretz School and Children's Home's scholastic celebrations and children's performances. Many times, the old Jewish festivities were combined with the new ones. On a *Chanukah* or a *Purim*, a school gala was organised for the children [and] for their fathers and mothers. Leaders of the workers' parties [and] representatives of the professional unions came together. With a beaming face, Comrade [Hersz] Cyna Orzech, representative of the Bakers' Union, brought pastries which the union had baked in honour of the holiday. The Chairman of the Parents' Committee, Lajbisz Berkowicz, opened the ceremony. The children sang and a luminous joy poured over everyone's hearts.

A prominent position in the workers' parties' activity was occupied by the explanatory and educational work amongst the working youth, who were once called "apprentice-boys" and for whom [conditions] were appalling. The *Vereinigte* conducted an evening school for them, where the emphasis was placed on teaching the youth, mostly from the *cheders*, to write good Yiddish and to become acquainted with the Yiddish literature. The school was also open to youth from other currents and those not affiliated with any party. The names of several of them have remained in my memory and they need to be mentioned: with the father of the little Wargon, I had worked in Markusfeld's *Malarnia* in 1905; the case was the same with the more grown-up Koniarski. Both, by then, already belonged to the Communist Youth Organisation. Rajzla Rozenfeld, the younger sister of Regina (Rywca) Kuperman, peace be upon her, also went over to the Leftists. She saved herself from Hitler's Destruction and later wrote me letters from Communist Poland. Chaja'le Waga's

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\*\* [TN: It is obvious from the subsequent description of the baking process, that the matzes in Czestochowa were hand-made, which stands to reason, as the Polish Chasidic Rebbes were strongly opposed to machine matzes. The machine mentioned here is most likely a manual grinder used to make the flour for the matzes, which is turned by two people.]

younger sister died very young. Mojsze Lewenhof was the best pupil. He later dedicated a poem to me, published in *Dos Naje Wort*. Elek Lewensztajn later became a functionary in the Communist Organisation, for long years, say in Polish prisons - like many others from the same group. A girl who was a member of *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* also studied there. The most idiosyncratic of them all was Herszl Lipszyc. He was the most fluent pupil and, unlike all the others, he was religiously pious and it was necessary to protect him from the rest of the school's youth, who wanted to chew him up. But he held his own. He later became a devoted social and cultural activist and, together with the representative of *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*, he managed the General Workers' Library.

The admission of Communist youth brought very negative consequences for the school and for the *Vereinigte's* youth organisation - "*Shtral*" [beam, ray]. The Communists destroyed the organisation, together with the school which had taken them in and educated them to be more cultural people. It seems that this was to no avail.

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During the whole period following the First World War, just like before, the emigration of the Jewish masses, [and] particularly of the youth, flowed like a surging river to America, the Land of Israel, Argentina, Germany, France, Belgium and to wherever it was only possible.

People travelled to the Land of Israel with certificates, to America with visas from relatives [and] to France and Belgium - illegally.

The surge to the Land of Israel greatly intensified once the emigration to America had almost come to a standstill. Many workers and youths abandoned their parties and joined the Zionist organisations [and], in particular, *Mizrachi* (which had no youth of its own), and all [this] in order to fight their way to a certificate.

But the Jewish stream of life in Częstochowa did not dry up. New groups of youth surged out from the poor Jewish streets. New faces appeared and Jewish life carried on with all [its] joys and sorrows.

At the end of 1923, I myself left Częstochowa and set off to America on a visa from my brother.

I spent one year in America but, during this time, I was more in Częstochowa than in America - in New York, at my friend Chaim Lajb Szwarc's house; in Coney Island, at the reception in the *Częstochower* Branch 1905 [?]; Kopl Gerichter, Mordche Altman, who was the Chairman then and also those who had just left Częstochowa: my friends Fela and Szymon Biro who, in fact, invited me to their [place] after the lecture; [at] the meetings of the United Czenstochover Relief and at the *Częstochower* Ball where I, once again, met the best friend of the schools: the delegate of the [Czenstochover] Young Men's [Society] in Częstochowa, Simkowicz; the friends Sobol, Korpiel, Kaufman, Senzer, Herszl and Chana Fajersztajn Szaja and Jetta Lenczer, who had all left Częstochowa before I had arrived [in America], together with the youth who had only just left Częstochowa - Rywczka Rozenfeld, Fajgla Berliner (not the one who is a teacher in Paris), Cincinatus and dozens of other friends and comrades. I felt as if I was back in Częstochowa!

In Chicago, at Mojsze Ceszynski's book business, at the house of Mendel and Szajndla Szuchter, of Symcha and Jetta Grylak, in the homes of Dawid, Sophie, Chana, Lina and Zelda Malarski - you were definitely in Częstochowa.

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At the end of 1924, I travelled back to my wife Helen, my new-born daughter whom I did not know and to the schools, which were not doing well. [Only after] having been a year in America, did one first feel how Poland was dark, reactionary, impoverished, embittered and antisemitic to the core of its bones. The crossing of the Polish border, the sitting on the dimly-lit Polish train where the derogatory term *Żyd* immediately jarred on one's ears, the Częstochowa prison<sup>\*)</sup>, the harsh, horrifying poverty in the Jewish Quarter, which had worsened a hundred times over due to the hard taxes - all this together hit one's eyes with such force, that it squeezed the heart like with iron tongs.

In jail, I met two of my acquaintances - Duwid'l Gerichter, the leader of the Communists and Działoszyński, together with whom I had worked at the paper warehouse in Markusfeld's *Malarnia* before the First World War. He, that quiet young man, who seemed unable to hurt a fly on the wall, had thrust a knife into the spine of the Libermans' only daughter and had ended up with a couple of years in prison.

Over the course of the two years which I remained in Częstochowa due to the [legal] process, the situation worsened from day to day. The rule of the *Defensywa* [Secret Police] intensified. The armies of spies multiplied [and] among them [were] many Jews, who did the work voluntarily for the time being, hoping to perhaps someday become paid spies. In my house and in those of other Independent [Socialist Party] activists, house-searches frequently took place and the police took any little piece of paper which they could find. The prisons were packed with political arrestees, Communists most of all. Every evening, when the tower bell tolled, your heart would shrivel up from the fear that they had come to drag you away to prison.

The "Piłsudski Revolution" took place in the summer of 1926, up on which were pinned so many hopes that it would alleviate the situation. The two opposing sides met in Częstochowa. The Kraków garrison, which had remained loyal to the government, was on its way to Warsaw, but the railway workers stopped the trains and the military remained [stuck] in Częstochowa. The Częstochowa garrison was led by supporters of Piłsudski and [they] hid the way from the government troops from Kraków. Everything ended peacefully.

At the end of 1926, I once again bade Częstochowa farewell, this time for good. As difficult as life was in Poland, it was even more difficult to part from it. The hardest was saying goodbye to the teachers and children of the I.L. Peretz School, which I had managed during the last year prior to leaving. I left the schools in an extremely good state. Afterwards, the very young Abram Bratt took over the management. He had been raised in the [Independent] Organisation and had become a capable and serious young man. One year earlier, he had married Róża Plawner. [They] had one daughter. Later, at the time of the annihilation, she was already 16 years old. Both he and Wolf Fajga switched over to the Bund after the military regime liquidated the Independent group. They also supervised the I.L. Peretz House until the liquidation of the Jewish settlement.

When the children and the teachers of the I.L. Peretz School and I said goodbye, they collected *groszy* amongst themselves and bought me a bouquet of white flowers. This bouquet and the song which they sang to me then have remained the greatest and strongest of my experiences that I remember.

At the station, I parted company with the closest comrades-friends, who are no longer with us - Szyja Nirenberg and his wife, Dudek Szlezyngier, Renia Gross, the exotic beauty who, like a wonder of life, had grown up in a cellar on the corner of Ogrodowa and Spadek. Abram Bratt and his wife Róża, the

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<sup>\*)</sup> Before I travelled to America for the first time, I was charged in court for an article in *Dos Naje Wort*, entitled "The Silent Murder", in which I came out against the closing down of the schools with 10,000 children, which were run by the Bundist *Unsere Kinder* [Our Children] Society.

auburn[-haired] Regina Warzecha, the quiet dove, Helencia Plywacz, the religion-loving Fajgla Berliner, the best Fröbelian Children's Home teacher which Częstochowa produced and the blonde, tall, blue-eyed Stefa Jesionowicz, who walked longer than all the others along with the train that separated us forever.

My wife Helen and Motek Plywacz accompanied me until Herby. Motek was a pupil at the Jewish *gymnazjum*, together with Eksztajn. They were among the finest fellows and the best representatives of the post-War youth. Motek Pływacz, who is also no longer with us, was my dearest pupil and best friend.



After having written all this down, I am aware that to a person from the side, for whom all these names are unfamiliar, this is all of very little importance. But, in truth, all these names and fleeting, short descriptions are taken from the great, still unwritten novel of an epoch, which is awaiting its artist. Perhaps someday he will arrive, this God-blessed artist, and will bring all this together and create, from it, a great work about the life which was horrifically destroyed and [which] cannot, and refuses to, vanish from life.

Following the publication of the book *Czenstochover Yidn*, we have been reproached for not having included in it records and descriptions of some currents in Jewish life, such as the Zionists, the orthodox, etc. This is correct to a certain extent, but how could we and how could one individual do this? After all, extensive research, much gathering and processing of material are required in order to do so. How can we carry this out, with our weak forces?

One does what one can. We, each one of us who were saved from Hitler's Destruction, take [each] his thoughts [and] his memories and set them forth, lest they should be lost. Let our friends in Israel do this. Let other fellow townsmen do this, wherever they only find themselves. Perhaps someday that compiler will come and forge one comprehensive work from it all, which will give a full picture, from all sides of the life that is gone and of what remains.

I would like to conclude with this - with every publication, with every description of that life [and] with every article that we publish, we have a double goal. We immortalise the life and all the people, who were annihilated in the abyss of destruction - [so that] their lives, their names [and] their deeds should not be forgotten! And, together with that, we wish to increase the treasure-trove of Jewish life, to make it richer [and to] console [and] invigorate those who have survived, in order to continue waging the war for the existence of our People and its culture. And, exactly like the book *Czenstochover Yidn*, we continue to dedicate each writing to the [axiom] *Am Yisroel chai* [The People of Israel live!].