

Raphael Federman

Izaak Samsonowicz

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Izaak Samsonowicz was born in Częstochowa. His parents were not affluent. For many years, his father was a schoolmaster at a private school for Jewish children and was considered one of the most respected citizens in town. Izaak Samsonowicz had a *gymnazjum* education and, for a time, occupied himself with giving lessons and tutoring children who had fallen behind for their exams. He was an intelligent lad. [He] read extensively and was knowledgeable about worldly, and, above all, Polish and Yiddish literature.

Izaak Samsonowicz

In 1922, as the Bundist Organisation in Częstochowa grew and at the instigation of the writer of these lines, Izaak Samsonowicz joined the Bund. He displayed capabilities as a writer. When the Bund commenced publishing the weekly newspaper *Arbeiter Zeitung* [Workers' Newspaper], the first issue of which appeared on 20th February 1923, he became a regular contributor, and each issue contained one of his articles on various general-political, social and cultural themes. He also gave talks on different subjects and went out on the Party's rallies. He also contributed to the periodical *Der Proletarier* and later became a teacher and a scholastic activist in the Piotrków secular schools of the Central Jewish School Organisation [CISZO, aka TSYSHO].

In Piotrków (Trybunalski), where the Bund was one of the mightiest organisations in town, he was active in all the fields in which the Bund had a leading role. Samsonowicz was later chosen as Councillor on behalf of the Bund and headed the Bundist faction, which played a very important role on the City Council. He was even a collaborator with the PPS faction, which held a majority on the City Council and which controlled the administration of the city. Later, Samsonowicz became the Secretary of the presidium of the Piotrków magistracy [viz. City Council]. He also became a correspondent of the Bundist *Volkszeitung* [People's Paper] in Warsaw and, very often, wrote articles of a general nature and correspondences on life in the city of Piotrków. He also wrote about various important processes which took place there (Piotrków was a district court). Samsonowicz was also a member of the Bund's Central Council in Poland.

At Party Council meetings, Samsonowicz participated in the hot, passionate discussions surrounding ideological and political questions and problems which prevailed within the Bund and which divided it into factions and tendencies. But he was always the defender and supporter of the guidelines represented by Henryk Erlich and Wiktor Alter. He brought these same views out in his articles in the *Arbeiter Zeitung*, *Volkszeitung* and the *Piotrkówer Ikr* [sic *Wecker*], of which he was the editor.

In 1928, Samsonowicz married Chaja Muszkes, who was a schoolmistress at the secular schools in Piotrków. Her work in Piotrków, which she carried out with true enthusiasm, was extremely successful.

In the period of the outbreak of Nazi vandalism, in 1942, Chaja Samsonowicz-Muszkes refused to give up her 10-year-old, beautiful, well-bred, intelligent and absolutely charming son to be thrown into the fire, to be granted her own life. Together with her son, she perished. Like a young tree, she was burnt [alive].

During this historic reign, Izaak Samsonowicz, together with other Bundists, stood at the head of the Jewish ghetto and was, at the same time, active in the underground movement. Along with others, he was arrested by the Gestapo. However, he managed to save himself. For a long time afterwards, he was active in Warsaw as a member of the Central Committee of the underground Bund in Poland. He also kept in touch with the Częstochowa underground Bund Organisation and edited the Bund's underground publications.

Disregarding the difficult experiences during the tragic years of Hitler's occupation which broke him physically, Samsonowicz did not think of leaving Poland, as long as a glimmer of Jewish life still showed itself. He continued to dedicate himself to Bundist activity in all fields. He was a member of the Bund's Central Committee [and] he was editor of *Glos Bundu* [Voice of the Bund], during the time the *Volkszeitung* and *Glos Bundu* still had the freedom to be published.

Following the ideologically-imposed "unification" of the Bund with the Jewish PPR (Communists), Samsonowicz was forced to submit to the decisions of the alleged unified Party. [He] contributed to the PPR's *Folks-Sztyme* [People's Voice] and wrote about international political issues.

Due to his walking in the footsteps of the Communists, the Bund hushed up his untimely demise. But for me, as a good friend from our more mature youth onwards, it is difficult not to say at least something of what I think about it. I should quote, at least, part of Sz. Horowicz's article *On the Fresh Grave of Comrade Samsonowicz*, printed in the *Idisze Szriftn* [Yiddish Writings] № 12 (116) of December 1956, which is published in Poland:

It is no coincidence that he (Samsonowicz) died during an extraordinarily difficult and complicated period, during which a great inner fortitude is required of each individual in order to attempt to give a correct answer to painful questions and doubts [and] in which life literally forces one to generally re-evaluate one's own convictions on a daily basis.

Two years ago, prior to his death, inquiries began being made into Samsonowicz's past and he received a shock. He was taken to a mental hospital, after which he was already no longer able to come to his senses. Of this, the Communist Press said nothing in their publications. Samsonowicz was one of the victims of Communism in Poland.

Yes, Izaak Samsonowicz departed prematurely from this world, martyred [and] unwell, "with doubts regarding giving a correct answer to the painful questions", which pervaded him and all the other Bundists who had remained in Poland in the alien environment. All Częstochowa Bundists, and also those not from Częstochowal, remember Samsonowicz well - the intelligent Bund activist, [the] writer who did not push his way to become a leader and a guide. He was a good socialist and a worldly Jew and, as such, we shall remember him.

May his memory be honoured!

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