

Raphael Federman

Dr Aron Singalowsky (Aron Cześćochower)

A



Aron Singalowsky

On 7th October 1956, Dr Aron Singalowsky, leader of the worldwide ORT, died in Paris of a heart-attack. He was 67 years old. Even though Dr Singalowsky was born in a village in the Minsk *gubernia*, and in his youth was lived in Kowno, he was very popular under the name “Aron Cześćochower”.

As a native of Cześćochowa, which lies on the River Warta in Poland, I wish to bring a bunch of flowers to the tomb of the deceased who, over the course of his life, loyally served the Jewish common folk as one of the most important leaders of ORT. With his nickname “Cześćochower” and his personality, he brought so much honour and importance to my hometown of Cześćochowa.

In the years 1904-5, when political life had already sprouted in Poland and the Jewish masses were already considerably committed to the illegal Workers’ Movement of all parties, the industrial city of Cześćochowa, which already then had a population of 20,000 Jews, was no exception in this regard. Amongst the Jewish workforce in Cześćochowa, there were various active parties - SS (Zionists-Socialists), Bund, *Poalei Zion* and even Jewish factions of PPS and SDKPL* (today’s Communists). The SS Party held the strongest sway over the Jewish workers in the city. Interestingly [enough], even though this party spoke and wrote extensively regarding the misery of the Jewish proletariat masses, and that Jews would not be employed in large factories, hundreds of Jews in Cześćochowa did, in fact, work in the great celluloid factories of Weinberg and Landau, which produced celluloid combs and [shoe] heels**. [Yet] the PPS actually had the greatest influence on the workers. It is more than certain that this was brought about by the young Aron Singalowsky, who was the party’s emissary in Cześćochowa at the time.

Aron Singalowsky was then a young bachelor and had a reputation as a fine orator. He simply bewitched the listeners in the factories, in the small circles and at the *masówki* [mass rallies] in the forest. Singalowsky was known in town as *Der Geyler Aron* [Aron the Yellow (blond)]. Whenever Jewish workers found out that *Geyler Aron* would be speaking, they happily remained in the factories after work and listened to him very attentively for hours, drinking in his every word.

In the summer of 1905, a tragic event took place in the city, which stirred up all the Jews in town and the vicinity – there was a huge fire at Landau’s celluloid factory in which six Jewish girls were burnt. Some of them had lived on ul. Garncarska and it was precisely from there that the SS Organisation arranged a collective funeral procession for the burnt victims. The workers brought the factories and workshops to a halt and assembled in their thousands in the streets, inhabited by the impoverished Jewish population, by the River Warta. The police was powerless [before the masses] disregarding the ban on gathering in large groups. In every corner of these streets, orators from all the parties

* [TN: *The Polska Partia Socjalistyczna (Polish Socialist Party) and the Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy (Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania).*]

** [TN: *קרענגס [krongs] in the original Yiddish, possibly a misprint. We’ve rendered it as the German “krängen,” meaning “heel.”*]

spoke. They labelled this tragedy as a consequence of the battle between work and capital. A crowd of thousands of workers accompanied the victims to the cemetery. The news that at the cemetery *Der Gelyer Aron* would be speaking spread with lightning speed.

The writer of these lines, [then] a boy of thirteen, secretly attended this mourning demonstration, without his parents' knowledge, and he went to the cemetery with the thousands-strong crowd and was [present] at the burial. I remember it as if it had been today. With deep curiosity and awe, I looked at the young speaker, at his longish face [and] at his head of yellow hair, which seemed like a flame of fire. From his well-shaped mouth words poured forth in a Lithuanian Yiddish. When I close my eyes, I can [even] today still hear the sound of his words which, at the time, found [their way into] my soul and mind. His words were said with great flame and fire and ignited the hearts of the entire assembly. All broke out in mournful weeping over the freshly covered graves of the fire's victims. Under the deep impression which *Geler Aron's* speech at this funeral [had made upon me], I began to ponder on the redemption of mankind, on the issues of injustice and insufficient wages [and] on the idea of socialism. I did not personally meet Singalowsky on that occasion, but for years I have not forgotten *Geler Aron's* speech - a speech which still follows me to this day.

Needless to say, in that short time (only a year had passed) that *Der Geler Aron* had been in Częstochowa, he gained the greatest sympathy and affection, not only of the city's Jewish masses, but also of the bourgeois Jewish intelligentsia. He had a great influence over it and pulled it to the SS Movement. Much of the intelligentsia became strongly active in the party over the course of the years.

Der Geler Aron was the legend of a very large proportion of the Jewish folk-masses and the workforce in Częstochowa. It is certainly due to this legend that the SS Organisation remained the strongest in the city, until its liquidation.

With the growth of reactionism, Aron Singalowsky was forced to leave the city. His last appearance in Częstochowa was at a mass-meeting in Weinberg's factory. This meeting was arranged under great peril, in the most difficult days of a state of war. As it seems, this broad field of work among the workers in the large factories and workshops had an effect on Singalowsky and, upon his travelling away, he fondly adopted the name of the city of Częstochowa, in which he had found gratification for his temperament and ideas. Henceforth, *Der Geler Aron* became popular among the Jewish masses as *Aron Czestochower*.

Aron Singalowsky had not been in Częstochowa for years, but the Jewish masses always remembered him and were proud that he considered himself a *Czestochower*.

Only in February 1923 was I able, for the first time, to meet Aron Czestochower in Częstochowa. He came especially from Berlin, for the memorial assembly which the Bund had organised for Vladimir Medem's death anniversary. Hundreds of Dr Singalowsky's followers and admirers attended this memorial assembly. The legendary Aron Czestochower appeared before the audience as quite a different persona. His speech on Vladimir Medem was brilliant, both in content and in form [and] was delivered in the tone of a lecturing professor. The Yiddish words uttered conveyed the impression he was picking flowers and was presenting the audience with a bouquet of fragrant roses. His address affected the listeners as would a musical symphony.

During the hours he spent in Częstochowa, he visited the Jewish secular school, which was located on its own premises on *ul. Krótka*. In it was hanged a large picture of the Sejmist* [Mark] Ratner. [This was] the only school in Poland named after him (later, the school was named after Y.L. Peretz).

* [TN: A proponent of Jewish self-government via a Jewish Sejm.]

Aron Singalowsky understood that it had been his former activity in Częstochowa that had brought this about. He took a stroll, together with me, along the Jewish streets by the River Warta. We called to mind the tragic funeral demonstration for the burnt girls, in which he had participated with such ardour and fire and tears appeared in his eyes. How proud he was of the achievements of the Jewish masses in his adopted hometown of Częstochowa. This was noticeable in subsequent conversations with him. He met with his old friends, many of whom had gone on other paths. He therefore pressed my hand heartily, for my having gone over to the Bund following the liquidation of the SS Party.

In the last years, I was already able to meet with Aron Singalowsky in New York, at the offices of the *Arbeiter Ring* [Workmen's Circle]. From me, he accepted greetings from his devastated adopted city of Częstochowa following Hitler's destruction. I brought him the book *Czenstochover Yidn*, which the Częstochowa townspeople in New York had published as a Memorial Book for the forty-thousand-strong Jewish community. Gently [and] wordlessly, he took the book and rocked his head.

The rescued Częstochowa refugees, who are now in New York and the Częstochowa townspeople who had known Singalowsky, had planned to dedicate an article in honour of his 70th birthday. By their calculations, he would have turned 70 [just] now. Sorrowfully, death came earlier and tore him from among the living.

May my words be an offering of flowers on his fresh grave and a worthy headstone.