

A Kaufman

Czenstochover Aid Society and Czenstochover Relief Committee in New York

The idea of founding a *Częstochower* Aid Society was born in Tompkins Square Park, on 7th Street and Avenue B in New York, at the beginning of summer in 1914. That is where the *Częstochower landsleit* would meet to share news from the old home city and to find out what was new amongst the *landsleit* here in New York. The Society's intended purpose was to hold frequent meetings of the *landsleit*, who were distanced and disconnected from one another, and to aid those in need in event of an illness, unemployment or other unfortunate circumstances.

On 14th July 1914, the first gathering of a large number of *landsleit* was held at the *Bełchatower* Society's *shul* on 6th Street, between Avenues B and C in New York. All those present voted for the establishment of an organisation, to which all *landsleit* would be able to belong, regardless of age and religious or social beliefs.

It was decided to call the organisation the "Czenstochover Aid Society". The Society's goals were set out as follows:

- 1.) To aid every *landsmann* or *landsfrau* [fellow countrywoman] in times of need or illness.
- 2.) To create work among our *landsleit* for the unemployed *landsleit*.
- 3.) Should a *landsmann* or *landsfrau*, for some reason, be unable to remain in America, to assist them with monetary means to return home.
- 4.) Anyone, regardless of political or organisational affiliation, may become a member.

Officials and executive members were elected to run the organisation. Flw Chaim-Lajb Szwarc was elected as the first president. It was decided that the Society's meetings would take place every Monday. With each meeting, new members came.

At one meeting, on the last Monday of August 1914, we found out that the First World War had broken out and that, on Saturday night, *Częstochowa* had been occupied by the Germans (the Germans occupied *Częstochowa* on 3rd August in the morning – the Editors). We were glad that we had become "Germans" ... At the time, we did not yet realise that the World War meant destruction for us and for the entire world.

One a Sunday in September, the Aid Society held its first picnic in Glendale's Schuetzen Park, in Brooklyn. Several hundred people gathered and spent a very nice time together.

At the picnic, several hundred banners with the inscription "Czenstochover Aid Society" were sold.

It was later decided to arrange a picnic every year, which did, in fact, happen over several consecutive years. The *landsleit* already knew that, in the summer, they would meet at the picnic and spend the whole day amongst *landsleit*, family, friends and acquaintances.

In those years, the two *landsleit*, Symcha Kalka and Josef Kaufman, had their printing press at 154 Delancey Street, where many friends and acquaintances would meet. It was then that the news arrived, that Flw Alkona Chrobolovsky was in a POW camp in Austria. It was immediately decided to send him a few dollars and, once a reply arrived, to send more. In this manner, aid was sent several times.

The Aid Society became very popular among our *landsleit*. The Society supported every individual who was in need of assistance. After the First World War, the Society helped a few members, who could not stay here, to travel back home.

In 1915, the first ball was held on Avenue I¹, between 4th and 5th Streets in New York. Some 500 people came together. The ball was a success. In the second year, the ball was held at the Tammany Hall on 14th Street, then one of the finest venues in New York, where our balls were held in several consecutive years. Later, larger venues were needed. The balls were held in different hotels - more than a thousand people would attend the balls.

The balls became a tradition with the *landsleit*, just like the annual picnic.

With the proceeds of these undertakings, the Society at first supported the sick and poor [*landsleit*] in New York. Later, large sums were sent annually to Częstochowa.

To begin with, the aid money was sent to Częstochowa addressed to the Rabbi Reb Nachum Asz, for him to distribute the aid amongst the communal institutions, such as the aged care home, the Jewish Hospital, etc. as instructed. Shortly after the First World War, the Aid Society made contact with the workers' organisations that conducted aid activities amongst the workers and poor masses, such as the workers' kitchen, the kindergarten etc., and other general charitable institutions in Częstochowa, and sent the relief funds to them directly.

The members and activists of the Aid Society did not forget the Society at any opportunity when they got together. Thus, for instance, a large sum of money was raised, in 1917, at the wedding of Flw Josef Kaufman and Rachel Szaja.

The Society would often organise theatrical benefits. The members served on committees, visited the *landsleit* and sold theatre tickets. In general, the active members of the Aid Society, and subsequently of the Czenstochover Relief in New York, devoted much time and energy to the society's cause.

Every undertaking demanded great effort and work. They needed to visit the *landsleit*, clambering up the stairs to the 5th and 6th floor, and sometimes even higher. But no sacrifice was too difficult for the sacred cause of aid for the brothers and sisters in the old home.

At one of the Czenstochover Aid Society's theatrical functions, the popular speaker Joseph Barondess made an appearance and appealed to those present in the theatre to support the war victims in Częstochowa. His appeal made a strong impression, and several hundred dollars² were then raised.

After each undertaking, the Executive [Board] would gather at the home of one of the members and tally up the expenses and proceeds. The custom was that the member, at whose home the meeting was held, would arrange a fine meal for those assembled. Great sums of money would always be raised at these occasions, which complemented the profit derived from the function.

¹ [TN: עיוניני איי in the original; as there are no 4th and 5th Streets in the vicinity of Avenue I, it is very likely that this is a misprint for 1st Avenue, which crosses the East 4th and 5th Streets in Manhattan.]

² [TN: The purchasing power of \$100 in 1917 was equivalent to over \$2,000 in 2021.]

In 1920, the writer of these lines was sent on a tour throughout America. He visited Chicago, Detroit, Toronto, Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Philadelphia, spending around three months in all these cities and, thus, raised several hundred dollars in aid for the war victims.

But the main income source of the Society, and later of the Relief, was [from] the annual balls - or rather from the brochure that was published for these occasions. In this brochure, the members and *landsleit* extended their congratulations, printed advertisements and also collected the like from amongst their non-Częstochower acquaintances. These brochures brought in hundreds and, often, thousands of dollars every year.

There were numerous *landsleit* who donated \$50 or more every year. Among them, Flw Jacob Rechnic stood out. He donated \$100 every year to the ball and, in addition, purchased \$25 worth of tickets.

Yet the need of our brethren in Częstochowa outgrew the Aid Society's work. The idea arose to pull the [other] existing *Częstochower* organisations in New York into the relief work. In the beginning, these consisted of the *Częstochower* Arbeiter-Ring Branch 261, the Czenstochauer Young Men's and the *Częstochower* Branch of the Jewish National Workers Alliance. The organisations agreed and chose their representatives. At one of the meetings between the Aid Society and the representatives of other *Częstochower* organisations in New York, the decision was made to change the name "Aid Society" to "Czenstochover Relief Committee". This Committee was to be tasked specifically with raising funds for the war victims in Częstochowa. The annual ball in 1921 had already been organised by the Czenstochover Relief Committee.

In 1921, Flw Mendel Szuchter, one of the leaders of the Labour Movement in Częstochowa, a respected communal activist in Chicago and a member of the contemporary People's Relief Committee [PRC] in America, was sent as a delegate of the PRC to a conference in Europe. He would also be visiting Poland and delivering certain sums of money for relief purposes. The Czenstochover Relief Committee decided to send several hundred dollars, with Flw Szuchter, for the local relief organisations and also called a special gathering to say goodbye to Flw Szuchter pending his journey. On that occasion, Flw Szuchter was asked to investigate the situation of the Jews in Częstochowa, and to find out which institutions, there, were the most useful and in greatest need.

When Flw Szuchter returned from his trip, the Czenstochover Relief Committee held another meeting to hear his report. He described the terrible state of the Jews in Poland, and what the aid from America meant to them. In particular, he lingered over the important work of the Yiddish kindergartens and primary schools in Częstochowa, where hundreds of poor workers' children were being fed, educated and raised. He declared that, if the *Częstochower landsleit* in America wished to do something useful and substantial for their hometown, which would remain as a constant reminder for their brethren on the other side of the ocean, they should help erect their own building for the kindergartens and primary schools.

Flw Szuchter's proposal inspired everyone. It was immediately resolved that, from then onwards, we would do everything within our power to carry out this grandiose plan.

In the brochure which appeared for the annual ball in 1922, an announcement was already printed to the effect that preparations were being made to build the kindergartens in Częstochowa their own building. The *landsleit* passionately adopted this idea and the ball, that year, had the greatest success.

Besides these undertakings, the members of the different organisations taxed themselves with certain sums for the purpose of constructing the building. The members of the Czenstochauer Young Men's placed upon themselves a tax of five dollars each. In this manner, the *Częstochower* Arbeiter-Ring

Branch 261 and the *Częstochower* Branch of the Jewish National Workers Alliance also contributed their part to the building.

Once the sum of several thousands of dollars had been raised, the Czenstochover Relief held a meeting and discussed the issue of sending a delegation to Częstochowa to purchase the house. The Relief's two dynamic activists, Flws Louis Szymkowicz and Chaim-Lajb Szwarc, were chosen. They travelled to Częstochowa and spent several weeks there.

Over the course of that time, they held a large number of conferences and meetings with representatives of different strata of the Częstochowa populace and listened to an entire series of projects as to how to put, into effect, the idea of creating a building. And after pondering the matter at length, they decided to buy the plot at ul. Krótka 23 for the sum of \$3,700. The disadvantage of this was that the actual building for the kindergartens and schools would first need to be built, as the house that was on the plot was too small for a school. This situation, however, had the great advantage that, in constructing a new building, it was specifically designed to be suitable for a kindergarten and school.

The Relief delegates in Częstochowa, who bought the house, also affected the unification of a few kindergartens and schools under one joint management committee, in which three factions were represented - Vereinigte, Poalei-Zion and the Bund. Apart from that, a general library was also formed from the three separate libraries which existed at the time in Częstochowa. The delegates allocated a sum of money for new books for the library and also distributed some funds to other goodwill institutions.

When the delegates returned to New York, at a large gathering, they delivered a detailed report on everything that they had accomplished in Częstochowa. The whole Relief Committee listened attentively to the report with great satisfaction, and thanked them for their momentous work.

Immediately afterwards, the Relief embarked on energetic and feverish activity in order to raise the money for the construction of the building.

The ball, that was held in 1923, was dedicated to this cause and, in the brochure published for this event on 17th November 1923, an announcement was printed under the title "*The Czenstochover Relief in New York Buys a House for the Kindergartens and Primary Schools in Częstochowa*".

From then on, the proceeds from all the functions increased, averaging about \$2,000 a year. The money was mostly utilised for the I.L. Peretz Kindergarten and Primary School in Częstochowa.

The Ladies Auxiliary, which was founded by Flw Szymkowicz prior to his journey to Częstochowa, assisted the Relief in its work to complete the building, and sent out the first \$500 to Częstochowa. The decision was approved at a meeting in the home of Flw Isrulke Broder in March 1923.

In April 1923, the Relief set out to collect books for the General Library in Częstochowa. The branch of the Jewish National Workers Alliance contributed 130 books to the campaign. The number of books, which the Relief gathered and sent off to Częstochowa, reached several hundreds.

On 13th January 1924, Labour leader and envoy of the CISZO (Central Yiddish School Organisation) in Warsaw, Bejnisz Michalewicz, visited the Czenstochover Relief's meeting, and delivered a report on the state of the Jewish masses in Poland and on the problems of the Yiddish schools throughout Poland and in Częstochowa.

In June 1924, the Relief received a report from Cześćochowa to the effect that the official opening of the building, which they delivered for the kindergartens and primary schools, would be held on 5th July.

In December 1924, Flw Chrobolovsky, after having spent one year in Chicago, travelled back to Cześćochowa and took \$600 with him for the schools - \$200 from Chicago, \$200 from the Czenstochover Relief in New York and \$200 from the Ladies Auxiliary. Apart from this, with him, the Relief sent \$100 for the Jewish Hospital and \$100 for the aged care home and orphanage in Cześćochowa. He was also authorised to act as the Relief's official representative on the management committee of the kindergartens and primary schools in Cześćochowa. The Committee also stipulated that the building should be named after I.L. Peretz.

In 1926, as a result of the great poverty amongst the general, Jewish population in Cześćochowa, which found its expression in the calls for emergency aid, the Relief, together with all the *Cześćochower* organisations, raised the sum of \$1,000 and sent it addressed to Rabbi Reb Nachum Asz and the Chairman of the school management committee, Szyja Nirenberg. Instructions were enclosed to form a joint committee, which would divide the money amongst the general philanthropic and workers' institutions.

That same year, the Relief conducted an operation to attach, in one of the building's walls, a marble plaque bearing the names of the organisations and individuals who had participated in the construction of the I.L. Peretz Building in Cześćochowa.

In addition to the balls, theatrical functions and other gatherings held by the Relief, there were also annual banquets and [general] meetings. The largest and most impressive banquet took place in 1926 at the Beethoven Hall, which generated the sum of about \$1,200.

In December 1926, Flw Chrobolovsky came to New York for the second time. At the Relief's meeting on 13th December, he delivered a report on the terrible state of the Jewish masses in Poland in general, and on the schools in Cześćochowa in particular. From then on, Flw Chrobolovsky remained active in the Relief as communications correspondent with Cześćochowa and as Secretary.

On 6th April 1928, Flw Zylber³ organised a theatrical performance with the help of actor Leon Rajch [sic Tajch], who appeared several times at the Relief's banquets. The performance brought in proceeds of over \$200.

On 27th May 1928, a banquet of the Relief and the Ladies Auxiliary was held. Flw Chaja'le Waga-Rojtman, one of the first kindergarten teachers, who had come that year to New York, made an appearance at this banquet.

At the meeting on 14th May 1928, it was decided that the Relief would hold its functions in partnership with the Ladies Auxiliary, and that the proceeds would be divided equally between both organisations.

On 4th February 1929, after Flw Szlingbaum, who had visited Cześćochowa, delivered a report on the persecutions and arrests in Poland, the Relief decided to call a conference of all the *Cześćochower* organisations to consider the issue of aid for the political arrestees.

On 4th March 1929, the Relief resolved to set about the work of publishing a book on the history of Cześćochowa, titled "*Cześćochower Album*". An elected committee began working. But the project came to a halt due to a series of difficulties.

³ [TN: *Jakub-Ber Zylber* or "*Silver*" in the US.]

In April 1930, the Relief held a concert, which included the screening of a film from the kindergarten and primary school in Częstochowa.

Along with this film, which had been sent from Częstochowa, a film made in New York by the activists of the Relief and Ladies Auxiliary was screened. Such film-concerts were also arranged in Detroit and Chicago, through the mediation of the Relief. Flw Karl Richter was the Relief's delegate to carry out these concerts in those two cities. The proceeds from the film reached over \$500.

During this period, the financial situation of the schools in Częstochowa worsened from day to day. However, the Relief's income was diminished as a result of the rising depression in America. The management committee of the schools mortgaged the building for the sum of \$600 and rented out part of it for private dwellings. Realising that, if things continued in this manner, both the schools and the building would be lost, the Relief decided to send a demand to the management committee of the schools to the effect that they should give up the seven-class primary school, maintain the kindergarten and hold evening courses for the older children.

Due to the fact that, during that period the differences of opinions between the so-called Rightists and Leftists more acute, on 11th May 1930, a group of active members declared that they were leaving the Relief. At the end of the summer of that same year, a meeting of Relief activists, which was held at Flw Fridman's house, resolved to bring the Relief's work - as a separate organisation - to a halt and to work together with the Ladies Auxiliary to maintain the kindergarten in Częstochowa for as long as possible. Thus, a beautiful chapter of fraternal aid and selfless work done by the *Częstochower landsleit* for their brothers and sisters across the ocean was sealed.



The first chairman of the Aid Society, and later of the Czenstochover Relief in New York, was Flw Louis Swarc. From December 1925, Flw Silver took over the chairmanship. In its last months, the Relief was chaired by Flws Szymkowicz and Kolin. Over the course of time, Flw Fajertag held the chair many times.

The Relief's secretary, until June 1926, was Flw J. [?] Win. From 28th June to January 1928, the secretaries were Flws Karl Richter and Aba Kaufman; from 1928 and on – Flw A. Chrobolovsky.

Flw Fajersztajn was the financial secretary to the last days of his life. He was followed by Flw Fridman.

The majority of the Relief's meetings were held at 276 Houston Street 276, and later at 305 East 6th Street 305.
