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Anonymous *Landsleit*

In the Belgian capital of Brussels, I was acquainted with three people from Częstochowa, who made a profound impression upon me. Such people remain in your memory for a long time.



Fajgla Berliner

These were Fajgla Berliner, Leon the cobbler and his young lady, Sala – no one knew the surnames of the last two¹. The Belgian police had them down under various names, but none of these were correct.

I was told that Sala's father was a wealthy man in Częstochowa - he had a large *bakalie*² business. At home, Sala had completed *gymnazjum* (high school³).

She was as petite and as silent as a quiet doe. But silently, she disseminated illegal literature, recruited members for the Patronage and raised money for the [International] Red Aid.

Both she and Leon were arrested on numerous occasions and deported from the country. But every time, they stole back across the border, returned to Brussels and continued the work.

Leon had extricated himself from the hands of the police in Poland and had set out on the road. Sala went with him. Until [reaching] Czechoslovakia, they still had enough for expenses. As they could not remain there, they set out for Belgium on foot.

They arrived in one of the German cities - this was before Hitler came to power - with a couple of pfennigs [pennies] in their pocket, [just] enough to buy a quarter of a pound of bread. They had already not eaten for more than twenty-four hours. They entered a bakery and showed the German woman the couple of pfennigs - all that they had. They told her that they were very hungry. The German woman shamelessly cut a thin slice of bread and weighed it - not a hair's breadth more than for the two pfennigs. Leon and Sala looked despairingly at the thin slice of bread - who would take the first bite and how could it appease their hunger?



***Leon the cobbler (Inzelsztajn),
first from the left,
with a group of friends in Brussels***

They journeyed several weeks on foot. It was summertime. They fed themselves with vegetables from the fields. They gathered firewood, made a fire and roasted potatoes.

They arrived in Brussels with swollen feet. Here, too, every day they faced the peril of being detained and deported. But this did not deter them from carrying out their work.

¹ [TN: The cobbler is identified on the following page as Leon Inzelsztajn, who is mentioned at length in the article "Jewish Fighters in the Fields of Spain" (above, pp.157-165).]

² [TN: Pol., grocer's specialising in delicacies, and particularly nuts and dried fruits.]

³ [TN: In English in the original (הגייסקול).]

Leon was a slightly taller than average and broad-boned man in his thirties. A calm good-naturedness gazed out from his brown eyes. His firm, determined character showed in his serious features, with the well-defined jaw, the markedly flattened nose and the furrowed brow. He was not a big talker, but the words he uttered were rationally calculated and consistent.

In 1936, when the Spanish Civil War broke out, he was one of the first who travelled to fight Fascism. He highly distinguished himself and fell in battle.

Fajgla Berliner was no less interesting. The impression [I received], when I came up for the first time to her tiny room under the roof with the bent walls, is unforgettable. A single, small window was on the ceiling and looked straight up into the sky. Cleanliness peered out from every little corner. The walls were decorated with pictures large and small. Amateurish bric-a-brac stood on a cabinet in one corner. Fajgla was just finishing her supper. In the feeble light of a small lamp, her face looked tender and full of love for the world.

Her pitch-black hair was parted down the middle, the curled sides resembling the placid, smooth wavelets of a tranquil stream. Her cheeks were like red flowers. A profound kindness gazed out from her graceful eyes, and an endearing smile lay on her lips.

She had not been expecting anyone that evening - but how beautifully and meticulously she had set the table for herself! On a freshly-ironed, coloured tablecloth stood a small plate with a piece of cheese, a glass butter dish with butter, a flowered [container?⁴] with sardines and a salt-cellar, and on a pretty, braided basket were a bun and a chunk of bread. A napkin, with colours matching the tablecloth, lay to one side. On the centre of the table stood a vase with flowers. Her patience and fastidiousness in adorning and preparing the table just for herself evoked [in me] delight and respect towards her.

Fajgla took the burden of social work upon herself just as meticulously and patiently. Silent and modest, she was devoted, with her whole heart, to the progressive Labour Movement, attended the meetings and carried her duties out with deep commitment.



⁴ [TN: The word used in the original Yiddish in ref. to this container is "filmesl" (פילמעסל), which we have not been able to find in any other source.]