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## Activity of the Bund Under Hitler's Occupation

The War broke out. [Only] a few individuals remained of the Party Committee. The outbreak of the War found the Committee Chairman, L. Brener, in the provinces liquidating the TOZ children's [summer] camps. Some Committee member had been mobilised [by the Army]. The concealment of the Party's archives, therefore, fell to just two members - Comrade Rozenfeld and me. We managed to bury the banners, the Party's publications and other important documents in the garden of Aleja 20, where the Medem Library had earlier been hidden. On that same day, we were unable to [also] clear out the archives of the professional unions and the School Organisation. That same day, 1<sup>st</sup> September, Comrade Percec (Bundist Councillor and Chairman of the Yiddish School Organisation) approached me with the request that I engage in clearing out of the materials of the Yiddish School Organisation, because he was leaving Cześćochowa.

On 4<sup>th</sup> September, Cześćochowa was already ruled by the Germans, who began rampaging in their usual manner. Comrade Szymkowicz and a small group of *Zukunft*<sup>1</sup> members also decided to rescue the archives of the professional unions and the School Organisation which, at the time, were in our premises at ul. Piłsudskiego17. We positioned a guard of young comrades at the gate and the older ones entered the premises and set to work. An hour later, the courtyard was sprayed with a hail of bullets. Our guards alerted us that the situation was a threatening one. All the participants deliberate briefly. We decide not to risk it, but to torch the premises to prevent the archive from falling into the hands of the murderers and [then] to make ourselves scarce. Once the premises were already in flames, we left the courtyard and dispersed in different directions. But not everyone managed to make it back home. The [atrocities of the] so-called "Bloody Monday" already reigned the streets. By 18<sup>th</sup> September, the majority of the Party Committee members were already back in Cześćochowa. We then met at the premises of the [future<sup>2</sup>] *Judenrat* and discussed how we could conduct our political work and help the Jewish workers, who had fallen into deep need. We decided to work together with the TOZ, which had embarked upon relief work in all fields, and where one of the leaders of the institution was our comrade Brener. We also set this [viz. the TOZ] as the address for our conspiratorial political work. It was from there that we also took aid to all the cellars, loft dwellings and to any place where our assistance was needed. Consequently, the entire *Judenrat* clique soon started a war against the TOZ.

We had no contact with the Central Committee until 1940. At the beginning of 1940, thanks to Comrade Falk, we made contact with our CC. We also began to receive food parcels from abroad, which Comrade Raphael Federman sent from America, via Portugal, to the addresses of a few comrades. As these food parcels were valuable. We traded them for bread and other essential food products, thus quieting the hunger of many Bundist families.

We held our first party gathering at the graveside of our fallen comrade, Michał Szymkowicz (a member of the *Zukunft* Committee). This comrade's funeral was a [public] demonstration of [the] Bundists and members of *Zukunft* and SKIF<sup>3</sup> in Cześćochowa. The second gathering took place in February 1940, three months after the fall of Comrade Michał, when the Party raised a modest headstone for him.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: "Future"; Bundist youth organisation.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: According to Dawid Koniecpoler in his article "Tearful Dates" (*Sefer Cześćochowa*, Vol. II, col.40), the Cześćochowa *Judenrat* was only established on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1939.]

<sup>3</sup> [TN: *Sozialistischer Kinder-Farband* (Socialist Children's Union).]

At the beginning, only two members were in charge of the entire operation - Comrade L. Brener and me. Once contact had been established with the CC, Comrades Szymusz Jakubowicz, Mojsze Berkensztadt and Mojsz' Tuchmajer were co-opted. All the members of the Party, *Zukunft* and SKIF were divided into groups of five, which used by the members of the Committee. The Medem Library - which held 20,000 books - was, over the course of two days, smuggled into Comrade Mojsze Berkensztadt's own home, and Comrade Rajzla Berkensztadt was put in charge of running the library illegally. More than one thousand readers benefited from this library.

Comrades Falk, Celemenski, Frajnd, Samsonowicz, Kaufman and Lazar provided us with instructions and literature from the Central Committee. The most energetic distributor of the illegal literature in our city was Comrade Alebarde ("Alpha"<sup>4</sup>), who later perished in Warsaw.

In June 1940, the Party Committee in Kraków sent a group of party members over to us, whom we helped settle down and provided with work. Among them was the renowned Bundist activist from Sosnowiec, Bela Szczekacz, with her family [and] Soski and Nosek with their families.

Following the outbreak of the war between Germany and Soviet Russia, large arrests of political and communal activists began. The Gestapo was searching for Comrades Federman, Klin, Perec and Prozer.

As a result of the downfall of the Central Committee's messenger [Maria Szczęsna] with the illegal literature in Piotrków, Comrades Mojsze and Rajzla Berkensztadt - with whom the messenger had stayed - were arrested in Częstochowa. This was on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1941. We activated the entire Party and made contact with comrades from various cities, who informed us of the arrests that had taken place everywhere in connection with that same miscarriage. In Częstochowa, they once more began to search for the old Bundist activists. We managed to make Comrade Prozer "ill" and had him set up in the hospital for contagious diseases. During the time in which he lay in hospital, we were able to bribe the chief of the Gestapo and pull Comrade Prozer out of the danger. We also managed to hide Comrade Dr Fensterblau, from Kraków, for three weeks in Częstochowa and, later, to transport him to Warsaw. Comrade Fensterblau hid out with a regular reader of our illegal literature, the dentist Mrs Moszkowicz.

On 16<sup>th</sup> July 1941, as I was sitting doing my office work in TOZ, through the window, a member of our guard shouted at me that the Gestapo was approaching. I immediately left through the very door by which the Gestapo officers entered. In retaliation for my having gotten away from under their hands, they arrested five co-workers in TOZ, my mother and my brother - whom they threatened with being shot, unless I presented myself. I put myself at the disposal of the Party Committee, which decided that I should not leave the city and should wait until the situation became clear. When the state of the arrestees turned perilous, the majority of the Committee concluded that we were the only ones who needed to bear the responsibility for our deeds and that, even though I was going to a certain death, I must present myself in order to tear the innocents out from the claws of death. Agreeing with the majority's view, I said goodbye to those closest to me and to friends and went to the Gestapo. I was sure, as were all the comrades, that the way to the Gestapo was the last path I would walk in life.

From the Gestapo, they took me directly to jail [in Zawodzie] without an investigation. There, they made me stand facing the wall, brought in Berkensztadt and asked him if he knew me. I did not hear his reply. They then led us to separate cells. On the next morning, at nine o'clock, I was already standing handcuffed for an interrogation at the Gestapo. Five Gestapo officers questioned me. They simultaneously also interrogated Comrades [Mojsze] Berkensztadt and his wife. They tortured us

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<sup>4</sup> [TN: In the book "Czenstochow" (1958), this codename is spelt "Alpe."]

murderously and we fainted numerous times. The worst pain was for Comrade Rajzla Berkensztadt, when the Gestapo officers crushed her breasts in the door of a cupboard. I was placed, tied up, with my head under a tap and, every second a drop of water, dripped onto the middle of my head. They did the same with Comrade Berkensztadt. In this manner, they tormented us from nine in the morning to late in the evening. After that, they sent us back to jail. Following this interrogation, I lay unmoving for a fortnight. Those who concerned themselves with bringing me back to my strengths were the arrested Polish firemen who were in the same cell with me.

The comrades on the outside, as well as my family, did not rest. Even though the efforts to free us seemed like a hopeless battle for a lost cause, they did everything to extricate us from the hands of the murderers. After nine nightmarish weeks of constant pain, the comrades on the outside managed to steal me away from jail<sup>5</sup>. But Comrade Brener was not content with this and launched a new "offensive" to also free Comrades Mojsze and Rajzla Berkensztadt. He only met with partial success. Comrade Rajzla Berkensztadt, too, was effectively released, while Comrade Mojsze Berkensztadt sadly perished in Oświęcim.

During the whole time of our arrest, contact with the Central Committee was not lost. The party work, however, came practically to a halt, because the entire focus was on erasing the [Party's] traces and freeing us. A month after the release, in the second half of October 1941, a Comrade (I do not recall her name) from Tomaszów Mazowiecki came to us on a mission from the CC, and brought a package of literature from the CC. She left this package in Comrade Brener's house. Before there was time to remove the parcel, the whole building was surrounded by gendarmes. Since Comrade Brener was not at home at the time, we feared the package would fall into the hands of the gendarmes and that a new misfortune would then ensue. We resolved that we would get inside the house at any price. We employed various ways and means, but it was all in vain. We were certain that a catastrophe was bearing down upon us. Nevertheless, we did not just hang about. Comrade Brener, thanks to a comrade who was employed in the gendarmerie, was eventually able to gain access to his dwelling and remove the parcel.

That was the last package of literature which we received from the Central Committee and the connection with them was interrupted. We only received messages from Comrade Klin regarding the persecutions against the Bund in Warsaw. We also began to receive reports of "resettlements" of Jews in an entire array of towns. Without waiting for any instructions from the Central Committee, we called an inter-party conference in order to organise a large resistance movement. A large group of fighters was organised [from] members of all the political parties, under the leadership of an independent Jewish captain - Dr A. Wolberg. A plan of resistance was formulated. But sadly, we did not manage to stockpile any armaments, and we were powerless during the *akcja* which began on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1942. The *akcja* took five weeks. The devastation was indescribably great. Also, from our large camp of party members, only a small handful remained.

The 6,500 Jews who were left in Częstochowa were herded into a small ghetto. Here, too, we started to organise a resistance movement. We put ourselves in contact with all the political parties and began stockpiling weaponry, equipment for cutting through barbed wire and petrol with which to set fire to the ghetto in the event of an *akcja*. The Jewish captain, Dr A. Wolberg, took over the command. Our comrades Frajman and Jochimek headed the group in charge of cutting the barbed wire and the group, which that needed to set the ghetto on fire, was led by a young fighter M. Fiszlewicz. The general command was in the hands of an inter-party committee made up of ten individuals. The number of combatants was growing gradually. They were all divided into combat *drużyny* [teams/squads]. Our [viz. the Bund's] group consisted of 125 people, besides some

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<sup>5</sup> [TN: According to Jakób Alebarde in his article "Conspiratorial Activities" (*Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. II, col.216), this was done by bribing two Gestapo officers.]

comrades who were in the mixed combat squads. The reason that it was necessary to split the combat squads up in this manner was that the fighters were in different workplaces.

On 4<sup>th</sup> January 1943, when only a small number of our combatants were in the ghetto, the Germans carried out a "selection" amongst those who worked inside the ghetto. Mendel Fiszlewicz began shooting at the gendarmes. The battle was brief, but tragic. Twenty-five victims fell and, among them, was our old Bundist *bojowiec* [fighter], Comrade Herszl Frajman. As for the gendarmes - only one of them was wounded.

After this episode, a serious divergence of views arose between the representatives of the Bund [and] Left-wing *Poalei Zion*, and the rest of the political groupings that were represented in the Fighting Organisation. Our standpoint, and that of the Left-wing *Poalei Zion*, was that we should defend the ghetto and avoid individual offensives, while the rest of the groupings advocated sending groups to the forest and giving up on the idea of defending the ghetto. This difference of opinion led to a schism. Two parallel movements, with two separate goals, began operating in the ghetto. Nevertheless, the two movements maintained contact with each other through liaisons - Comrade Brener on our part, and Comrade Pejsak on theirs. Frequent conferences were held to the effect that the two combat movements should be reunited. However, due to the fact that they<sup>6</sup>, besides money for weapons, [also] began confiscating boots and other articles of apparel - which we thought would blow the cover of our whole operation - the difference of opinions became acuter and no accord was reached. All the same, we withdraw our members from the mixed combat groups. The first group, which went out to the woods to join other partisan groups, fell in battle against the AK. Among those killed then was our comrade Mojsze Rozenberg, Chairman of the Bundist Youth Organisation in Radomsko.

On 25<sup>th</sup> June 1943, as a result of the treachery of one of the Jewish *Ordnungsdienst*<sup>7</sup>, the activity of the combat groups was uncovered. *Schutzpolizei* seized the bunkers with the weapons and, with impunity, went on a day-long spree, murdering great and small, young and old. On the following day, the last few remaining fighters were still defending themselves at the tunnel's exit on the "Aryan side". All the combatants in the tunnel perished. But gendarmes and Gestapo officers also fell. Among these fighters to perish were our two *Zukunft* girls from Sosnowiec, [sisters] Pola and Dosia Szczekacz, and Comrade Pinchas Lewensztajn.

After the *akcja*, we found ourselves in the Częstochowa concentration camps, where the HASAG munitions factories Pelcery and Raków were located. At first, no organisational work was possible. Many of us had been killed in the recent events and those few remaining were split up into [the] two camps. Comrade L. Brener (Party Committee Chairman) and I were in one camp. We gradually began to make contact with our surviving comrades. Thanks to the assistance of Polish workers, we also contacted our comrade Adv. Wilczyński, who was in the other camp. We began anew to organise our remaining members - we in our camp and he in his. With the aid of Polish workers, the Central Committee members from Warsaw and Kraków once again established contact with us. We received letters signed by Comrades Fajner, Henryk, [Izaak] Samsonowicz, Marek [Edelman] and Władka [Peltel]. We also received bulletins from the Party, brochures and money. We immediately organised aid for comrades - for the sick (a typhus epidemic was raging), [and] for children and youth. We also organised two illegal kitchens, with the active cooperation of all the other political groupings.

In the camp, all the work of the political groups in general was coordinated. After we received reports from our comrades on the outside, regarding the liquidation of an entire array of camps, an inter-party committee was established, which devised three plans for resistance operations.

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<sup>6</sup>[TN: The other political groups – the "kibbutz."]

<sup>7</sup>Jewish Police

- The first plan was to organise small groups in the barracks with the appropriate amount of equipment, who were to put up a resistance in the event of an *akcja*.
- The second plan was to attack the *Werkschutz* guardhouse, take over the factory and free the imprisoned Jews from the camp.
- The third plan was to blow the factory up by setting fire to the dynamite storeroom.

In earnest, we prepared for all [three] plans in the most conspiratorial manner. The task of setting fire to the dynamite storeroom fell to other comrades. The storeroom was set alight twice but, both times, the firemen managed, with great effort, to bring the situation under control. We, in the first camp, as well as Comrade Wilczyński in the second one, maintained constant contact with the comrades on the outside. One Polish worker, who brought to our comrades in the second camp everything that the comrades from the outside sent over, fell as a victim when he smuggled in a bundle of money with letters. They seized the money from him, but he managed to swallow the little letters in the last minutes before being shot. Due to an unknown reason, our comrade Brener (the model of conspiracy) also had a downfall, which [actually] ended well. On 26<sup>th</sup> December 1944, directly after the courier had given a great sum of money over to him from our Central Committee and left, two SS officers suddenly entered [the barrack], searched him and found the money, because he had not yet managed to stash it away. Comrade Brener was immediately arrested and murderously beaten all day long, in order to reveal from where the money had come. Comrade Brener kept stubbornly repeating that the money was his own. After a whole day of pain, he managed to convince the SS officers that they could take the money, privately for themselves, and release him. The two SS men let themselves be “persuaded” by him and, finally, set Comrade Brener free. That evening was a great festive occasion for everyone - regardless of political affiliation.

Even though, after this episode, all the Jews in the camp became aware of everything that was being done by us, we still did not cease our work until the Red Army liberated Częstochowa from Hitler’s murderers.

The few comrades, who were liberated, immediately gave themselves over to the Party’s work. Before the Liberation, many comrades were dragged off by the SS men to Buchenwald and to other concentration camps in Germany. Among them were Comrades Wilczyński, Jankel Fajga and myself. Comrades Wilczyński and Fajga perished there. The group of comrades, who survived and I, are [now] back in Częstochowa and we continue to stand dutifully at our Bundist posts as we did before.

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