

D. Tanski

***Częstochower* Branch 11 of the Jewish People's Fraternal Order**

Introduction

The official birthdate of our order and branch is 1930 but, unofficially, the seeds for this new order were sown years earlier.

We do not wish to go into all the details behind the reasons that brought about the foundation of the new order. Nevertheless, it is worth establishing a few facts.

The outbreak of the [Soviet] October Revolution [in 1917] caused a strong difference of opinions and splintering in the Jewish street. The two contemporary workers' orders - the Arbeiter-Ring and the [Jewish] National Workers Alliance - were also drawn into these disputes.

The fight between right and left took on acute forms. The *Częstochower* Branch 111 was dissolved by the [Jewish] National Workers Alliance. More than seventy percent of the members were expelled from the Arbeiter[-Ring] Branch 261.

It became clear that the further cohesion amongst the various factions and groups had become impossible and that, at any rate, they would no longer be able to live together harmoniously. A necessity was created to found a new order for those expelled and for those who could not find a homely atmosphere in the existing orders.

When the *Częstochowers* were faced with the test of fire, they conducted themselves as *Częstochowers* - they heeded the call and founded their own organisation. Those expelled from Arbeiter-Ring Branch 261 and the dissolved Branch 111 of the [Jewish] National Workers Alliance formed the workers' order in March 1930.

Among the dozens of pioneers and charter members, who joined the new organisation, we should at least mention some of the most active: Jakow-Ber Silver, Aba Kaufman, Pinches Gotlib, Dawid Gotlib, Maurice Szwarc, Jasker, Maks Rozenblat, Benny Rozenblat, Benjamin Rozenblat, Mordche Altman, Willie Willinger, Sam Willinger, Rubin Berger, Izzie Berger, Chune Gliksman, Maks Wajnryt and his brothers, Szlingbaum, Karl Gerichter, D. Tanski, Maks Kuzminski, Herszl Grosberg, Abram Grosberg, Frajlich, Frajman and others.

The Internal Life and the Character of Branch 11

Born during the period of the hardest crisis in the history of the country, when unemployment was spreading across the land at lightning speed and the masses were living in poverty, our branch encountered many difficulties and hindrances. But, thanks to the tireless work of our pioneers, and surely even more so due to the necessity of having a progressive order of this type, our branch quickly grew and spread. Along with the entire Order, the branch significantly increased the number of its members and began playing an important role in our city's communal life.

Our branch avoided the mistakes of becoming an organisation affiliated to a political party¹. In this manner, we formed for ourselves a broad base of masses. Regardless of its larger or smaller number of members, the branch was always a place of great, ebullient communal activities - a concentration point of progressive workers, united around the struggles in our country and made brothers by the concern for their fellow members. From the very beginning, the branch opened wide its doors to any individual who only wished to belong [to it]. Every member, regardless of his views, had his place and worth in our branch. Each fight of the masses was supported with a full hand and each activity for the Jewish People was backed and carried out alongside other organisations.



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The branch's internal life was arranged such that every older or newer member should feel at home, and should find a comradely environment and a friendly atmosphere. The absolute tolerance of the different opinions, the interest and [sic in?] the wellbeing of the member, each one's right to set the character and course of our activities, the collective leadership - these and other no less important qualities prompted the members to be active and to see to the branch's growth and existence. Here, they became acquainted with all social questions. Here, they found an echo of all the battles the masses were waging. Here, they lived their cultural and communal lives. Here, they associated with the Jewish People and, here, they found mutual aid and all the benefits that a fraternal organisation should provide.

The emergency fund, which is currently run by Comrades Sidor and Rozenblat, has provided aid to sick and needy members. With their tactful approach, their understanding and their devotion to the work, Comrades Sidor and Rozenblat have set the fund on a basis of self-help - as an expression of camaraderie and concern of the branch for its members. In all the years of its existence, the branch has never lost a single member due to unpaid bills.

¹ [TN: As a whole, the International Workers Order was closely connected to the Communist Party.]

Our branch also has the merit of having led the wives of our members out of the kitchen, and interested them in communal activities and in the branch's problems.

With the joint work of [female] Comrades Frajlich, Minnie Rubinsztajn, Frida Najberg, Annie Goldberg, Ester Koźmiński, Vladimir, Horsz and Tanski, a women's club was formed, with its own autonomy and its own field of work. Through this club, many women came into contact with issues that were once alien to them. They were drawn into all the struggles that the branch led, assisted the branch in its activities and developed very important work amongst the women in their vicinity. In this club, they developed socially and culturally, became activists and leaders and, in every field, worked alongside their fellow [male] members. Many of them play a leading role in the branch to this day. Thus, Comrade Frajlich is a permanent member of the Executive [Board], a tested fighter for Jewish rights, a builder of the Yiddish school, a social activist and a leader in several organisations.

The branch's "laden tables" have become known far and wide. At these "*lamelech*" [²], which the branch held quite often, the members spent a good and pleasurable time and enjoyed the cultural entertainment. The summer outings also drew a crowd, because the branch, under the capable leadership of Comrade Silver, always found means to entertain its members in a cultural-communal manner.

As of today, we have 250 members - not all *Częstochowers*. Thus, for instance, Comrade Brodski, a native of Odessa, who is one of our branch's most active members and was its President for many years, was more concerned with our Relief than many *Częstochowers*. Comrade Brodski has shown the way, how members, even those who are not *landsleit*, can become united around the goals of the branch.

Branch 11 is now one of the best branches in New York's Bronx district.

The Cultural Work

In the field of cultural work, we have particularly distinguished ourselves. We have conducted a broad and earnest propaganda for the necessity of cultural work, to become acquainted with our culture and to spread it deeply within our membership. We encouraged self-education on a large scale. Many of these students, later, continued their studies in higher schools. Dozens of them are, today, active in the cultural front. We have raised a number of speakers, activists, and intelligent labourers who today occupy prominent positions in our order.

Every meeting is transformed into a cultural activity. An introduction, a lecture, a discussion, literary evenings, musical concerts, recitals, cultural festivities dedicated to our [viz. Yiddish] classical and new literature, the celebration of historical events - all these were opportunities to acquaint our members with our people's cultural achievements. We disseminated various Yiddish journals, pamphlets, books, newspapers and other publications. The matter of literature sales is specially taken up at every meeting and discussed at length. Our literary agent, Comrade Silverman, performs his duties with devotion and self-sacrifice.

It is [then] already also understandable why the branch heartily supported the *Yidisher Kultur Farband* [Jewish Culture Association] (the YKUF) and its journal *Yidishe Kultur*.

Our interest in the cultural work, by its own nature, has already driven our branch to pay the greatest attention to the school.

² [TN: "*לֵאמֶלֶךְ*" in the original; we have as yet not been able to ascertain the meaning of this word, nor have we found it in any source, but it would appear from the context that it is synonymous with "banquets."]

From the first day onwards, we had supervision over a school, which we supported morally and materially. Hundreds of children were recruited, by the branch, for this school. The majority of them, afterwards, continued their education in the Order's higher schools. We have formed special cadres of school workers, who are specialists in their field [and have been] trained with sufficient knowledge and understanding for this proletarian Yiddish school. The branch's old school activists, such as Comrades Koźmiński, Najberg, Silver, Sadie Berger, Louis Goldberg, [female] Comrades Frajlich and Najberg and others, may well be proud of their work.

We distribute thousands of pamphlets regarding the Yiddish school, drawing the area's broader echelons [of the Jewish population] into the battle for its existence and development. Through the school, we gained influence over the parents who, until just recently, had had a negative or, at best, a passive attitude towards Yiddish and Yiddish literature.

Nowadays, these parents have been drawn into the fight against the national nihilism and against assimilation. Our school is now School 5. It caters to over fifty small children. Comrades Louie Goldberg, Sadie Berger, Frajlich and Najberg represent the branch there and work tirelessly for the school. Our branch takes pride in School 5, and in our comrades' very large contributions towards it.

Its serious attitude towards the Yiddish school and the Yiddish culture, and its concern for the younger generation, has put the branch at the head of the foremost rows of Yiddish cultural institutions in our city.

Communal and Political Activities

Our branch conducted a broad campaign for insurance against unemployment. We handed out thousands and thousands of leaflets, collected thousands of signatures, sent speakers to the neighbouring organisations, and called large mass-meetings under our banner, at which our members spoke.

We participated in the march to Washington [?], and were represented there by Comrade Aba Kaufman. This is just one example of the hundreds of endeavours which the branch carried through, and of the manner in which it participated in these operations through its members and funds. Thanks to these activities, the branch's popularity grew. Whenever support or signatures were needed for some enterprise in our area, the initiators could count on the branch. Thus, for instance, when in 1945 an area committee was formed to combat the antisemitic [*New York*] *Daily News*, our branch was automatically counted among the endorsers. We were represented there by Comrade Brodski, who had a great influence there.

Our branch, as an organisation, always participated in local and national elections. Special meetings were dedicated to the analysis of the programmes and candidates. We led a wide campaign [for voters] to take part in the elections, supported the progressive [viz. Communist] candidates and unmasked the reactionaries. The street meetings, organised by the branch, were often mobilisation points for the broad masses in the area.

Branch 11 was the first to organise the *Częstochower Patronage* - an organisation to fight fascism in Poland and to help the victims of terror.

The branch delegated its best activists to it, such as Comrades Silver, Szlingbaum, Aba Kaufman, D. Tanski, Rubin Berger, Koźmiński, Louie Goldberg; the [female] Comrades Frajlich, Vladimir, Annie

Goldberg and Ellen Tanski; Chune and Fradel Gliksman, Handelsman and his wife, Josef Rozenblat, Willie Willinger, Sam Willinger and others.

As an anti-fascist organisation, our branch supported the Anti-Nazi Council³ from the very first day of its existence. It participated in its activities both as an organisation and with its [individual] members. The branch called a boycott of Nazi merchandise, picketed the shops where it was being sold and distributed a massive amount of anti-Nazi literature. The branch was part of the Anti-Nazi Council through its delegate Louis Goldberg.

Branch 11 also warmly supported the activities of the ICOR - the Association for Jewish Colonisation in the Soviet Union⁴. We energetically participated in the campaign to popularise the solution to the Jewish and general national problem in the Soviet Union, where antisemitism had been declared a violation of the law.

Materially and morally, we supported the Jewish settlement in Birobidzhan, where the Jews of the Soviet Union were to become normalised as a nation with its own culture, language and political and economic independence. Our comrade Aba Kaufman was a member of ICOR's Central Committee.

We [also] considered it our great duty to defend the Jewish settlement in Palestine against the imperialistic machinations of the English government, [and to fight] for its unhindered development, for a free Palestine built upon Jewish-Arab cooperation and for a Jewish national home. We held dozens of meetings dedicated to the struggle against the White Paper [of 1939⁵], sent protest telegrams to congressmen and called upon our members to participate in every activity to annul this blatant discrimination against Jews.

Branch 11 developed as a persistent fighting organisation against the Reaction and antisemitism and for Jewish rights in all countries.

When the War broke out, our branch quickly took its place among the patriotic organisations and supported our government with all its might. We conducted a true anti-Fascist - and simultaneously patriotic - work of clarifying the goals of the War and the obligation of each individual to do his duty in the sacred war against the Nazi beast. Dozens of our members left for the front. We supported them the entire time, maintained them as members and encouraged them in their bitter fight against the enemy of mankind.

In the War, we lost Comrades L. Nestin, friend Rubinsztajn⁶ and Louie Lefkowicz, who fell as soldiers on the battlefield.

We purchased tens of thousands of dollars' worth of bonds, and the branch was thanked by the Treasury Department. Our contributions to the USO⁷, the Russian War Relief⁸, and other war relief agencies were also significant.

When the returning soldiers visited the branch, the event was a true festive occasion. The closeness and camaraderie that the branch had brought among its members were sensed. It was a celebration of victory, and a joyous occasion of welcoming our brave soldiers back to their home, to their branch.

³ [TN: Organisation founded in 1933; its full name was "The Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi Council (or League) to Champion Human Rights."]

⁴ [TN: More commonly known in English as "Organisation for Jewish Colonisation in Russia," although both names appear in the sources.]

⁵ [TN: A policy paper issued by the British government which, among other things, limited Jewish immigration to Palestine to 75,000 for five years.]

⁶ [TN: According to the "Index of Names Mentioned in the Book Czenstochover Yidn" which appears in the book "Czenstochow" (1958), this individual's given name was Joe or Joey (דזשיי).]

⁷ [TN: The United Service Organisations Inc.; a US non-profit corporation that provides entertainment for US troops and their families.]

⁸ [TN: US organisation that provided aid to the Soviet Union during WWII.]

After the War, our branch has been participating in the great national task of supporting the Surviving Remnant of the Jewish People in Europe.

Our Order issued a call to raise a quarter of a million dollars in 1944, and a million dollars in 1945, to aid Jews in all countries. In both cases, our branch exceeded the quota that had been set for it.

We carry out widespread information work regarding the situation of the Jews in the countries ravaged [by the War] and call upon every member to donate as much as he can.

Our relief operations shall not cease until Jewish life becomes normalised. And we, as individuals and as an organisation, will do our duty! We will help create the unity of the American Jews necessary for a broad, democratic programme of relief work, for a solution to the Jewish question in the world, for the eradication of fascism and antisemitism and for the assurance of the rights and lives of the Jews.

The Branch and the Relief

Branch 11 has written an important chapter in the history of the Czenstochover Relief and its selfless work.

As a *landsmannschaft* branch - a *Częstochower* organisation - it also had local issues to resolve. These were the problems of our hometown, where we had left our close ones and friends. And we never forgot them. In all the fundraising campaigns that we conducted, *Częstochowa* stood in first place.

From its very foundation, the branch bound itself organically to the Relief and worked harmoniously together with it. We helped to formulate the Relief's guidelines, run its operations and broaden the scope of its activities.

Our members in the Relief hold respected positions and, thanks to their devotion to it, they have earned the recognition of all *landsleit*. Comrade Jakow-Ber Silver, Chairman of the Relief's Executive Board and also Chairman of the *Czenstochover Yidn* Book Committee, is certainly considered one of the Relief's best activists. His contribution to the Relief's activities, his large, personal monetary donations and his extraordinary capabilities in leading the Relief, were of great consequence in the establishment of a "United Relief", which could become a meeting point for all *landsleit* regardless of their [political] tendency or grouping. Aba Kaufman, a member of the *Czenstochover Yidn* Editorial Board, has been connected with the Relief from the very first day of its existence. His contribution is also significant. Alkona Chrobolovsky, an old member of our branch, an activist who was widely known already back in the old home with his cultural-social activities, now one of the editors of the book *Czenstochover Yidn*, has aided the Relief extensively in its work, and particularly in planning, publishing and editing this book. And we certainly cannot underestimate the work of such members of the branch as Josef Rozenblat, Koźmiński and Gliksman.

The branch, as an organisation, has always supported the Relief materially and morally. It has held several lectures about the Relief and its activities. In 1945, it conducted a special campaign for the Relief. Even though a large number of members are not *Częstochowers*, everyone heeded the call. The branch contributed \$1,000 to the Relief, not counting the personal donations of our individual members. This campaign was led selflessly and with full accountability by the whole Executive, and especially Comrades Brodski (himself not from *Częstochowa*) and Tanski.

Branch 11 will always cooperate with the Relief and give it every possible support in its sacred work for our brothers and sisters across the ocean.

In Closing

The *Częstochower* Branch 11 of the Jewish People's Fraternal Order can well take pride in its sixteen-year existence, in its contribution to Jewish life and to the development of Jewish culture here in this country, in its contributions to the suffering Jews in Europe, in its enduring fight for progress and against fascism and antisemitism and in its work with the Czenstochover Relief.

The branch, as a whole, does not stand in isolation within the confines of narrow fraternalism, but is connected with every movement and every struggle that only bears a progressive character, here in this country and in the life of the Jewish people.

The branch works alongside all organisations that wish to make Jewish life more secure and healthier, such as the American Jewish Congress and others. In the [American] Federation for Polish Jews, we are represented by Comrades Koźmiński and Louis Goldberg and we work together with the Federation in all areas.

The branch represents fraternity plus progress - it is a Jewish progressive people's organisation.

The branch's individual member is also a new type. He has been raised in a constant struggle for the progress and wellbeing of the masses. He is permeated with a profound love for the country he has adopted. He has remained a loyal son of his people - the indefatigable builder of Jewish culture, the keeper of Jewish tradition, the soldier who fights for Jewish unity and for a progressive Jewish life.

Both the branch, as a whole, and its members constitute an important factor in New York's Jewish communal life.

Greetings to Częstochowa

Through this book, *Czenstochover Yidn*, the *Częstochower* Branch 11 conveys its hearty greeting to its brothers and sisters in Częstochowa, with encouragement in their difficult situation and promises every possible aid for the development of Jewish life in our hometown of old.

Branch 11 is certain that the Jewish community in Częstochowa will become even more firmly established, as it was before the War, because *Częstochowers* have always been tested fighters for a new and more beautiful life and because a new day is dawning with hope in life for the entire Jewish people.

**Committee of Częstochower Branch 11
of the Jewish People's Fraternal Order
in the United States of America**

Bratt, Silver, Tanski, Wargon and A. Grosberg

Officials of Branch 11 in 1946

President – Jechiel Bratt
Vice-President – Karl Wargon
Finance Secretary – A. Grosberg
Cultural Director – Jakow-Ber Silver
Treasurer – Berl Erlich
Press & Publicity – Dawid Tanski
District Representative – Rubin Berger
Minutes Secretary – M. Nafman
Hospitality – Aba Kaufman
Emergency Fund – Josef Rozenblat
School activists – [female] Comrades Frąjlich, Sadie Berger and Louie Goldberg⁹
Representatives in the Polish Federation – Maks Koźmiński and Louie Goldberg

Members of the Executive

Besides the abovementioned officials, the following individuals were members of the Executive:

Louis Brodski
Ellen Tanski
Sarah Gliksman
[female] Comrade Rose Mandel
Comrade Willie Willinger
Comrade Maks Wajnryt

⁹ [TN: Each of these three names is preceded by the Yiddish "chaverte" (חברטע), meaning female friend/comrade/member; in case of Louie Goldberg, this is an obvious misprint.]