

Wolf Gliksman

The New Częstochowa

Along with the remnants of the bygone Polish Jewry, in January 1945, Częstochowa was swept into a period of life and building.

The fact that, on the day of [Częstochowa's] liberation, 16th January 1945, in Częstochowa, there were 5,200 Jews, who had survived the four labour camps, soon motivated a few enterprising individuals to establish a body which was to occupy itself with putting the Surviving Remnant back on its feet.

Cut off from the world by the long, dark years of the War, with no prospects of swift aid from the *landsmanschaften* in America or the Land of Israel, the Surviving Remnant in Częstochowa was faced with very difficult tasks.

On the ruins of their former homes, on the soil that was soaked in the blood of those closest to them, morally battered, the Jews in Częstochowa brought out the courage and energy to set about organising an immediate and speedy relief operation.

In the West, as the War still continued for a few months, a central body of the remaining Jews in Poland was just being formed.

And, nevertheless, a small group, headed by L. Brener, took upon itself the sacred duty of achieving that which life demanded.

The news that *landsleit*, who had held out during the War in Soviet Russia, and who would in time return to Częstochowa, strengthened the resolve to create a Jewish committee in Częstochowa. Besides, among the 5,200 saved Jews, there were some 100 children - either complete or half orphans – who, during the War, had been in bunkers, with Christians or just saved by a miracle. Another urgent problem were the nearly 200 youths who were without protection or support, the dozens of invalids and the hundreds of sick people who came, together with the Soviet Army, when it marched in. All these needs increased, even more, the demand for constructive relief work.



The Jewish Committee in Częstochowa in 1945/46
Standing (R-L): M. Lederman, Brzeziński, Birenholc, L. Baum, L. Jurysta.
[and] Grinsztajn; Seated (R-L): Ajzenberg, Czarny, M. Hasenfeld,
L. Brener, J. Goldberg, D. Koniecpoler and Z. Weksztajn

The first news about Częstochowa was received, in America, by the United Czenstochover Relief in New York from the Polish ambassador in Moscow at the time, Stanisław [sic Zygmunt] Modzelewski. We present the full text of the letter in another part of this book.

Further reports were coming from Częstochowa, through regular correspondence between the *Częstochower landsleit* in America and our hometown which ensued.

The Jewish Committee in

Częstochowa made up of people from various political factions, with conscientious awareness, albeit with limited means, developed widespread activity.

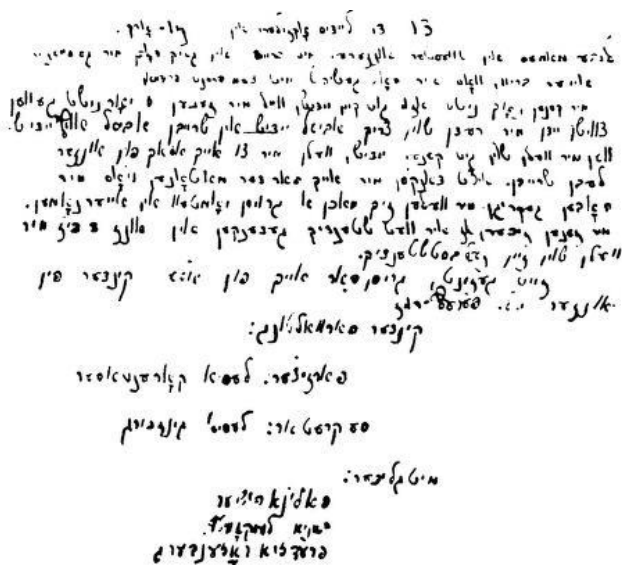
They established homes for the homeless, invalids and children, a reading room, places for juveniles, and a preparatory school. Children and young people received lessons and were fully nourished.

And, even though for a short time, the number of Jews in Częstochowa decreased, and in May of that year the Jewish community in Częstochowa numbered only 2,000 Jews, with the return of Częstochowa Jews from different camps, in June, the number of Jews reached 6,000.

New tasks presented themselves to the Jewish *Kehilla*.

Cooperatives for cobblers, tailors, carpenters, locksmiths and barbers are organised. Certain difficulties emerge in connection with this - such as obtaining craftsmen's cards [i.e. certificates]. But the Committee, with great efforts, also manages to overcome these difficulties.

A community began to be built, which was small but on healthy foundations. The Jewish population in Częstochowa began to work, trade and settle down to everyday life.



A thank-you letter from the children of the I.L. Peretz School to the Ladies Auxiliary (summer 1946)

One problem that was very difficult to bear was that of the Jewish children. After spending years in camps, bunkers, under “Aryan papers”, with Christians or in cloisters, they needed a new education from the ground up. Some display neurological disorders, some are afraid to identify themselves as Jews, and there are even some who exhibit an attitude of hate towards Jews and Judaism. There were children who understood no Yiddish at all.

It took a great deal of energy and work to bring these children back into Jewish society.

The Jewish Committee organised the entire intelligentsia, the best pedagogic forces, and they enthusiastically threw themselves,

with heart and soul, into the work. After a short while, the fruits of these efforts could already be seen. The children start to learn Yiddish, play, dance and, from time to time, also put on performances - in time, larger and more beautiful. Torn from their parents and those closest to them, they once again became Jewish children who had mastery of the spoken and written Yiddish language.

However, the displays of hate, on the part of some amongst the Polish populace, the murder of a few individual Jews in Częstochowa and in other cities, as well as the pogrom in Kraków, causes a new migration of the Częstochowa Jews and, at the end of 1945, the Jewish community in Częstochowa numbers 3,000 souls. In March 1946, the number falls to 1,200. To a certain extent, this also discourages the leaders of the small Częstochowa *Kehilla*. The work of the cooperatives and workshops is downsized and Jewish trade falls – but, fortunately, just for a short time.

Repatriation from the Soviet Union has begun. The number of Jews in Częstochowa begins to grow and the handful of builders, once again, takes to strengthening the Jewish community.

The activity of the communal institutions and the workshops is once again expanding. Cultural activity also intensifies. In May 1946, the number of Jews reaches 2,500 souls. The belief in a [permanent] Jewish community increases and gives greater courage to the work.

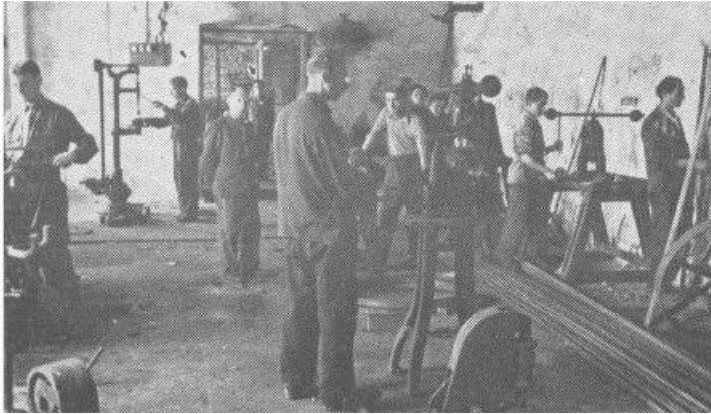
But, already in July 1946, a new wave of anti-Jewish excesses [viz. displays of hostility] sweeps across Poland. False rumours of ritual murders are spread. The dreadful pogrom takes place in Kielce - and this results in a further decrease of the Jewish population in Częstochowa. And, although the spirits [of animosity] eventually subside, this causes a partial liquidation of private dwellings, businesses and workshops. A new migration has begun.

And, nevertheless, a Jewish community exists in Częstochowa - small, but alive.

For [the reader] to have picture of the achievements in building up the new Jewish Częstochowa, [I] should like to present a statistical overview:

- a) Some 200 children have passed through the children's home. For many of them, their parents, who were separated from them during the War [or] general relatives or guardians, have been found again. In this manner, more than 100 children have once more received a home of their own.
- b) Dozens of invalids have been given prosthetic legs or arms and, thus, they have become partially fit for work - some have even become independent.
- c) Hundreds of sick people were put up in hospitals and maintained by the Jewish Committee, until completely regaining their health. They are now under the care of the TOZ.
- d) A special home was arranged for the homeless.
- e) The elderly, the poor and those who are just infirm, as well as workers, receive free lunches, dry goods and such.
- f) A convalescent home was set up for patients with lung disease, and many of them have already recuperated.
- g) A kindergarten was established, where children, aged 3-7, are educated in the Jewish spirit.
- h) Some 70 youths study at the supplementary schools.
- i) Repatriates also received, besides a one-time stipend of 2,000 *złoty*, dry goods rations for one month and lunches for ten days to one month.

Some of the institutions listed [above] have already been liquidated as a result of the better situation and due to migrations. Nevertheless, a few cooperatives exist to this day, and the work of helping individuals become settled continues in full measure.



A mechanical workshop at the Jewish Committee's Crafts School

We also see activity in cultural work in the new Częstochowa. Large memorial ceremonies were held on the anniversary of the Liberation in January 1946 and 1947.

In March 1946, a memorial ceremony was held on the third anniversary of the massacre of the Jewish intelligentsia. A solemn ceremony was held at the Częstochowa [Jewish] cemetery, at the unveiling of a huge memorial monument over their mass grave.



Inauguration of the Zionist "Ichud" premises (Dec 1945)



Staff at the Bund's workers' restaurant



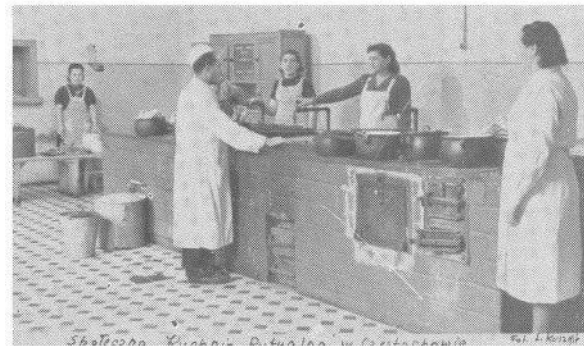
The exhumation of those killed in the liquidation of the "Small Ghetto"



Transporting the [bodies of] the victims of 4th January 1943 from the "Small Ghetto" to the Jewish cemetery



The Jewish religious kitchen



The Jewish religious kitchen



***The Jewish religious Kehilla;
Seated (R-L): J. Landau, A. Zander, A. Dorfgang, L. Rajcher,
N. Edelist, M. Goldberg, Rabbi E. Wajsler, Ch. Rajzman,
Sz. Granek, D. Koniecpoler and B. Szybel***

mikve [ritual bath] with a hygienic bathing facility, a school for children, a *yeshiva*, a rabbi, a *shochet*, and tends to Jewish Częstochowa's religious needs in general. It also provides a number of sick people with doctors and medication.

In closing, it is worth mentioning that, in the first half of 1946, the Jewish Committee spent one million *gilden* [i.e. *złoty*] on communal aid. It will cost five million *złoty* to restore the destroyed Jewish cemetery and encircle it with a wall.

Together with the number of Jews in contemporary Poland, the Jewish community in Częstochowa is fighting for its existence. We have faith that, on the ruins of the bygone great Jewish Częstochowa, a pulsating and vibrant Jewish life will, once more, sprout up in our city.

In April 1946, a I.L. Peretz *Akademia*¹ was held - the first one after the War. This was a great festive occasion for Jewish Częstochowa.

The visit of Jakow [Jacob] Pat, as envoy from the Jewish Labour Committee in New York, was a great event in Częstochowa. The hall at the Hotel Polonia, where the gathering was held, was jam-packed, wall-to-wall, with the entire Jewish population of Częstochowa.

A beautiful chapter in the annals of the new Częstochowa is being written by the religious *Kehilla*. It runs a communal kitchen, where 100 lunches are given out every day. It maintains a

¹ [TN: Pol. "celebration"; in this case, a festive gathering on the anniversary of the writer's death (he died on 3rd April 1915).]