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The *Częstochower Patronage* in New York (Committee for the aid of political arrestees in Poland between 1931-1939)

In the 1930s, ever more gruesome news began to arrive from Poland. The fascist regime, which was claspng the country as if in iron tongs, robbed the masses of any rights and any possibility of existence. No trace of freedom remained - only fascism reigned free, the pogrom perpetrators rampaged free, and antisemitism was free. The ruling cliques wished to rid themselves of the people's wrath by casting the blame for all the afflictions, pain and suffering of the masses upon the Jews, by inciting pogroms and by shattering the country's democracy. But the masses did not let themselves be led astray by the false fascist slogans, and fought the regime bitterly. These battles brought great sacrifices.

The Polish *Ochra*¹, however, was not content with torturing arrestees. It would shoot labour activists in the street, without any trial or [indeed] warning. The renowned *Częstochowa* activist Adek Landau was murdered in this manner - the police shot him in the street and quietly buried the body, without even notifying his family of it. Prison terms were dispensed with a very generous hand. Here is a verdict that was passed upon a group of *Częstochowers*: Frenkel - 15 years imprisonment, Knapik - 15 years, Brajman - 12 years and Olszewski - 5 years. The Polish civil press presented the following horrifying statistics: from 1st May 1926 to 1st May 1936, 1,534 anti-fascists were murdered without trial, 2,400 were wounded and 125,000 were sentenced to prison. Over the course of this period, the courts passed sentences which together totalled 50,000 years.

It is no surprise that Jews, those most persecuted, also constituted the greater number of the political arrestees. The Jewish prisoners also suffered more than the others - they were tortured [both] as Jews and as political [activists]. The Jewish masses in Poland sought aid in their struggle and, more than once, regarding this matter, they turned to Jewish society around the entire globe. They demanded of us, the immigrants from Poland, a public stance regarding the Polish government, and activities of moral support and financial aid for the victims of fascism. "Why do you say nothing?", American Jews were often asked.

Frequently, the correspondent of the New York *Tog [Day]*, B. Smolyar, warned that, if American Jewry did not force the arrogant Polish government to bridle the appetites of the antisemites, the Polish Jews would be doomed. It was a question of simple human sensitivity to stretch out a brotherly hand of anti-fascist solidarity to the masses in Poland, and an obligation as a people to aid the Polish Jews in their battle. Support for the political victims of the Polish fascism was the order of the moment.

The *Patronage* was formed in 1931 in order to organise this emergency aid.

To begin with, the *Patronage* ended up having to fight an atmosphere of indifference that pervaded the *landsmannschaften*. If the interest of the old home found any echo at all amongst the local *landsleit*, it was expressed through philanthropic relief work. But even this work was conducted on a very small scale. Divisions and splits made any energetic operation even harder. The news from Poland was not brought to the attention of the Jews in America. The wider public did not become agitated and swept along with the events in Poland, because the leaders of American Jewry did not find it necessary to stir up the masses against the fascism in Poland. When the persecution of Jews in Poland took on such proportions that the wider echelons of the *landsleit* began to demand action, they called

¹ [TN: Although "*Ochra*" was the name of the Soviet Russian secret political police, it would appear from here that the name was used in Poland in ref. to its Polish counterpart.]

a conference, passed a resolution in chosen words and, with that, the matter concluded. Even in the later years, once fascism had cast away any mask of democracy and was rampaging freely on the backs of the Jews in Poland, here, in America, words were still carefully chosen - and actions even more so. It was actually the Jews of Poland who expressed their protests against the Polish hangmen more brazenly and ardently than the free Jews in America. In 1936, Dr [Samuel] Margoshes, editor of the *Tog*, was compelled to warn the local *landsleit* that the relief problem needed to take form and that "the moral aid, which has hitherto been very much neglected, is of colossal value and must be administered as quickly as possible".

Under these circumstances, the *Patronage's* work was a very difficult one. Much toil, energy, tenaciousness and patience were required in order to pierce the soil of the *landsmannschaften*, to clear away all the prejudices and to gain the trust and support of the *landsleit*. They needed to be made interested in the bloody struggles in Poland, in the cruelty of Polish fascism and in the need and suffering of the political martyrs.

At the other end, it was necessary to establish connections with the political arrestees in the Polish prison cells, maintain these contacts, send over the collected funds and receive authentic reports from there - [all] despite the persecutions and hindrances on part of the Polish *Ochraną* [Secret Police].

Nevertheless, the work was crowned with success. The *Patronage's* small group of founders consisted of people without resounding names, simple workers without elevated social positions and without bags of money - but to whom the fight against fascism was close. Over time, the *Patronage* became strong and gained prestige, weightiness and recognition from the *landsleit*. Even the [more] obstinate opponents were forced to change their opinions and adopt a positive stance towards the devoted work and selflessness of the *Patronage* activists. At long last, they were forced to recognise the necessity of combating the Polish fascism. They were compelled to agree with the *Patronage's* historically important goals.

In accordance with its programme, the *Patronage* turned all its energy to acquainting the *landsleit* with the horrifying terror that was reigning in Poland, and with the struggles that the masses there were leading. The *Patronage* disseminated all news from the old home, raised funds for the political arrestees and helped form unity amongst the *landsleit* of different factions which was so necessary for the fight against the Polish *Sanacja* regime. We must proudly emphasise that the *landsleit* responded well to the *Patronage's* appeal and supported it with full generosity. All the *landsmannschaft* organisations - such as the [Czenstochauer] Young Men's Association, the Ladies Auxiliary, the Arbeiter-Ring Branch 261 and the International Workers Order Branch 11 - were always represented in all of the *Patronage's* undertakings and supported its work. The relationship with the [Czenstochover] Relief Organisation was extremely close. It is truly difficult to determine where the Relief's activity began and where the work of the *Patronage* ended. Both worked for the wellbeing and freedom of our brothers and sisters in the home of old. Just as the Relief was impartial and progressive, so was the *Patronage* a centre for all the progressive *Czestochowers* who were interested in overthrowing Polish fascism. Any operation, benefiting Jews in Poland, was acknowledged and actively supported by the *Patronage*, regardless of who had taken the initiative in that operation. Every detainee was given aid, as far as this was possible, regardless of his or her political affiliation. The *Patronage* became an integral part of *landsmannschaft* life and a strong instrument by which to forge unity within the *landsmannschaft*. Whoever was present at the *Patronage's* well-attended meetings and banquets, truly felt the joy that unity can create and the sympathy for the political arrestees that the *Patronage* evoked.

From 1936, both organisations - the Relief and the *Patronage* - held joint balls every year and part of the proceeds was allotted to the political prisoners. Every ball was a demonstration against Polish fascism and an expression of love towards the brethren in Poland.

The *Częstochower Patronage* in New York founded a branch in Los Angeles, California, which over time became an important factor in the life of the *landsleit* there. It organised public protest meetings against Polish fascism and also various functions for the benefit of the political arrestees. Groups were also formed in Detroit, Canada and South America. At the initiative of the *Częstochowers*, a *Nowo Radomsko Patronage* was also founded, which became a respected member of the *Patronages* family. In praise of the *Częstochowers*, we must highlight the fact that they were among the most important initiators of the Central [Committee] of the *Patronages*. Among other achievements, they managed to convince the two *Patronages* existing then - those of Nowodwór¹ and Białystok - to join all forces in order to found a Central, which would be tasked with building new *Patronages* and generally promulgating the fight against Polish fascism.

The establishment of the Central was of very great significance. The struggle against Polish fascism took on a broad, national character. The Central had the means of popularising the *Patronages* amongst the *landsleit*, undertaking various operations for the benefit of the political prisoners in Poland, deepening the work and preparing the ground for joint [public] appearances.

In a short time, the Central built thirty-five *Patronages*, in which almost all of the most important *landsmannschaft* organisations participated. Each *Patronage* was autonomous, but they all worked together under the Central's leadership. The journal *Zu Hilfe* [To the Rescue], which the Central published, had an average circulation of 5,000 copies. The *Częstochower Patronage* sent its best activists into the Central and was generally responsible for a large part of its work.

1936 was a year of great, intensive activity. That year, a new wave of antisemitism flooded Poland. Pogroms on Jews became a daily phenomenon. The *reakcja* [right-wing reaction] was raging in an unbearable manner and the number of detainees rose tremendously. The Poland regime cast away all guise of democracy and curled up in Hitler's arms, both in its external and internal policies. The Polish regime quite unashamedly set out on the road of overt and brutal fascism.

In the summer of 1936, the *Częstochower Patronage* actively participated in the creation of the "People's Committee to Combat the Pogroms on Jews in Poland²", which undertook a number of operations. Thousands of signatures, protesting the wave of pogroms, were sent to the Polish Ambassador in Washington.

The *Patronage* also participated in the large and impressive street demonstration organised by the People's Committee Against Antisemitism [and Fascism³], and was represented in the delegation that was sent to the Polish Consul in New York.

We must also mention the imposing historic march to Washington that was organised by that same People's Committee Against Antisemitism. Thousands of delegates, representing around a quarter of a million Jews, 30,000 Ukrainians and hundreds of *landsmannschaft* organisations, took part. Our *Patronage*, too, was represented by a delegate. Senators, congressmen, writers and social activists -

¹ [TN: Most likely ref. to Nowy Dwór in the Lida district (modern-day Belarus); there are a great many localities bearing this name throughout Eastern Europe.]

² [TN: We have as yet been unable to find any mention of this organisation in any sources.]

³ [TN: We have translated the Yiddish name verbatim; this organisation is apparently one and the same as the one called "World Committee for the Victims of German Fascism" in English.]

both Jewish and Gentile - endorsed the march. Senator Thomas⁴ took the delegation to the President, whom they presented with a detailed memorandum. This was the first time that Washington officially heard Polish Jewry's cry of anguish.

On 11th June 1937, our Relief, with the vigorous collaboration of the *Patronage*, called a [protest] meeting against the pogroms in our hometown. This was a great demonstration of our *landsleit* - all the *landsmannschaft* organisations were represented. The speakers condemned the arrogant government in the sharpest manner and demanded the immediate abolition of all discrimination and persecution against Jews. Every event in Poland, in general, and in Częstochowa in particular, found an echo in the activities of the *Patronage*.

In its last report to the Central, the *Częstochower Patronage* declared:

"We have had great difficulties in reaching the landsleit belonging to the different organisations. Disunity and many misapprehensions reigned amongst these organisations. But thanks to our tireless work and efforts, we have been able to persuade the landsleit that it is necessary to unite all forces for the fight against Polish fascism, which is the progenitor of the pogroms upon Jews. As of today, a great unity reigns amongst us. We currently have one United Relief, which raises aid for those suffering need in Częstochowa, and also for the political arrestees..."

Since the War, the *Patronage* obviously no longer exists. The Relief remains. All the *Patronage's* former activists are involved in it, as they were earlier. They have remained loyal to their sisters and brothers in Częstochowa – who, today, require more aid than ever before.

The *Patronage* has written an impressive page in the war against Polish fascism. Many of the former political prisoners, whom the *Patronage* had supported, fell as heroes at the barricades and in the ghettos. Many became partisans and those who survived are helping build the new Poland, which will no longer need any *Patronages* for the political arrestees.

The following *landsleit* and friends were members of the *Częstochower Patronage*:

Altman, Maks & Rose	Treger, Dawid
Berger, Izzie & Eva	Lewensztajn, Jechiel
Berger, Rubin & Bela	Lefkowicz, Morris
Buchner, Morris & Sophie	Morz, Morris
Biro, Szymon & Fela	Munowicz, Szlojme z''l
Besser, Lajzer	Silver, Jakow-Ber
Bobrowski, Rose	Frajlich, Sam & Sophie
Bratt, Jechiel	Frajlich, Abe
Gliksman, Chune & Fradel	Frajman, Herszl & Laja
Gliksman, Sarah	Cuker, Jehoszua
Gerichter, Karl & Regina	Kinstler, Zyszka
Gotlib, Pinchas & Molly	Kraus, Joe
Gerichter, Abe	Kraus, Morris
Grauman, Irving	Koźmiński, Maks & Ester
Grauman, Sam	Kaufman, Aba

⁴ [TN: There were two members of the US Senate of 1935-1937 with the surname Thomas: Elbert D. Thomas from Utah and Elmer Thomas from Oklahoma; as we have found no mention of this event in others sources, we are unable to ascertain to which Thomas the author is referring here.]

Grosberg, Abram
Goldberg, Louie & Annie
Gotlib, Dawid z''l
Handelsman, Louie & Rose
Willinger, Sam & Gussie
Willinger, Willie & Blanche
Wargon, Karl & Helen
Tanski, Dawid & Ellen

Rozenblat, John & Bela
Rubinsztajn, Joe & Minnie
Richter, Dawid
Ruk, Szlojme z''l
Szlingbaum, Szlojme & Miriam
Szwarcbaum, Abram & Laja
Szwarcensztajn, Gabriel
Szaja, Morris

