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In and Around the Workers Club

(A pen-picture of the life of workers after the First World War)

The memories which we present here only encompass one faction of the Labour Movement in Częstochowa - the "Vereinigte". But, in content, this picture is also in large measure characteristic of the two other workers' clubs in Częstochowa - the Borochov Club at the First *Aleja* 12 and the Medem Club on the Second *Aleja* 40.

The Vereinigte Workers Club

It now numbers some 700 members. On a daily basis, its well-lit halls and rooms are filled with hundreds of workers, who are here [in] their comradely home and fraternal environment.

Here, there is a quiet, peaceful reading room with all the newspapers and journals. A rich library in Yiddish and other languages is connected to this reading room. Here, there is a tea-hall, where one receives a low-priced evening meal. There is also an office that provides medical assistance.

A dozen professional unions concentrate around the Workers Club, [which are] unified in one Central Office which encompasses almost all of the city's Jewish trades.

On any given evening, when one enters the club, it is always clamouring [with] the work of the dozens of committees, management committees, plus general and trade-specific meetings.

With the Meat Workers

Exemplary comradely life reigns in the professional unions. The meat workers have a common treasury, where the collective weekly earnings are deposited. Every Sunday, the members meet and distribute the wages according to three categories. The quarrels and incidents with the owners of the butcher shops do not need to be settled by the governmental authorities. For that, there is a union with a secretary - and a notice [or] a letter is enough to resolve a dispute.

The Needle Branch of the Union

The Union's members are mostly women (linen sewers, seamstresses, dressmakers, etc.). As a result, the management committee consists mostly of female members. The sole male member (the deceased Comrade Śliwiński) seems as if he were "the last of the Mohicans". Nevertheless, he is not overridden. On the contrary, he is treated with the greatest tolerance. The management committee sits around the table, with the chairwoman, Comrade Halberg, at the head. They discuss the issue of an eight-hour working day and of raising the wages in a few workshops. No one here at all speaks about equal rights for women

Professional Union of Metalworkers

This union numbers more than 400 members. The management committee has no great business to conduct, because nearly all the members are unemployed. There are, however, old scores to settle with the factory owners. They closed down the small factories without paying the fourteen days' reparation stipulated by law. They refuse to honour their commitment to the workers, because they

sense that the musician Paderewski¹ is now playing their tune. But the workers have their union, their Central Office and their delegates to the Workers Council, so things are not so bad - somehow, they will manage.

Hauling Workers

Elderly Jews with beards sit around the management committee table with work-worn faces and work-worn hands. They have, at home, left their porters' coats and torn shirts from the street. [To enter] inside the Union [headquarters], one has to change. Bowed backs are straightened up. Lines of human dignity appear on their countenances. In [reading] *Bontshe the Silent*², the man who has long been suffocated by the heavy load of sacks and packs reawakens, they are beginning to understand that a better life means one of comradeship - not to compete, but to help one another.

Various Activities

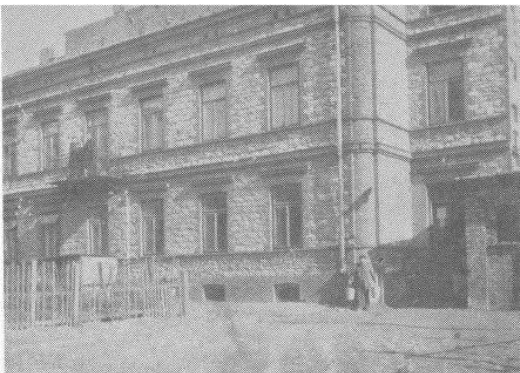
Here, in one of the rooms, the Economic Committee sits, listening to reports from the widespread institutions. In another room, the Literary Committee sits, occupying itself with the matter of disseminating literature. In a room next to it, identity cards are issued to the unemployed, which grant them the right to benefit from the free food products. In a room to the side, a circle is being conducted, and in a large assembly hall, the general meeting of this or that professional union is being held.

In the Workers Kitchen

[This is] an enormous hall with numerous large portraits of I.L. Peretz, Mendele [Moycher Sforim], [Ferdinand] Lassalle and Karl Marx. The latter is the largest of all the pictures.

The two tables, which occupy the entire length of the hall, are set from end to end. Lunch consists of soup with a chunk of bread. A large part of the "clientele" are children, whose heads barely reach their plates, and who could quite comfortably walk about under the table. There are also many small children who eat sitting on their parents' laps. Once the infants have enjoyed their portion, the parents sit them down on the bench next to them, whereupon they themselves sup.

Many poor mothers come with containers and take several portions home for their families.



Kitchen №2

This kitchen constitutes an idyllic image of equality of classes and inter-party cooperation. The Bund and Vereinigte have made peace here, the bourgeois and the proletariat have forgotten about the battle of the classes here - all are equal and friendly towards each other during lunch. Those, who are not wealthy enough to afford paying ten marks for a lunch, come here to this place. Understandably, the meals here are not any that would befit posh people.

Vereinigte's "New World" Hall on ul. Strażacka

¹ [TN: Ignacy Jan Paderewski, a pianist and composer, was Poland's first PM after WWI, under Piłsudski.]

² [TN: Famous short story by I.L. Peretz about the suffering of a porter, which the now politically conscious porters would have been encouraged to read; see English translation here: <https://www.yinr.org/wp-content/uploads/Bontsha-the-Silent.pdf>]

I.L. Peretz Kindergarten

The workers' Kindergarten is airy and warm, and glistens with children's pictures and with white, clean children's furniture. The teachers' intimate treatment of the children, the expressions of contentment and joy in the eyes of the little ones, their games, dances and songs - makes the visitor think of his own childhood years in the *cheder*, with the *Rebbe* and his rod, when we played under the table, in the dirt and on the floor.

The children sing,

*Little fishies are playing in the river,
That's jolly – what a treat it is!*

Or,

*Ay-lu-lyu-lu, ay-lu-lyu-lu,
Ssleep my dear and rest.
All is well if you have a mother
And a cradle, too..."³*

And this is what you think:

"Sing, kinderlech – dance, jump! May your little eyes gleam and your little faces laugh! Perhaps your childhood and your future will be more beautiful – and better – than our own."

³ [TN: Although this is certainly a very typical Yiddish lullaby, we have not found this specific song in any other source. Our renderings of these two songs are not literal.]