

**A. Gotlib**

## **The Craftsmen's Union and Guilds**

In 1912, a movement began in Poland to organise the Jewish craftsmen, in order to elevate their cultural level and improve their economic conditions. The initiator of this movement was the engineer Jan Kirsztot, the founder of the first craftsmen's club in Łódź.

Prior to the rise of the craftsmen's clubs, some of the craftsmen were organised into *minyanim* [prayer quorums]. These minyanim - or [the] Craftsmen's *Shul* - were also a rendezvous point, where people got together to discuss professional issues and to also spend time playing a game of chess or dominoes, or reading a newspaper.

The initiative to establish a craftsmen's club in Częstochowa came from Łódź. At the first gathering, which dealt with choosing an organising committee, [both] employers and workers were represented. Among the workers at that meeting were Mojsze Weksler, Symcha Kalka and A. Chrobolovsky. Those admitted to the organising committee were Eng. Assorodobraj, Wolf Gostiński, Szlojme Librowicz, Lajbisz Goldszajder, Ber Balsam, Mojsze Tenenbaum, Szlojme Krauskop and A. Chrobolovsky. Regardless of the attitude of the employers, the group of workers assisted the establishment of the craftsmen's club in large measure.

Eng. Assorodobraj and A. Chrobolovsky were chosen as a delegation to Łódź, to coordinate with Eng. Kirsztot. The first mass meeting of the craftsmen, at which the envoys to Łódź gave a report, was held in the hall of the *Lira* [Society]. A large number of craftsmen signed up as members. The organising committee's meetings were held at Sz. Librowicz's house. An amateur troupe, directed by Hersze'le Fajwlowicz and Dora Szacher, held a performance at "Harmonia" [hall], which brought in 150 roubles of net proceeds. Almost all the progressive communal activists and socialists, such as Jakow Rozenberg [and] Josef Aronowicz, actively participated in the development of the Craftsmen's Club from the moment of its foundation.

The first management committee of the Craftsmen's Club was comprised of Eng. F. Ratner, Eng. Assorodobraj, Wolf Gostynski, Artur Broniatowski, Jakow Sztajer, Ludwig Goldberg, Szlojme Librowicz, Szlojme Krauskop, F. Zalcman, Lajbisz Goldszajder, L. Cymerman, Mojsze Tenenbaum, Stanisław Herc [and] Mojsze Win.

Henryk Markusfeld was nominated as Chairman.

During the pre-War years, the Craftsmen's Club mainly occupied itself with cultural activities and matters of social relations. Family evenings, concerts and lectures were held. A library [and] a reading room was established. After *Lira*, the Craftsmen's Club was actually the most active cultural institution.

In the occupational arena, however, the Craftsmen's Club did practically nothing. A few professions, such as carpenters and cap-makers, attempted to organise sections, but this did not work out. Nevertheless, the Craftsmen's Union had created an important institution, which helped ameliorate the situation of its members. This was the second loans and savings fund, which was established in 1913 with the aid of the ICA, specifically for craftsmen. The fund was managed by Sigmund Sztyller – President, Henryk Markusfeld, Eng. Ratner, Chaim Weksler and W. Gostiński.

Initially, the Craftsmen's Club occupied large premises at *Aleja* 11, [and] afterwards at *Aleja* 27. In 1913, it moved to ul. Ogrodowa 22. Prior to the outbreak of the First World War, the Union was headed by Eng. Assorodobraj as Chairman, and the Vice-Chairman [as] Hipolit Gajzler, who had returned from Germany and was practising medicine in Częstochowa.

From the onset of the First World War to 1916, the Craftsmen's Club, just like many newly-created associations and organisations, occupied itself with relief work. An affordable kitchen [and] a tearoom were created, which were managed by Częstochowa youth, headed by M. Asz, M. Jszajewicz, D. Krauskop, S. Mokraujer, and A. [x] Chajutin. The affordable kitchen and tearoom received funding from the *Dobroczytność* [Charity (Society)]. Generally speaking, during the War, a large section of the Jewish youth organised sports and music divisions within around around the Craftsmen's Club. Later, the sports section became the independent [Jewish] Gymnastics-Sporting Association<sup>1</sup>.

The War years were very difficult for the majority of the craftsmen. This drove a whole row of activists to reinstitute the Craftsmen's Club, on the foundations of mutual aid and occupational organisation. The Union's new activists included Mojsze Katz, Szmul Katz, Szaja Granek, Kopl Urbach, Abram Fridman, Z. Krug, Dawid Wolfowicz and Herszl Win. Almost all of them were either tailors or bakers because, in these trades, there were comparatively fewer unemployed than in the other trades. The Union organised the craftsmen in almost all trades and, in 1918 - thanks in part to the aid of American foundations - a fund for widows and orphans was established. In 1919, the pre-War activity of the loans and savings fund was renewed, and an entire array of co-operatives was established - such as the "*Selbsthilfe*" [Self-Help] food cooperative, and several raw products cooperatives for different trades. A *patronat* [a kind of mentoring system] was also created for the professional education of apprentices.

By 1919, the Craftsmen's Club already had 530 members. It also expanded its activities to a whole range of neighbouring *shtetls* - Kłobuck, Kamyk, Koniecpol, and Krzepice - where branches were established.

In 1921, the Union's new constitution was approved by the Polish authorities. The protection of the interests of craftsmanship was listed as its primary function. According to this constitution, only

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master craftsmen could belong to the Union. Its official name was changed to the "Jewish Craftsmen's Resource", but the Union continued being referred to as the "Craftsmen's Club".

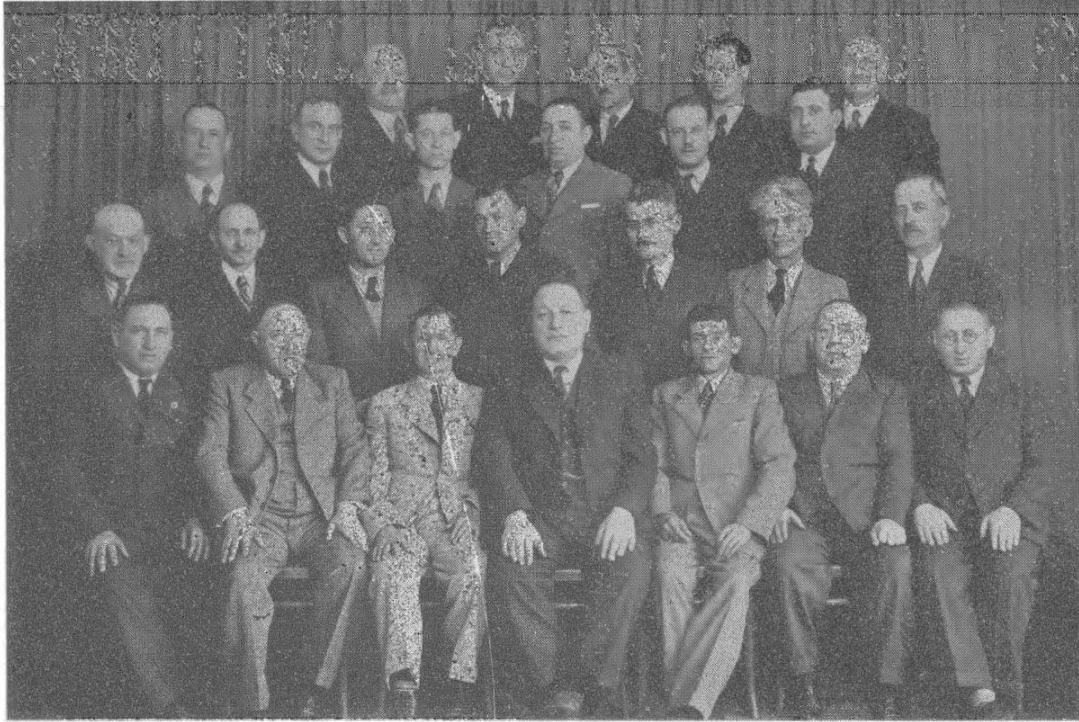
Besides those mentioned above, in the years 1917-1923, the Craftsmen's Club was headed by the following individuals: Dentist M. Grejniec, chairman in 1918; Dr Gajsler, chairman from 1918 and on. The vice-chairmen were: Jakow Sztajer, Herszl Wnuk, [and] Abram Dzialowski. During this period, Jakow Fisz, Szmul Hofnung, Michał Ajdelman, Naftuli Deres, and Mojsze Berman distinguished themselves as active members.

In 1924, the Craftsmen's Club nominated its own list for the elections: A.Z. Fridman (*Gmina [Kehilla]* Management), A. Dzialowski, A. Liberman and J. Granek. The Craftsmen's Club was represented on the City Council by Dr H. Gajsler and J. Goldberg; in the council of the *Spółdzielczy [Cooperative] Bank* by Dr Gajsler, B. Szytybel, [and] Sz. Loryje; in the council of the HMO by A. Jarkowizna, M. Grejniec, [and] M. Ajdelman; [and] in TOZ<sup>2</sup> by J. Goldberg.

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<sup>1</sup> [Translator's note: *Żydowskie Towarzystwo Gimnastyczno-Sportowe* in Polish – or "*ŻTG-S*".]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: *Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia Ludności Żydowskiej (Society for Safeguarding the Health of the Jewish Population)*.]



***The Representatives of the Craftsmen's Union and Their Guilds***  
***First row, sitting (R-L): J. Fisz, P. Szlezinger, M. Blum, Dr H. Gajsler, J. Goldberg, J. Granek, and H. Frajerman.***  
***Second row (R-L): M. Braun, A. Grajcer, J. Sztajer, A. Winer, Magister<sup>3</sup> Z. Rozenchwajg, A.F. Sidycki, and A. Kalka.***  
***Third row (R-L): Naparty, A. Pajes, D. Koniecpoler, M. Zysholc, Moszkowicz, and M. Gelber.***  
***Fourth row (R-L): Ch. Pytel, N. Owieczko, H. Frajman, J. Izraelewicz, and L. Katz.***

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In 1927, the Polish Government passed a guilds law, which renewed an array of powers of the guilds, with the aim of limiting the access of Jews to craftsman-trades. The Craftsmen's Union conducted a hard struggle to decrease the impact of the decree. To this purpose, the Union's existing divisions were turned into guilds. By law, guilds issued Masters' certificates, without which it was forbidden to open a workshop. The Union also organised a convention of all Jewish craftsmen's unions in the Kielce *województwo* [Province], in order to prepare the members for the elections to the craftsmen's [council] chambers.

In that period, internal friction and quarrels, based both on professional competition and ideological differences, took place within the Craftsmen's Union in the shoemakers, tailor, and carpenters sections, [where] the second-hand dealers, *chatupnikes* (those who take work home) and contractors (those who work by order) fought amongst themselves. The trades split up into separate sections, such as bespoke tailors, *chatupnik* tailor, and trousers and waistcoat makers. Sometimes, the Craftsmen's Union succeeded in uniting the divided sections.

An acute struggle arose inside the Union surrounding the two central [offices] which had been formed in Warsaw: [Chaim] Rasner's folkist central on ul. Nalewki, and the Zionist central on ul. Leszno. The Częstochowa Craftsmen's Union sided with the folkist central. Częstochowa later played a large role in unifying both centrals into becoming one Central Union of [Jewish] Craftsmen [in Poland].

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<sup>3</sup> [TN: Holder of a university degree.]

The Jewish guilds, which had been created under the duress of the Guilds Law, imitated the Polish ones – both in building a certain hierarchy within the profession, and in external signs - each guild endeavoured to have its own flag, etc.

The celebration of the Częstochowa Craftsmen's Union's fifteen years of existence was very impressive. All the guilds, with their flags, participated in the ceremony. The Union also issued an anniversary publication of the history of the Union and its divisions.

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In 1933, a group was formed, within the Craftsmen's Club, under the name "Craftsmen's *Ha'Chalutz*"<sup>4</sup>. In 1934, the Częstochowa group took part in the convention for all such groups in Poland. This movement's purpose was to help build the Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel, to try to obtain [immigration] certificates for craftsmen and to assist them in travelling to the Land of Israel.

The founding of a single Central in Warsaw did not bring to an end the embittered fight between the two factions (folkist and Zionist) among the craftsmen. This battle was very strongly felt in the Częstochowa Craftsmen's Union. On 31<sup>st</sup> May and 1<sup>st</sup> June, the 5<sup>th</sup> Craftsmen's Congress was held in Warsaw, at which Częstochowa was represented by fourteen delegates. The Congress was a very stormy one. The Częstochowa delegation once again attempted to create unity, but no peace was attained.

Under the conditions in Poland, where the heavy burden of taxation weighed down on the Jewish populace with particular force, the Craftsmen's Union was forced to expend a great deal of energy on tax-related issues and payments to the HMO. In this field, Dr H. Gajsler and J. Goldberg were active in Town Hall, and A. Jarkowizna in the HMO.

In 1924, the Union created two other branches in Przyrów and Mstów.

In 1928, the Union numbered 1,200 members, with the following twenty-one organised divisions: Master Tailors Union, Gaiter-Makers Section, Carpenters Section, Master Bakers Union, Turners Section, Cobblers Section, Master Furriers Section, Locksmiths Section, Union of Master Hairdressers, Cap-Makers Section, Knitwear Section, Stocking and Embroidery Section, Electro-Technical Section, Watchmakers Section, Goldsmiths and Engravers, Master Box-Makers Section, Union of Master Tinsmiths, Butchers Section, [and] Pastry Bakers Section.

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<sup>4</sup> [TN: Heb. lit. "The Pioneer," or the Zionist Pioneering Movement.]