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Political Persecution & Trials

Political Persecution in the Tsarist Period

The political trial, which took place in connection with the 1874 Polish demonstration at the inauguration of the Russian Orthodox church on *Plac Magistratski* [Municipal Square] as a symbol of Russian sovereignty, may doubtlessly be considered one of the first well-known political trials in Częstochowa.

In 1906, a trial took place in Częstochowa against a group of Russian soldiers of the Częstochowa garrison, who belonged to a circle of the Russian SS [sic SR] (Socialists-Revolutionaries).

Setting aside all the arrests [and] police and military acts of terror in the years 1904-1906, which have already been partially mentioned in other articles, we shall only touch on the political persecutions, murders and trials that took place after the liberation movement had been stifled.

At the end of 1906, several workers of the *Kapeluszarnia* were shot by a military tribunal. It was difficult to find out what allegations had been against them. All we knew is that they were on strike and had gone into the forest to pick berries. They were detained and sentenced by [Piotr] Stolypin's¹ courts to be shot as bandits.

In 1913, the trial was to have been held in the Piotrków court against Chief of Police Vasily Denisov, who was charged with belonging to the PPS,. The trial was postponed several times due to the condition of his health. Vasily Denisov had been denounced to the police, together with numerous other members of the PPS' combat division, by the arrested Sukenik.

In May of that same year, several workers from *Częstochowianka* were detained in connection with the strike of 5,000 workers. The strike took place due to the fact that the foreman Ajchler had insulted a worker. The workers had the foreman sacked from the factory.

In July 1913, a trial against a large group of "Revolutionary Avengers", headed by [Edward] Dłużewski, was held in Częstochowa. The lawyers, Szumanski, Berson and Medalus, appeared for the defence. Of those convicted, five were sentenced to hanging but, due to a demonstration, the verdict was changed to twenty years of penal servitude. Others were sentenced to different terms of penal servitude and permanent banishment.

On Saturday 4th October 1913, at one o'clock in the afternoon, the police and gendarmerie, headed by Chief of Police Arbuzow, surrounded and arrested all participants in a Bundist gathering next to the *Klejarnia* - some sixty people, mostly tailoring workers (see the details of this arrest in the article *General Jewish Labour Bund* by Szulim Herc).

On Friday 23rd January 1914, at twelve midnight, Mojsze Cieszyński was arrested in Częstochowa, together with the entire management of the then legally-established Bakery Workers' Professional Union. The arrest came as a result of a denunciation on the part of the bakery owners.

¹ [TN: Prime Minister of Russia between 1906-1911.]

Earlier, Mojsze Cieszyński had already been visited by the gendarmerie due to a series of articles on the professional unions and the HMOs, which A.Ch. had printed in the *Częstochower Wochenblatt* under the pen-name of "A Worker". The direct cause of his arrest together with the bakery workers was that, as a contributor to the *Częstochower Wochenblatt*, he had been banned from being part of the presidium of a legal gathering of the bakery workers at the *Harmonia* Hall. The police spies therefore included him in the list of leaders. For a couple of months, he sat in the Częstochowa prison.

Under the German Occupation During the First World War

A great many arrests and deportations took place during the German occupation. The detainees were mostly sent to the Modlin Fortress near Warsaw. Among those sent to Modlin were Szymon and Fela Biro (Birencwajg), arrested in Germany for anti-war activity in the Independent Socialist Party. Kaneman was arrested in Częstochowa for activity in the SDKPiL.

In Independent Poland

In August 1920, a raid was carried out in the Wiedza Robotnicza [Workers Knowledge] Society, formerly the Kasprzak² Club. A whole group of its members were detained. This society was a legal one and all its members were registered. Poles and Jews belonged to the Society, including a large number of women.

In October 1920, Anszel Judkewicz was tried for belonging to the Communist Party and spreading literature. The judges were Kozarewski [and] City Councillors Januszewski and Gawędzki. The accused was represented by the lawyer Rumszewicz. Judkewicz was sentenced to one year in prison and the loss of all his rights.

With the rise of "Independent" Poland, a new series of political persecutions and trials began.

The first large political trial in Częstochowa took place in 1922. Instead of the Russian gendarmerie and police, the *Defensywa* [Secret Police] was now ruling. Its leader was Janusz, a former PPS member who, on behalf of the PPS, had opened and been in charge of the provisional Workers Council. His aides were Zdankowicz - the bailiff, who tortured the arrestees; Hibner - a German, and "Tzofe'le" [?], who could read and write Yiddish, which aided him extensively in his espionage work. Later on, "Janek" came along – a former Social Democrat.

At the time, a regional conference of the ZMK (*Związek Młodzieży Komunistycznej* [Young Communist League] was held in Zawada, which was reported to the police by a Polish participant. Some seventeen individuals were detained. Among them were Bajla Temerowicz, Maks Opatowski, Elja Lewensztajn, Salek Zylberberg, Burech Brokman, Szulim Tobjasz, Szlojme Librowicz, Herman Zygas and Koniarski. Under torture, Bajla Temerowicz broke down and gave up the names of the conference's leaders.

The trial took place in Częstochowa in September. It lasted for four days. Dr Markusfeld, Dr Gajsler, Dudek Szlezinger, A. Chrobolovsky, R. Federman, Aleksander Behm, Szyja Nirenberg, Józef Kaźmierczak, Szmul Goldsztajn, Mendel Asz, Dr Brom and Jan Hempel, head of the *Książka*³ publishing [cooperative] were called as witnesses for the defence.

² [TN: Most likely named after Polish Socialist and Revolutionary Marcin Kasprzak (1860-1905), who was hanged by the Russians.]

³ [TN: "The Book"; publishing cooperative led by the Communists at that time (source: <https://ipn.gov.pl/>).]

The accused were represented by the lawyers Honigwil, Duracz, Dąbrowski and Brajter from Warsaw, M. Koniarski from Częstochowa and Wozyński from Piotrków.

Opatowski, Lewensztajn and Zylbersztajn were sentenced to fifteen months imprisonment. All the others were released.

In connection with this trial, the Communist deputy in the Polish Sejm, [Tomasz] Dąbal, raised a political question, protesting against the fact that the indictment began with the words "In Holy Częstochowa, a band of criminals has gathered for the purpose of undermining the foundations of the Catholic Church and the order of society".

One of the most active among the Communist youth was Wolf Złotnik. He led the students' group and wrote in the *Swiatlo* [Light] journal. He was sentenced to two years in prison.

In May 1926, prior to the "revolution" of Piłsudski's followers, the Chjeno-Piast⁴ regime was still in power. On 1st May, the Communists took part in the general demonstration. On ul. Teatralna, they were set upon by mounted police, who were waiting in the gateways, and numerous arrests were made. Among the detainees were Opatowski, Lewensztajn, Zylbersztajn, Brokman, Tobjasz, Librowicz, Różka Rozenfeld, Szlojme Kaneman, Mojsze Richter, Krymołowski (a student), Wolf Złotnik, Leoszka Kochman, Leon Tenenberg (a student), Icek Tenenberg, Mojsze Szuchter, Estera Zborowska, Fajgla Zborowska, Rzonszyński, Zigas and Szajnwald.

They sat seven months in prison. Some of them were freed. Opatowski, Lewensztajn, Zylbersztajn, Zlotnik and Zigas were indicted under article 102 of the Russian Penal Code for "high treason". Others were accused, under article 126, for sedition. With the aid of the lawyer Wozyński from Piotrków, all the evidence was refuted and the lawsuit was made void.

In 1927 another trial was held and W. Złotnik, Estera Zborowska and Różka Rozenfeld were sentenced to four years imprisonment. Tenenberg and several others from the vicinity received two years in prison. In 1928, Laja Świerczewska from Krzepice, along with a group of Communists, was prosecuted at the District Court in Piotrków. She managed to abscond while being taken to the dentist to have her teeth treated, and she became one of the leading figures in the Communist Party of Berlin.

Later, Wolf Złotnik pulled back from political activity and became the director of Bank Kupiecki in Kraków.

Among those who stood trial for belonging to the Communist Movement were the students Perc, Bem and Pruszycki. Characteristically, in 1905, their parents had belonged to various [revolutionary] factions - A. Perc had been a Bundist, Bronia Bem had been an SS member and Pruszycki, Adolf Bryll's brother-in-law, had considered himself a sympathiser of the SD⁵.

In 1928, Leoszka Kochman, Krymołowski and Elek Lewensztajn were, once again, sentenced to four years in prison.

In that same year, Dawid Richter was also sentenced, in Łódź, to four years imprisonment. Before that, he had been arrested many times and had been tortured.

⁴ [TN: Coalition of the "Chjena," or Chrześcijański Związek Jedności Narodowej (Christian Union of National Unity), and the Polish People's Party "Piast," which were right-wing and centre-right, respectively.]

⁵ [TN: Likely ref. to the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania.]

In 1935, Icek Tenenberg was sentenced to four years in prison. In 1937, Różka Rozenfeld was sentenced, in Warsaw, for the second time to four years of hard imprisonment.

Laja Tenenberg, a nurse, along with a group of detainees, was sentenced in Warsaw to eight years in prison for [her] activity in the military division of the Communist Party.

Two Częstochowa [anti-Communist] provocateurs, Mojsze Szuchter and Herszlikowicz, were shot in Warsaw by orders of the Communist Party. Many Communist activists throughout Poland were arrested because of Herszlikowicz.



Other parties in Częstochowa also suffered from political terror and persecution, albeit not to the same extent as the Communists.

In 1920, the entire Bund Committee was arrested. Among the detainees were Józef Aronowicz (Bundist councillor on the Częstochowa City Council), Józef Izraelewicz, Zalman Tenenberg (perished in Oświęcim), Mendel Bron, Grynbaum, Czonszyński and Chaim-Dawid Wolhendler. The arrested were held at the Dąbie prison camp - the first concentration camp for political prisoners. (More details on this arrest are in the article by Sz. Herc, *The General Jewish Bund*.)

In 1920, the *Vereinigte* Club, at *Aleja* 43, was [also] liquidated by order of the Częstochowa *Starosta* [district administrator]. In addition, the Częstochowa municipal authorities requisitioned the club's premises and gave it over to the police, who set up their *ekspozytura* [agency] there. These same premises were later given over to a Christian official as his private residence. The premises of an entire array of professional unions, which were in the club, were also requisitioned. The city's two Polish *Endecja* newspapers had agitation against the *Vereinigte* Club for a long time, to the effect that it was a Communist nest in the very centre of the city. Denunciations reached the government in Warsaw, whereupon the club was liquidated and, by its orders, the premises were impounded.

That same year, the trial was held of Raphael Federman, who was accused in court by *Starosta* Gryboszyński of having belittled him as an official of the State. The quarrel between the *Starosta* and R. Federman had taken place because of a prohibition against holding a lecture in Yiddish. R. Federman argued that such a ban violated the constitution, which safeguarded the rights of ethnic minorities. From then onwards, the decree against Yiddish in Częstochowa was, in fact, revoked. In revenge, the *Starosta* accused Federman in court.

The accused was defended by lawyer Mieczysław Koniarski. R. Federman was sentenced to three months in prison, but the general amnesty freed him from the penalty.

In 1923, during the elections to the Sejm, the police, together with the *Defensywa*, carried out an *obława* [raid] on all the institutions and bureaus of the Independent Socialist Labour Party, which had put forward Dr Józef Kruk as its candidate to the Sejm. Together with this, home-searches took place in the private residences of all individuals who were on the Party's list of candidates. A haul of party documents and private writings were taken away to the *Defensywa*.

On 5th February 1926, the trial was held of the editor of the Częstochowa *Das Neue Wort*, A. Chrobolovsky, for an article [that had been] printed in 1923 entitled "*The Silent Murder*", which protested against the closure of the Bundist *Unsere Kind* Society, together with the dozens of schools which this society was running. The court was made up of the judges Wałoszyński (Chair), Kamieńbrodski and Keller. The accused was defended by the lawyer Mężnicki. Dr Moryc Grynbaum, Dr Józef Kruk [and] Józef Stanisław - then already the chief of the *Defensywa* in the Kielce district -

came forward as witnesses, called forward by the accused. The trial took all day and ended with the release of the accused.

On 19th November 1926, the trial of Dr Józef Kruk was held. He was accused of high treason for his appearance at a mass meeting in Częstochowa, where he made the toast “*Kochajmy się*” (Let us love each other), which the Soviet Union Foreign Minister, [Georgy] Tchitcherin, had made in honour of Poland’s Prime Minister, [Aleksander] Skrzyński, and had called the Polish workers to emulate the example from above.

The lead witness against the accused was Commissioner Kuliński (formerly a worker in Raków). The witnesses for the defence were Dudek Szlezinger (chairman of the said meeting), Białek and Antoni Domański. The lawyer Botner from Warsaw was the defending counsel.

Dr Józef Kruk was sentenced to a year and a half imprisonment. For a long time, he wallowed in the Częstochowa and Piotrków prisons. He was later freed by the appeals court in Warsaw.



Much has been written locally and abroad about the sadism and torture to [which] the political arrestees in Poland [were subjected]. In a letter from the Częstochowa political arrestees to their friends in America, dated 6th April 1929, we read:

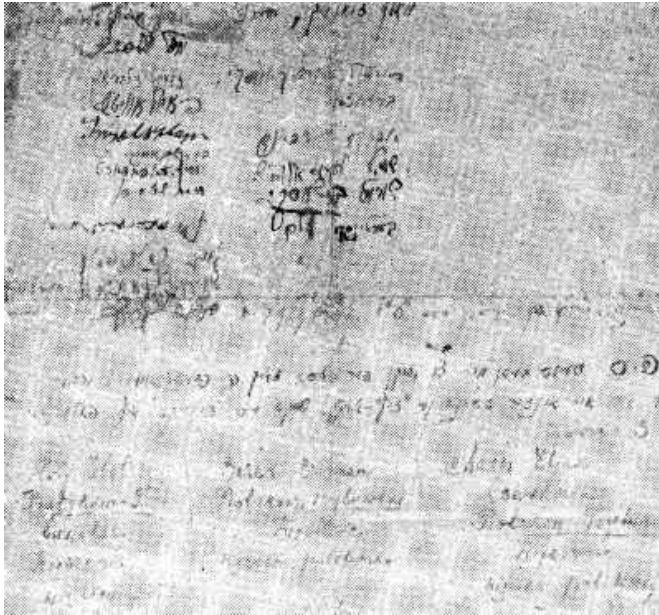
We, Częstochowa political arrestees, having already found ourselves behind the bars of the Polish prisons for long years, [and] being by chance (now) in the Częstochowa jail, turn to you, Comrades, calling you to come to our aid in our situation.

For our fighting in the ranks of the revolutionary proletariat, for our loyalty to the ideals of the working class, for our commitment to the cause of a state of workers and peasants, for our aspirations to a better and brighter tomorrow, for that, that we are unable to look on with indifference as our fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, live in want and [in] fear of an uncertain tomorrow, for that, that we have openly declared a fight [against] our local clerical-nationalistic rule, for that, that we wish to be free people in a free order – hangman - style and bloodthirsty Fascism has thrown us for long years into Polish prisons, in a bid to crush in us the will to fight - to stifle the revolutionary ideal.

You have surely heard how we “live” here. It is difficult to describe what we go through on a daily basis. We suffer hunger, need and cold. The prison authorities ‘feed’ us with rotten, frozen-through potatoes, foul-smelling, filthy soup and black, clayish “bread”. When one puts it in one’s mouth, it is nauseating. Our relatives do not have any possibility of aiding us, as many of us had been their only providers. The hunger torments us so, that we often fall unconscious – and, in the long winter nights, we toss and turn for hours on end on the bunks, unable to fall asleep for hunger.

There are comrades here, among us, who have already been in prison several times, and are struggling with their last remaining strength.

It is, therefore, no wonder that many of us are ill with tuberculosis. We have no medical aid - besides iodine and... powders.



**The signatures of political arrestees
in a letter secretly sent from prison**

goal of our lives. No prisons, no detentions [and] no regulatory penalties will stifle, within us, our readiness for battle. We make use of the time that we spend here to improve our knowledge, so that once we leave jail we should be able to, once more, join those ranks from which we have been torn away.

But the prison authorities - who consist of inhuman creatures - seeing that the hunger does not break us, employ all means to crush us physically and mentally. We have fought with the jailers, different prison dignitaries and leaders every single day. For every slightest insurrection, they throw us into dark cells. All this makes our lives unbearable. At every opportunity, we are forced to defend the honour of a revolutionary and class-conscious proletariat.

We can, however, assure you, with pride, that no persecutions, chicanery and suffering will weaken our will to fight for that which is the