

# Pogroms

[Foreword by Dr Raphael Mahler]

The Jewish community of Częstochowa suffered three pogroms from the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – pogroms which marked, with blood, the path of the reaction in Poland and cast the shadows of the dark night of Nazism, which annihilated this community along with the country's entire Jewish population. [Although] under different political regimes, all three of these pogroms against Jews in Częstochowa were organised by, essentially, the same dark reactionary forces - with the same political purpose - to drown, in the blood of Jewish victims, the aspirations of the Polish masses for freedom, democracy and socialism. That said, Częstochowa's three pogroms constitute three stages in the concentration of the reactionary camp in Poland, just like the decided stance of the organised Polish workforce in each of these pogroms mirrors the growth of the political awareness of the labour movement in the city and in the entire country.

The 1902 pogrom was organised by the Polish *Endecja* in alliance with the clergy - under the black wing of the Tsarist administration, albeit without its initiative - as a means to turn the masses away from the newly-established socialist movement which was spreading across the country. The young and persecuted Polish socialist movement was only able to express its protest against the pogrom in announcements which it made efforts to spread within Częstochowa, Łódź and other working centres (see Symcha Lew's note [on p.170] on the report of the *Arbeiter Stimme* [Worker's Voice]).

The pogrom in 1919, in "liberated" Poland, was much more tragic and bloodier than the first pogrom seventeen years earlier. The reaction in Poland was stronger, more widely spread among the ruling classes and more brutal than in the Tsarist times, because [now] much more was at stake than then. The Polish reaction was standing face to face with the direct peril of a social revolution [like the one] that had been carried out triumphantly in neighbouring Russia. The slogan of the *pogromczykes* [pogrom perpetrators] - war against Bolsheviks and Jews - this time already had, behind it, the full support of not only the *Endecja* Party and the clergy, but also the Polish military and governmental apparatus, including the majority of the *Sejm* and the municipal administration and City Council. The Polish and Jewish labour parties, organised in the local Workers Council, came out against the pogrom, but the feeble results of this intervention of the Workers Council are, in themselves, already proof that this institution, which had risen during the first revolutionary storm of the working masses in Poland, had by that time already lost any substantial political significance.

The third Częstochowa pogrom, [that] in 1937, took place during the period of fearsome exacerbation of fascism in Poland, and was a link in the bloody chain of pogroms that stretched from Przytyk, through to Mińsk Mazowiecki and Brisk [Brest, Belarus] - one of the terrifying culmination points of the cold economic pogrom which had been crushing the country's Jewish population in an increasingly unbearable manner. The two camps of the Polish reactionary bourgeoisie - the ruling *Sanacja* camp and the "sulking" *Endecja* opposition - shook each other's hand over the heads of the Jews. The black wings of the "endemic" Polish Nazism were already flapping over the country, as a portent of the black swastikas that would fly in over the German bombers in two years' time. Polish organised workers already realised then, clearer than at any time in Polish history, that antisemitism is a poisoned weapon which, in the latest settling of accounts, was being aimed at the labour movement. Polish workers in Częstochowa protest, [and] send delegations to the powers that be. But splintered [and] divided amongst themselves, the Polish labour movement in Poland, exactly like in other countries, did not manage to overcome fascism. The foundation of Polish Jewry's

misfortune and of its subsequent extraordinary catastrophe lay in the tragedy of the Polish working class.