

Mark Liber

The “*Rabunek*”¹ - The Pogrom in 1902

The first pogrom on Jews in Częstochowa broke out on Monday, 11th August 1902 (eve of 9th Av 5662). At the time, people were still ashamed to use the word “pogrom”² - [so] they called it “*rabunek*”.

At the time, this “*rabunek*” was described in the illegal *Arbeiter Stimme*, № 30 (published in October 1902). Below, we reproduce this same report, word-for-word:

Three days before the pogrom took place, in Częstochowa, there was a parade in honour of the new church that had been consecrated that day. Early that morning, the chief of police and the mayor ('gorodskoy golova'³) (unofficially) informed several Jews that the city was preparing for a pogrom, and they warned the Jews not to show themselves in the vicinity of the new 'sanctum'. The participants in the pogrom, themselves, later recounted that they had not carried out the pogrom out on 8th August as planned, because they had 'not wished to spoil the holiday for themselves'. It is therefore self-evident that the incident in the marketplace was only a spark that fell into a powder keg. In the market, several Jews had quarrelled and had come to blows with a Christian woman. Both the Jews and the woman were professional thieves. The Jewish Kehilla had already, long before, asked the police to expel those Jews from the city, but the bribed Częstochowa police had allowed them to remain in town just to spite the Jews. The Christian woman, whom the Jews had beaten, had also been tried three times already for thefts. And it was this fight, among thieves, that the Russian authorities, along with Polish 'society', presented as the main cause of the 'disturbances'.

The beaten Christian woman was not even seriously injured and she had already checked out of the hospital that same day. But despite this, everybody - even the doctors at the hospital - spread a rumour that the woman had died.

*On 11th August, at half past twelve in the afternoon, at the hour when people leave the factories to eat lunch, a mob of bricklayers (*mularzes*⁴), factory workers and ordinary young ruffians began throwing stones at the Jewish shops in the Old Market Square. [Stary Rynek] No police were to be seen there [and] there were no soldiers in Częstochowa – they had been sent off on 'manoeuvres'. Only when the Jews began closing their shops did a few policemen show up with a commissar (*prystav*⁵) and a gendarmerie officer. The workers dispersed, beating every Jew with a long caftan on the way. At the Old Market Square, the centre of the Jewish petty trade, it then became calm. But, at the same time, a 'pogrom' ensued in the surrounding streets. A mob, made up of labourers, craftsmen and unemployed - which were then numerous in Częstochowa, due to the crisis - began breaking window-panes in the Jewish shops and robbing the merchandise. They also broke into houses, smashed furniture,*

¹ [TN: Pol., robbery/pillage.]

² [TN: Derived from the Russian verb *gromit'* (ГРОМИТЬ) meaning "to destroy/ to wreak havoc", the term denotes helplessness on part of the victims.]

³ [TN: Rus., lit. "head of city" (ГОРОДСКОЙ ГОЛОВА).]

⁴ [TN: From the Pol. "murarz," or mason/bricklayer.]

⁵ [TN: Rus., bailiff/marshal (ПРИСТАВ).]

[and] tore bedclothes, with the feathers of the Jewish pillows flying far and wide. The Jewish shops on ul. Krakowska, where more Christians than Jews live, suffered particularly large damage. The only shops they left unrobbed were a few in the Christian courtyards, such as at Krüger's, who guarded his property with a revolver in hand. At the beginning, there was no police at all. Later, they were afraid to do anything because they were too few of them. Only when the patrols of the few soldiers who had remained in town arrived, did they first start individually arresting the more tenacious rioters, and taking them away to the police station (uchastok⁶). The mob even took some of the arrestees back from the police by force. At five o'clock, it became a little calmer for a while but, by then, ul. Krakowska had been completely pillaged. All waited in dread for the pogrom to restart at seven o'clock, when the factory workers left work. The fear of death then spread amongst the Jewish populace and the wealthy Jews began fleeing Częstochowa.

The police [only] telegraphed the Governor of Piotrków at one o'clock on the following day. After the multitude had smashed the windows of the Jewish synagogue, where the Jews were congregated for [the fast of] 9th Av, the Jewish Kehilla turned for assistance to the 'Uyezdny Nachalnik⁷' - but he hid himself and did not even go out to the Jews. The Kehilla then telegraphed the Governor and the General Governor. The police formed patrols from the soldiers who were left in town and from the 'tamozhne strazhnikes⁸' (soldiers who guard [against] contraband). Among those soldiers who had remained in the city were numerous Jews and, afterwards, the Polish antisemites spread a rumour that that had been the only reason why the soldiers had not refused to shoot into the crowd.

The police turned its entire attention [only] to safeguarding the city's main thoroughfare - the legendary 'Aleja', where the 'Gosudarstvenny Bank⁹', several Jewish banking houses and the different governmental institutions are located. The poorer quarters were left, as one would say, 'to the mercy of God' - no one protected them, so therefore they were robbed in a terrible manner. As seven o'clock neared, various suspicious characters began to appear on the First Aleja. Everyone waited, with dread, what would happen at about seven o'clock. And, as it turned out, immediately after seven, masses of workers began pouring out of the factories and they joined those who were already waiting on the boulevard. With a shout of 'Hurra na Żyda!' [Hurray, at the Jew!], and with a terrifying shrieking of whistles, the multitude set upon the Second Aleja. The soldiers beat the mob back with their rifle-butts; the multitude dispersed [and] regrouped once more, but the soldiers were eventually able to drive them off the Aleje. The crowd then fell, once more, upon the Old Market Square and Częstochówka¹⁰.

Meanwhile, the police - disregarding all this - strongly defended the wealthier quarters, not allowing anyone inside them. The whole city looked as if it was in a war and, [all] the while, the mob - not encountering any resistance - rampaged fearsomely in the poor quarters. They robbed and destroyed all the Jewish shops, starting from the tiny Jewish shops and ending with the large and affluent ones. The only shops that remained intact were the Christian ones, which had put up icons and candles in their [shop] windows. Apart from these, only one

⁶ [TN: Rus., precinct (УЧАСТОК).]

⁷ [TN: Rus., county governor (УЕЗДНЫЙ НАЧАЛЬНИК).]

⁸ [TN: From the Rus. "customs guards" (ТАМОЖНЕ СТРАЖНИКИ).]

⁹ [TN: Rus., National Bank (ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫЙ БАНК).]

¹⁰ [TN: The older, upper part of the city.]

Jewish street remained whole - Targowa, where the Jewish butchers had vowed they would lay out, on the spot, anyone who dared to rob [them].

The multitude split up into several groups. One of these fell upon Miętkiewicz's colonial goods [viz. groceries/spices] shop, broke down the doors and robbed the merchandise - despite the fact that, nearby, were the Vice-Governor and the Prosecutor who had arrived in Częstochowa, at seven o'clock, with a small group of soldiers. They began persuading the pogrom participants to disperse. But this was to no avail and they did not stop looting. Twice, they warned the crowd to disperse and, twice, they fired blanks. But this only irritated the mob even more, who began hurling stones at the soldiers. At this point, they began shooting in earnest [and] two were left dead and several seriously wounded. Interestingly enough, there were also several Jews amongst the wounded. It is therefore to be assumed that the soldiers shot, not only at the attackers, but also at those attacked.

After this killing, it became calm, but the 'rabunek, in the surrounding streets, did not cease. Ul. Warszawska in Częstochówka was particularly heavily plundered. Here, a few of the mob threw some stones at the memorial of [Tsar] Aleksander II, and the Polish patriotic song, 'Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła'¹¹, was heard being sung. As a result, some time later, a rumour spread that the pogrom had borne a political character, as it were.

During the pogrom, people tried to start fires in several locations (for example, at Helman's shop, they drenched everything in petrol), but this did not succeed. They only managed to set fire to one house next to the Old Synagogue. The pogrom ended at eleven o'clock at night, and only at twelve - once the multitude had already robbed almost everything - did sixty stójkowes¹² (gorodovye) from Łódź and one hundred Cossacks from Będzin arrive. The Governor, [and] the prosecutor from the Warsaw 'Okružhnoy Sud'¹³, also arrived, and they began to arrest people. They also found stolen goods amongst many of those arrested.

All in all, the pogrom left behind 120 looted shops, two casualties, masses of wounded and dozens completely destitute, who were then forced to beg for alms. But this is only the material harm that the 'rabunek' caused. This damage was still not as terrible as the spiritual and moral one. The chasm, dividing the Jewish and Polish populations, became deeper [and] the segregation and hatred between the two became more acute. The only winner here was the Russian government.

It is a dreadful state of affairs, when the Jews, who are persecuted and oppressed to such an extent by the Tsarist rule, are forced to find, in the bullets of the soldiers and the 'nagaikas'¹⁴ of the Cossacks, practically the only aid against the savage violence of another nation which is also downtrodden by the Tsarist government - the Poles. These are the facts. But how are they to be explained? Who is to blame for the terrible war between two peoples, whose historical destiny by itself - one would think - calls for brotherly unity against their common enemy? With each new incident, this same question emerges before us - and it is worth reflecting upon it.

¹¹ [TN: "Poland has not yet perished"; this same song was officially adopted as the national anthem of Poland in 1926.]

¹² [TN: From the Pol. "stójkowy," or policeman; the subsequent word in parenthesis is the Russian term for the same (ГОРОДОВЫЕ).]

¹³ [TN: Rus., District Court (ОКРУЖНОЙ СУД).]

¹⁴ [TN: Short, thick whip with round cross-section used by Cossacks.]

The event, in Częstochowa, came as no surprise to anyone who is at all familiar with Jewish life in Poland. This pogrom was only a [more] acute expression of that which we are already accustomed to encountering in our everyday life - which is the deep-rooted antisemitism of the Polish nobility ('szlachta' [or] 'dvoryanstvo'¹⁵), of the petty and high bourgeoisie, and of all the strata of the Polish nation, which have not yet been freed of their pernicious influence. In order to characterise the relations between the Polish and Jewish populations of Częstochowa, it is enough to present just a few facts from the lives of society's higher echelons (being as the Jewish working masses in Częstochowa are still ignorant and they still live completely separated from the Polish workers). The main motto in this relationship is 'Down with the Jews!' [and] even the 'Poles of the Faith of Moses' (as the Jewish intelligentsia and bourgeoisie in Poland call themselves), who are always prepared to renounce their solidarity with the Jewish people for the merest gracious glance from any 'wielmożny pan' [noble lord], are not safe from this attitude towards them. A continuous fight is led against the Jews in all the temples [fig.], starting from the Temple of Hermes (the god of commerce), and ending with the Temple of Melpomene (the goddess of theatrical art) - not to mention the Roman Catholic temples, where the 'holy fathers' stir up the fanatical masses against the 'infidels' for 'God's glory'.

In Częstochowa, for example, there is a 'credit society' that was established with the help of the Jewish bourgeoisie. The majority of this society's members are Jewish. Jews also constitute a third of its Board of Directors. Christians hold two higher positions in this society and, lo, when a vacancy came up for a third post, an intelligent young Jewish lady was proposed. The Board of Directors, upon examining whether she was well acquainted with the work, acknowledged that she could hold the position perfectly well. But, having said that, they rejected the young woman - quite openly declaring that, if they were to give the job to a young Jewish lady, they could not be fully assured that the society would remain 'a truly Christian one'. That is how Jews are treated at the temple of the Golden Calf. But here, this is no news. After all, it is common knowledge that here, where money is involved [and] where one must run competitors off the road, all means can be employed. Yet we also witness this same treatment in the temple of 'pure' art: Jews are admitted neither to the Lutania Musical Society, nor to the Society of Lovers of Dramatic Art - and we could provide hundreds of such examples.

But the attitude of the Polish 'intelligentsia' towards the Jews in Częstochowa was expressed in a particularly marked manner at the time of the recent pogrom itself. Of the whole 'intelligentsia', there was no one to attempt to influence the mob and hold it back. On the contrary - everyone quite openly abetted the participators in the pogrom, [and] quite openly lamented the fact that they had not slaughtered all the Jews. We should like to present just a few facts.

A Grade Six gymnazjum student, Wigowski (his father is a salesman at a 'kazyony'¹⁶ shop), paying no heed to the fact that the police had, on that day, forbidden the sale of spirits after seven o'clock, sold liquor to the drunken mob all evening long, and exchanged it for bottles of wine stolen from a Jewish wine cellar (this fact was proven in court). His 'elders' - people who had completed university - were also not much more advanced than this 'civilised' savage. People in the street ask the renowned Dr [Władysław] Biegański, the author of articles on

¹⁵ [TN: Both words mean "nobility" - the first in Polish and the second in Russian (ДВОРЯНСТВО).]

¹⁶ [TN: Rus., state-owned (КАЗЕННЫЙ).]

medical ethics (morals), to administer medical assistance to an injured Jew. Dr Biegański refuses to do so. He leaves the sufferer in the hands of the police. He turns away and calmly continues on his way. His colleague, Dr Wrześniewski, also does the same. A Jewish woman, with a broken bone, is brought to him for medical assistance. He drives her away, [roaring] with laughter. The lawyer Paciorkowski, meeting a Jewish acquaintance of his in the street, says to him, in a delighted voice, 'Aha, ours are beating yours!' The beer manufacturer, Karl Szwede, stands with a few of his foremen and watches several burly youths pummeling a Jewish boy. Very pleased with their deed, he holds his sides with laughter. (The Jews have now imposed a boycott on his beer). I believe that these facts speak quite clearly. They give us an idea of the causes of the pogroms.

Furthermore, I must add that a proclamation was spread not long ago in Włocławek (Warsaw gubernia), calling to 'kill the Jews off'. There are similar rumours about Warsaw and other cities. Of course, one must not believe all of these reports - but, in any case, they once more prove to us that the Częstochowa pogrom did not happen because of local reasons. The causes lie much deeper - in the relations between the Jewish and Polish population in general.

For several reasons, I separate the question of Jewish-Polish relations from that of the attitude of Christians, in general, towards the Jews. First and foremost, the history of the Jews in Poland differs, in numerous aspects, from that of the Jews in Lithuania and Russia and, even to this day, the Polish Jew is unlike the Jews of Lithuania and Russia - that is on the one side. On the other side, the antisemitism amongst the Polish populace is without doubt stronger than that amongst the Russians. The majority of Polish society is imbued with this antisemitism, and including the supposed 'intelligentsia' - which is the most characteristic thing of all. The whole press is also full of it. It would seem that even such a respectable organ as 'Prawda' [The Truth] does not renounce it, as it came out not long ago against Zionism purely from an antisemitic standpoint, voicing its solidarity with the Jew Orensztajn [?] who sold himself to the antisemitic band - and with the newspaper 'Gazeta Polska' which bought him off. Here, we must immediately stress that, although we are fundamental opponents of the Zionists, and we welcome any campaign, be it legal or illegal, that is conducted against them on Socialist-progressive grounds, we must nevertheless fight with all our strength against those gentlemen who wish to 'throw the baby out with the bathwater', who think that, with the obliteration of Zionism, the Jewish problem itself will also already be eliminated. Of the entire Polish press, the 'Golos' [The Voice (Rus.)] is the only paper that is really progressive, even in its treatment of the Jewish question.

I conclude my correspondence with an appeal to Polish comrades, that they should treat the drama in Częstochowa seriöser (more seriously - the editors¹⁷), and to see to it, as far as they can, that events such as these, which could bring alienation and mistrust between the Jewish and Polish proletariat, are not repeated. It is indeed a 'joke' that, to this day, there is still no Socialist brochure in Polish against antisemitism - no such brochure has been published even by the PPS, which always bands together with the Bund, that [?] it does not develop, amongst the Jewish proletariat, any feelings of solidarity towards the proletariat of other nations.

¹⁷ [TN: The author used the German word "seriöser" instead of term commonly used in Yiddish for "more serious" (ernster) - thus the Editor's translation.]

Note:
(by Symcha Lew)

According to the reports from the "Assistant to the Warsaw General Governor of the Police Division" (the Chief of Gendarmerie in Poland), which were written to the General Governor in Warsaw on 13th November 1902 (Old Style, by which the Russians reckoned time), a proclamation had appeared in Łódź regarding the Częstochowa "anti-Jewish disturbances" (that is how the Częstochowa pogrom was referred to in the Tsarist administrative nomenclature). This announcement had been distributed by the PPS group in Łódź by the intellectual "Bolesław". The police had not been able to discover who this "Bolesław" was. They had seized forty-three copies of this proclamation. This same announcement had also been found in Częstochowa and in Sosnowiec on 6th October 1902. As 6th October in the Old Style is 19th October in the New Style - the accepted chronology in Europe in general, and in Poland in particular - there is no discrepancy between these [two] dates. Unfortunately, we do not have the full text of the proclamation at our disposal, as it was not included with these documents. In its place, however, we do have the brief summary of it, which the Chief of Gendarmerie presented to the General Governor, and we shall have to make do with it, for lack of a better choice.

These are its contents, in a verbatim translation from the Russian [original]:

This appeal condemns the anti-Jewish disturbances in Częstochowa, and advises the conscientious workers, hardened in the revolutionary struggle, to put such upheavals to the use of the labour cause, should they be repeated. For this, it is necessary - utilising the situation that has been created - to turn the ignorant anti-Jewish manifestations into conscientious demonstrations against exploitation and against any kind of violation.

(Archive of the Warsaw General Governor, General
№101,654, №8 of 1902, p.190 of the directorial management, second table [?].)

Naturally, we may hardly draw general conclusions from a summary. In a proclamation, the style [and] the wording are of importance, as they express the ideology and mood of the author. One cannot base oneself on the dry, official terminology of the Tsarist gendarmerie's leadership. [But] we should at least note that, although we do not know how outspoken the PPS' reaction to the Częstochowa pogrom [actually] was, we do know that the PPS did not remain indifferent. And this needs to be recorded for the sake of historical truth, in order to not be led astray by the political passion in the fights of those days, from which the correspondent of the *Arbeiter Stimme* was apparently not free.