

F. Szmulewicz

## The Popular<sup>1</sup> Bakery

Częstochowa was an industrial city and, when the War broke out in 1914, the wheels came to a standstill in almost all the factories. The entire sales market was Russia, and the War tore apart and cut off the connection with the sales market. Need grew amongst the ranks of the workers and the middle-class population. In addition, the German occupation forces took over the entire economic production, claiming that they would institute a distribution of rations. In reality, the means of sustenance became costlier from day to day and, scarcer too, because the occupation forces carried off all the best and sent it away to Germany. The working population did not have the possibility of buying the most essential necessities - even at high prices. A chunk of bread started to become something precious. The number of bakers also decreased, as not all the bakers received flour for baking, except only at the discretion of the "Behörde"<sup>2</sup>. As a result, people would stand [in queues], from midnight, at the few bakeries in order to receive a little loaf of bread. The idea arose to create a bakery in order to ease the plight of the population and, simultaneously, actually create a new workplace for the bakery workers.

To generate the initial funds for the establishment of a public bakery, the drama section<sup>3</sup>, under the direction of Herszel Gotajner, performed *Die Mishpuche* by H. Nomborg. Participants were Szmul Frank, F. Szmulewicz<sup>4</sup>, R. Federman, Zarnowiecki, Dorka Szacher, Fela Rajcher, Miss C. Federman, Miss Lajcia Gliklich and Gotajner.

This evening brought in a sum of 200 roubles. With this sum, we set out to create the "Popular Bakery", which [was to] serve nearly the entire city.

In order to procure the minimal sum that was needed for the establishment of the bakery, we were compelled to resort to aid from the city's worthies. Considering that among our sympathisers was Mendel Koniarski - who, before the War, had been in Russia and studied law, and who had access to the higher society - we decided to take counsel from him. The discussion took place in Raphael Federman's home and we gave Koniarski the assignment to call together a large circle of the important people.

Shortly afterwards, a meeting was held at the Kupiecki Hall, headed by Rabbi Asz. As far as I recall, among those gathered were Rabbi Asz, Mojsze Asz, Dr Rus, Dr Broniatowski and his brother the dentist, Koniarski, Werde, Dr Kohn, Markusfeld, Dr Gajsler, Szpiro, Neufeld, Weksler, Goldsztajn and, as representatives of the workers, F. Szmulewicz and Zarnowiecki. This gathering, of some forty individuals, was chaired by Rabbi Asz.

The differences of opinion, as regards to the communal character of the bakery, already became apparent as soon as the question of a name for the institution was contemplated. Several participants suggested the name *Beis Lechem* [House of Bread], after the fashion of the *Beis Lechem* in Warsaw, [an institution] with similar philanthropic purposes. The representative of the workers - the writer of these lines - declared that the question of a name was no triviality, because "clothes maketh the man". The name *Beis Lechem* was not in agreement with the goals of the initiators who

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: Meaning of and for the common people.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: In German in the original, meaning authority or governmental agency.]

<sup>3</sup> [TN: This is the same amateur troupe "Lovers of Yiddish Stage Art" which is mentioned above in the article "Yiddish Theatre in Częstochowa" (p.92).]

<sup>4</sup> [TN: The author of this article.]

had generated the initial funds. There could be no mistake about the name - the bakery needed to be a people's bakery<sup>5</sup>, both in name and in character. Thus, the name "Popular Bakery" was adopted.

On the following day, the news about the establishment of the bakery appeared in the paper, and this elicited great gratification from the public.

In order to carry out the plan, the division of tasks was as follows:

- bakery workers and premises - the dentist Broniatowski, Koniarski and Szmulewicz;
- the supplying of flour - Markusfeld, Dr Kohn and Werde, [and]
- in charge of health and sanitary conditions - Dr Rus and Werde.

The bakery workers had a professional union influenced by the SS [Party]. The organisation of the work plan with the bakers was given over to Raphael Federman, as a representative of the Party.

In the meantime, we were able to obtain a bakery. This was Auerbach's bakery on ul. Warszawska, which had four ovens [of] the most suitable and desirable [type] for this purpose.

Without any great difficulties, week also soon managed to obtain flour and, within a week, everything was in full swing. Oversight over the bakery was assigned to Szmulewicz and Zarnowiecki. We also turned to the *Poalei Zion* for their assistance and they sent in Abram Gotlib.

The bakery gained a reputation in town. After a short time, it was decided to open branch locations in the city and in various districts, in order to avoid the standing in queues in order to buy bread. Additional comrades, such as Efroim-Majer Fajnrajch, Bem and others, were called in in connection with this work.

Over the course of time, however, the bakery's character took an undesirable turn. This was because the founders did not ensure that the leadership remained in their hands. As they were not represented in running the business [side of things], its management fell into the hands of a few individuals, whose objectives were purely commercial, and who employed a system of protectionism. People from different backgrounds soon appeared at the bakery, chasing after jobs. It turned out that Koniarski had betrayed the workers. Instead of maintaining the purity of the enterprise, he stood opposed to philanthropy - the lust for money had made him stumble. The two aforementioned workers' representatives, in charge of the supervision, had refused all wages, declaring that the bakery had been created by a workers' organisation, [and] not for commercial purposes.

After we refused to take payment, the management received free rein and took the bakery away from being under the supervision of the workers.

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<sup>5</sup> [TN: Viz. a cooperative institution which sells bread to workers for a nominal fee, as opposed to a philanthropic organisation that gives out free bread to the poor.]