

Professional Workers' Unions

The Situation of the Jewish Workers at the End of the 19th and Beginning of the 20th centuries – The Influence of the Political Parties – Repressions – The Start of Legal Activities – The Crisis During the First World War – The Situation in Independent Poland – The Professional Unions and the Workers' Council – The Roles of the Central Council and the Bureau of Culture – The Struggle of the Young Workers – The Role of the Youth Office

The relatively young Jewish community in Częstochowa, already by the end of the 19th century, had quite a significant working element. According to the 18997 census, among the city's roughly 12,000 Jews, 2,155 drew their incomes from industry and craftsmanship. Within this category, there were 801 souls who lived in tailoring and 228 from shoemaking. The remaining working elements were mostly employed in little workshops and small-scale factories.

From a report by the renowned Zionist leader, Szojel [sic Szmul] Rafael Landau, who visited Częstochowa in 1898, we are made aware of several important details regarding the local Jewish factory workers. There was, at the time, only one Jewish factory which employed a large number of Jewish workers. This was a needle and umbrella factory, which counted among its 220 workers more than 100 Jews, both men and young girls⁽¹⁾. The working day lasted eleven and a half hours. The wages of adult labourers, men, reached between four and five roubles a week; that of the girls - from one rouble and eighty kopeks to two and a half roubles, [and] in exceptional cases three roubles. The men were employed in the production itself, whereas the girls mostly worked in cutting [sic packaging¹], sorting, etc. The Jewish workers were employed in manual labour, due to the fact that they worked on Sunday instead of *Shabbes* and, on that day, the machines were shut down. Only small groups of Jewish labourers worked in the other little Jewish factories, in the fields of paper, celluloid, jute, etc. The fact that the deliverer of the report found, among the workers at that needle factory, a number of former tavern-keepers – elderly Jews, bent and with long, unkempt beards – is characteristic of the process of proletarianisation² of the Jewish *petite bourgeoisie*.

The great poverty among Jews in Częstochowa at the time is illustrated by the fact that, in 1898, 708 Jewish families - viz. nearly a third of the local Jewish community - applied for "wheat money"³ for *Peisach*.

Over the course of a few years, at the start of the 20th century, Jewish industry in Częstochowa - and with it the number of Jewish factory workers also - increased significantly. The *Collection of Materials*, which the ICA published in 1904, based on reports from correspondents, brings us the following type of information on the Jewish factory workers in Częstochowa:

In the metal industry, the factories which employed Jewish labourers were those of Wajnberg and Horowicz. At Horowicz's, which made *tzepes* (threshing sledges⁴), lock, and metal household items, fifty people worked, of whom fourteen were Jewish locksmiths and blacksmiths.

⁽¹⁾ It is possible to identify this factory from the materials of the ICA [Jewish Colonisation Association] from 1904 – it belonged to Henig & Partners.

¹ [TN: The Yiddish words for cutting and packaging are almost identical: "hakn" and "pakn"; as in the version of Szmul-Rafael Landau's report that is presented above on p. 24 it is clearly stated that "the girls were mostly employed in sorting and packaging," it is quite certain that the word "cutting" here is a misprint of "packaging."]

² [TN: In Marxism, proletarianisation is a social process whereby people move from being either an employer or self-employed, to being employed as wage labour by others.]

³ [TN: Stipend allotted by the kehilla to the poor with which to purchase the necessities of Passover, and namely the wheat for matzos. According to Halacha, all the members of the community who are not poor themselves are required to give food or money to this cause.]

In the toy industry, there were fifteen Jewish factories, each of which employed between fifteen and fifty labourers. Together, all these factories employed a total of 300 workers, of whom 80% were Jews. The largest factories were those of the toy industry's old pioneer, Szaja, of his five sons, of Hamburger & Hocherman and of Szmulewicz. The labour was exclusively manual. Only two toy factories had motors. The "factory buildings" were little hovels, which looked exactly like little dwellings. In the majority of these factories, 60% of the workforce consisted of youths and children⁽²⁾, mainly girls. The working day lasted between twelve and fourteen hours. The method of payment was by piece-work, so that workers developed such velocity, that one labourer on his own could finish twenty-five gross - i.e. 3,600 pieces a day - of a specific toy. The rate of payment varied according to the type of toy. One, who cast little lead roosters, would receive no more than four kopeks for a gross (twelve dozen); with other toys, the rate reached twenty, forty [kopeks] and even a rouble and a half for a gross. By this system, the weekly wages for children under fifteen reached from eighty kopeks to one rouble and twenty kopeks; youths over fifteen would receive between one rouble and eighty kopeks to two and a half roubles a week; adult workers had between three and four and [even] five roubles a week, and those, who earned between seven and nine roubles, were rare exceptions.

Of the three large haberdashery factories - such as buttons, needles, pins, cufflinks, metal and celluloid handles, etc., the largest one was that of the Grosman brothers. It did not employ even one Jew amongst its 200 workers and it was only in the administration that four Jews were employed. To compensate, at the Szaja & Rozensztajn mother-of-pearl button factory, almost all the workers were Jewish - 68 out of 70. At the Henig & Partners needle and umbrella factory, Jews made up half of the 160-180 labourers. In order to observe *Shabbes*, the Jews, who worked machines, would be employed only for five days a week. The Jewish labourers, who worked six days a week, only engaged in handwork. The director of this factory, Werde, not only personally hired a large number of Jewish metalworkers who had completed the local Crafts School, but also propagated the idea of hiring Jews amongst the local Jewish manufacturers. Notwithstanding, in Częstochowa, there were six needle factories owned by Jews, which did not employ even a single Jewish worker. The wages of labourers in this branch of industry had increased very little by comparison to the situation in 1898. At Henig's factory, girls earned from thirty to sixty kopeks per day. Adult men [earned] from half a rouble to one rouble and twenty kopeks. Some of the Jewish haberdashery factories, such as Szaja & Rozensztajn, and even Grosman - just like some of the toy factories - gave out work to exclusively Jewish home-based labourers. Their work consisted of sewing the buttons onto pieces of cardboard, dressing the toys, etc.

The furtive and radiant tidings of freedom and the fight for a better life passed through these little factories and workshops like a spring breeze in a land of winter. The SS, Bund, [and] *Poalei Zion* parties, who spoke to them in their mother-tongue, organised them according to their factories, branches and professions, leading strikes and achieving shorter working hours and higher wages.

This was the beginning. In 1906, following the "Constitution" [viz. the October Manifesto] and the state of war, the main work of the parties was focused on the Professional Movement. Professions, such as the women who made ladies' hats and adorned them in the shops and the *Aleje*, organised themselves and went on strike. For them, it was necessary to print announcements in Polish, because the majority of them spoke only Polish, and to select elegant young men who would have an influence over them.

The greatest and hardest struggle that took place between the workers and their employers was that of the bakers. The employers could not make peace with the idea that, of the three hours of

⁴ [TN: Farming implement which consists of a board whose bottom side is covered with sharp metal blades, and is dragged over cereals to separate the grain from the chaff.]

⁽²⁾ From the memories of many Częstochowers in America, many children were so small, that a crate had to be placed under them for them to be able to reach the table that was their workplace.



**Częstochowa Bakers' Union,
with Cyna Orzech (in centre) as Chairman**

sleep on top of the *piekarnik* (oven) that the bakery workers had, a normal working day should consist of at least ten to twelve hours. They made denunciations, [and] hired bruisers and provocateurs. One of them was actually shot and almost all the leaders of the bakers' workers were sent to Siberia or other places in Russia.

We may glean a concept of the activity of the Professional Union of Tailors and Seamstresses from the financial report which was published in the Bundist *Volkszeitung* [People's Paper] dated 1st July 1907. This report encompasses the period from 1st December 1906 to 10th June 1907:

Proceeds: (in roubles and kopeks)	
<i>Balance brought forward</i>	16.00
<i>Admission and weekly membership fees</i>	85.36
<i>Received from a men's master tailor</i>	10.00
<i>Received from a women's master tailor</i>	5.00
<i>Received from a master of white linen</i>	3.00
<i>Received from a stocking-maker</i>	2.50
<i>Received from a men's tailor</i>	<u>2.00</u>
Total	123.86
Expenditures:	
<i>Unemployed</i>	2.47
<i>Strikers</i>	5.50
<i>[Tailors] travelling through</i>	2.35
<i>Seals</i>	4.00
<i>Lodgings</i>	2.05
<i>Stationary supplies</i>	0.95
<i>Library</i>	6.00
<i>Volkszeitung</i>	3.00
<i>Loans to the Organisation</i>	5.00
<i>Admission booklets with notepads</i>	5.04
<i>Loans to 5 members</i>	15.05
<i>Members that travelled away</i>	<u>10.80</u>
Total	<u>62.21</u>
Balance remaining in the treasury	61.65

The proceeds from individual master tailors, which appear in this interesting report, presumably consist of monetary fines for breaking an agreement, for defamations, etc.

As the Reaction intensified, the Tsarist police also applied themselves to the workforce's financial organisations – to the professional unions. They would conduct raids on these unions, confiscating the seals and documents, and exacting other forms of persecution. In these cases, when the police seized the seals, the unions announced it publicly and declared the old seals void. If, for instance, the seals had been circular, the new ones were made square, so that they could be easily differentiated. The police would also carry out searches in the homes of union activists and of striking workers.

These repressions did not have the power to completely disrupt the professional organisations. In 1907, and even in 1908, when in an array of towns and *shtetls* in the Polish provinces the

Professional Movement was stifled by the Reaction, the professional unions in Częstochowa still endured. At the end of 1908, even in Częstochowa, the professional unions all but disappeared from the face of the earth – but even then, the Tsarist regime was unable to stifle the aspiration for a free and humane life, which the Freedom Movement aroused in the working masses. There were, in fact, strikes during the entire period in the large factories such as Mottes', Peltzer's, Wajnberg's, etc., and the Jewish workers in the little factories and workshops held clandestine profession-related meetings with great frequency, presenting collective demands to the employers.

In the large factories, the Christian Workers Association was active amongst the Christian labourers. It was an organisation established by the clergy to draw the workers away from the Socialist parties. Hand in hand with the anti-Socialist propaganda, needless to say, went the antisemitic hatred of this "Christian" association. In independent Poland, they were known under the name "*Chadekes*"⁵ or "Christian Democrats", and they surpassed the "*Endekes*" with their reactionary politics and hatred of Jews.

Nevertheless, the majority of the Polish workforce in Częstochowa did not allow itself to be led astray by these haters of the working class.

In 1912, at an appointed hour, the sirens of most of Częstochowa's factories gave five signals in protest against the Tsarist regime's mass-murder of the workers at the goldmines [by the River] Lena, in Siberia.



In 1913, a law was passed concerning the implementation of health maintenance organisations (HMO) in the factories which employed large numbers of labourers. The new aspect of this law was that the workers of every factory could choose their own representatives in the administration of the HMO. In the large factories, where only Christian labourers worked, an energetic agitation was conducted amongst the workers to participate in these elections. The Jewish workers in the little factories and workshops remained largely indifferent to the matter.

To compensate, that same year, a broad movement began amongst Jewish labourers to establish legal professional unions, according to the law that was published at the time by the Tsarist government.

The new law was actually nothing more than the administration of the old *Zubatowszczine* (Zubatov - a gendarme officer, who proposed that the workers in Russia have an opportunity to organise in professional unions in order to draw them away from the political struggle), but the Jewish labourers used the law for their own benefit and organised a wide range of professional unions. The initiative came mainly from Łódź, where the Central [Offices] had been first established. The professional unions in Częstochowa were branches of these.

The first legalised professional union was that of the woodworkers. The inauguration meeting was held in the hall of the Craftsmen's Club on Saturday, 30th November 1913. The chairman was M. Felzensztajn, Chairman of the Central Administration in Łódź.

A second representative from Łódź was Dawid Abramson. The speech made by Daniel Zaluski had a strong impact on the audience. Elected to the Administrative Commission were H. Fajwlowicz, Sz. Fajnrajch, Z. Tenenberg, J.F. [ד.פ.] Guterman and L. Win.

⁵ [TN: "*Chadekes*" and the subsequent "*Endekes*" were the Yiddish appellations for members of the "*Chadecja*" (*Chrześcijańska Demokracja* – Christian Democracy) and "*Endecja*" (*Narodowa Demokracja* – National Democratic) parties, respectively.]

We read about the founding of this professional union in an article in *Częstochower Wochenblatt* dated 13th December 1913:

The founding of a professional union for the woodworkers was a true holiday [yom-tov] for class-aware workers and their friends.

Of the apathy and indifference that we witness in bourgeois gatherings - there was no trace at all. One after the other, the workers stood up and demonstrated that the fire of striving for unity, in order to conduct the struggle for their liberation with combined forces, had not yet been extinguished within them – and, one after the other, they congratulated the newly-established union as the foundation stone of the Professional Movement in our city.

On 13th January 1914, we read in the *Częstochower Tageblatt* about the fact that the movement to organise the professional unions had also enveloped other branches of labour:

Of late, a movement has begun amongst Częstochowa workers to organise professional unions. Just recently, a branch of the woodworking union was founded. The bakers have also organised and, now, measures are being taken to organise professional unions for the box-makers, celluloid workers and other occupations. We need not speak of the importance of the professional unions for workers, in general, and the Jewish ones in particular. The Jewish worker has more to endure than all other labourers. He does not know a normal working day and it has, more than once, occurred that it was necessary to have a fundraiser to buy medicines for an ailing labourer.

In the years 1913-1914, Jewish professional unions of workers in leather, tailoring, wood, [and] celluloid, and of commercial employees also, were active in Częstochowa. In 1914, the Society of Commercial Employees numbered about 300 members. In 1912, the same union had an income of 3,822 roubles. During that period, an assimilationist spirit still reigned in that union.

In those times, the question of workers' rights for Jewish labourers was also a vexed one. Some of the larger Jewish manufacturers did not allow Jews into their factories as workers. One of those, who boycotted Jewish labour, was the owner of a celluloid factory - Landau. He had once employed a few dozen Jewish male and female workers, but he later made his factory absolutely "judenrein" [clean of Jews⁶]. Even some Jewish public activists and pillars of various charitable organisations behaved shamefully towards Jewish workers. Instead of giving the poorer, Jewish classes the opportunity to earn money for bread through their own toil, these strange philanthropists preferred to "help" them by tossing them alms.

In the First World War, under German occupation, economic life came to a standstill, which hit the working population especially hard. Due to the unemployment, many labourers emigrated to Germany. Those, who remained in Częstochowa, tried to alleviate their plight through [communal] self-help. Bakeries and tearooms were opened for Jewish workers. The professional unions, together with the political parties, conducted large communal campaigns in connection with this relief work.

With the rise of an independent Poland, the situation of the Jewish worker was incomparably changed for the worse.

The greater part of the members of the Metal Union which, during the German occupation, was made up of Jews working in the railway workshops, was replaced by Polish workers. Wajnberg's

⁶ [TN: Term borrowed from the future Nazis.]

factory was utterly paralysed, and was later relocated to the Soviet Union. Landau's factory was completely deserted. *Malarnia*, *Kapelusznia* and dozens of other factories, big and small, which had formerly worked for the large Russian market, were now downsized.

But also, independent of the negative effects of the political changes, the War itself left behind a financial devastation from which the city of Częstochowa, just like the rest of the country, was only able to recover from years later.

The number and classification of Jewish workers in Częstochowa, in the first post-War years, are presented in the work *Jewish Industrial Enterprises in Poland*, which was published in Warsaw in 1923 and was based on a questionnaire from 1921, with the aid of the Joint, [and] edited by the engineer E. [v] Heller.

In 1921, there were 1,056 active factories and workshops in Częstochowa, where Jews were employed as contractors or labourers.

An entire row of manufacturing professions were only partly active, or mostly inactive. In the rubber and gum industry, 30% of all enterprises were inactive; in the textile industry – 20%; in metal and toys – 62.5%. In the celluloid comb and felt hat industries - not a single enterprise was active that year!

The 1,056 active factories and workshops are classified according to their separate branches of industry, with the percentage⁷ they constituted within all the enterprises:

<i>Clothing</i>	58.0%
<i>Metal</i>	6.4%
<i>Wood</i>	5.8%
<i>Construction</i>	3.7%
<i>Leather</i>	3.2%
<i>Paper</i>	2.6%
<i>Textiles</i>	2.3%
<i>Machinery, appliances</i>	1.8%
<i>Cleaning</i>	1.4%
<i>Rubber, gum</i>	1.3%
<i>Graphics industry</i>	1.2%
<i>Stone, clay, glass</i>	0.9%
<i>Chemicals</i>	0.9%

Our eye is caught by the characteristic phenomenon that 58% - nearly three-fifths - of all the enterprises where Jews were employed as contractors or labourers, belonged to the clothing branch.

Of these 1,056 active enterprises, only 588 – viz. not much more than half (55.7%) – employed wage labour and, in the rest of the enterprises, only the owners were employed - sometimes also with the help of family members. All the enterprises employed, during each season, close to four thousand wage labourers – 3,893 people, of whom 26% were the owners, 7.5% family members and two-thirds (66.5%) paid workers.

Among the 2,643 paid workers, 1,390 were Jews - roughly 52.5%, or a little over a half. These are the percentages of Jewish labourers in the separate branches of industry:

⁷ [TN: The sum total of the numbers below only comes to 89.5% – 11.5% is unaccounted for.]

<i>Rubber, gum</i>	98.0%
<i>Clothing</i>	95.8%
<i>Cleaning</i>	88.9%
<i>Machinery, appliances</i>	87.1%
<i>Construction</i>	81.3%
<i>Food</i>	77.0%
<i>Paper</i>	36.6%
<i>Textiles</i>	63.0%
<i>Leather</i>	56.2%
<i>Chemicals</i>	51.9%
<i>Wood</i>	45.6%
<i>Graphics industry</i>	40.5%
<i>Metal</i>	35.8%
<i>Stone, clay, glass</i>	9.3%

The part the Jewish workers took, however, differed not only in entire branches of industry, but also in occupations within the same branch of industry itself. In this particular, the branch of the metal industry is especially characteristic. This branch employed 508 wage-labourers, of whom, as said, almost 36% were Jews. But, in the separate professions within the metal industry, the number and percentage of Jews were as follows:

[Profession]	Workers in total	Jews	Percentage
<i>Smelting</i>	186	5	2.8%
<i>Metal buttons</i>	81	31	38.3%
<i>Iron chains</i>	64	50	78.1%

We see that, even if the metal industry as a whole numbered over a third Jews amongst its workers, in an occupation such as smelting, which concentrated the largest quantity of labourers of all the professions in the branch, there were no more than five Jewish workers – less than 3% of all the workers in that occupation.

The fact that Jews were, for the most part, splintered into small enterprises, it emerges in an even more evident manner, from [the] other tables that, as a unit, constitute the results of the questionnaire. In the branch of stone, clay, and glass, which employed 699 workers, of whom 9% were Jewish, there were on average 79 workers in each enterprise. By contrast, in clothing – which employed nearly 96% Jews among the paid labourers – there were only 2.2 people in each enterprise. The enterprises in all other branches of industry, which employed mainly Jewish workers, were not much larger. In food, an enterprise which employed on average just three (3.3) people; in construction, less than two (1.9); in cleaning, a little more than two (2.4); in machinery and appliances, also roughly the same amount (2.6). Even in the rubber and gum industry, which was already considered a factory industry, there were on average of less than 9 (8.9) people in each “factory”.

The character of production in the Jewish industries also brought with it the fact that Jewish female workers were employed there in larger numbers. In the metal industry, where the general number of Jews was 144, or 31% of all the 585 employees – there were 38 Jewish women working (as compared with 46 non-Jewish women); in the machine industry – 10 Jewish women (no non-Jewish women); in rubber (gum) – 19 Jewish women (2 non-Jewish women); in clothing – 131 Jewish women (as compared with just two non-Jewish women).

Unfortunately, the structure of the Jewish workers in Częstochowa, as regards to being dispersed amongst little workshops and little factories, also did not change in the subsequent years. The reason was not solely discrimination on part of the Polish manufacturers, but also on part of the

Jewish factory owners, who also did not allow Jewish labourers to cross the thresholds of their enterprises. And Częstochowa, after all, did have Jewish men of wealth, who played a significant role in the local, large industry. The jute factory *Warta*, which employed a couple of thousand workers, belonged to Jews. The Jew Kon owned a factory with two thousand workers. Several large factories belonged to the well-known philanthropist, Henryk Markusfeld. Jews owned the *Gnaszyn* textile factory. An array of other textile, metal and chemical products factories belonged to Jews. Among the thousands of workers in all these factories, one could count the Jews on the fingers [of one hand]. Even in the last few years prior to the Second World War, when the hearts of some of Częstochowa's Jewish manufacturers softened a little, they barely agreed to take a few Jews into their factory offices.

It is only from the vantage point of the Jewish workforce being dispersed into miniature workshops and tiny factories that we are first able to correctly evaluate the tremendous achievement of the Jewish professional unions in organising the Jewish workers to the fight for better economic conditions, for political awareness and for cultural elevation.

Directly following the rise of independent Poland, in 1918-1919, the Jewish professional unions played a pivotal role in the elections to the local Workers Council, as well as in the local Labour Movement in general. Most of the Jewish professional unions, at the time, concentrated around the Educational Union for Jewish Workers. This association belonged to the SS [Zionist Socialist Workers Party, aka Territorialists] and, later, when the Territorialists merged with the Sejmists [Jewish Socialist Workers Party], it was taken over by the [newly-founded] *Vereinigte* [United Jewish Socialist Workers Party]. During this period, other professional unions also arose, such as unions for the branches of paper, celluloid and horn, painters, porters and butchers. The greater part of the members in the professional unions, however, was unemployed at the time.

The number of votes cast by the separate branches and professions, during the elections to the Workers Council, gives us an idea both of the organisational strength of the individual professional unions and of their numbers in the proportion of workers according to their occupations:

Hairdressers – 55; metalworkers – 440; wood branch – 118; celluloid and horn workers – 126; needle industry – 410; leather workers – 126; bakers and confectionary workers (pastry bakers) – 79; butchery workers – 34; paper branch – 62; porters – 174; unspecified trades – 125; others – 126; in total – 1,749 votes, and a certain number of additional votes from Jewish workers in small factories⁸.

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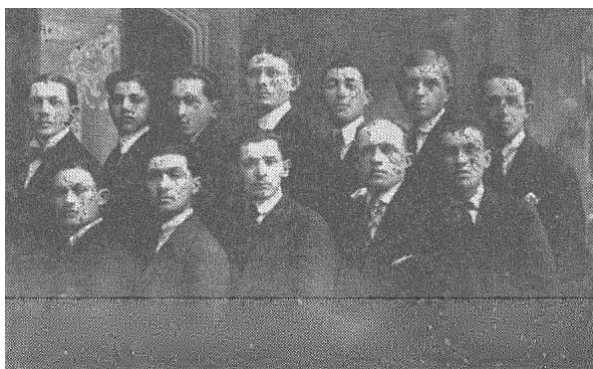
In 1920, the majority of the professional unions were under the leadership of a Central Council, whose Chairman was Raphael Federman and Secretary was Jakow-Icek Żarnowiecki.

At the time, the law regarding the HMOs [workers' health programs] did not yet exist in Poland. The Central Council organised medical care for its members. Every professional union paid a certain sum, for every member, into the Central Council's HMO.

To this purpose, a workers' rescue aid committee was created within the Central Council, which supported the unemployed and their families, and provided members with medical assistance.

⁸ [TN: These are most likely the "others – 126" at the end of the listing, as they are not included in the sum of 1,749.]

On Saturday, 19th February 1921, at the premises of the Tailors Union at Nowy Rynek 2, a meeting of needle workers was held at which it was decided to merge the two needle workers' unions. However, it was still a long time before one union was created.

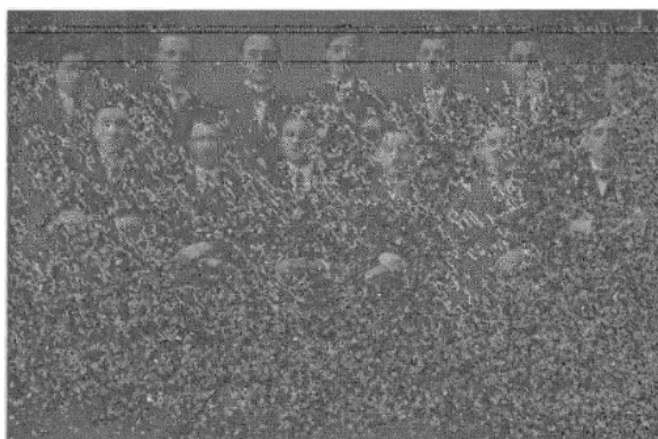


The founders of the Tailors Union in Częstochowa; among others: Tyfenberg, Krzepicki, and Rozenblat

The needle workers' union was not the only one that was divided. The Professional Movement of the small number of Jewish workers, and even smaller number of employed, continually suffered from the schisms and splits which the four parties – *Vereinigte*, Bund, *Poalei Zion* and the Communists – had among themselves, apart from the dozens of "chronical" illnesses from which the Jewish Labour Movement suffered per se, such as the unclear boundary between labourer, "*chatupnik*" and workshop proprietor – who was usually wretchedly poor himself. The division of the professions into dozens of

sections and the fighting of these sections amongst themselves; the emigration, which every year emptied the ranks of the best professional activists, filling them with youngsters who had gone into the workshop straight from *cheder*.

In 1922, the unification of the Jewish and Polish professional unions came into effect in Poland. The vast majority of the Jewish workers remained in separate divisions but, formally, they were united at the top. They participated in the general conventions and in the main leaderships of the separate industrial unions or of the national federation.



Founders and leaders of the Tailors Union under the influence of the SDKPL (Communists); sitting, from the right: Cezynski, Kaneman, Sobol, Rzonsinski, Ganzwa, [and] Rozenblat; standing, from the right: D. Richter, Krzepicki, Opatowski, Hirsberg, Cymberknopf, [and] Ganzwa.

In the larger cities, the unification was tighter, due to the fact that the local Jewish professional unions were bound together by a Central Council or Cultural Bureau⁹ and, through the mediation of this body, were represented in the local *rada*, viz. the city's General Central of all professional unions. This was a unity beyond the bond within the separate trades. Jewish divisions of tailors, cobblers, textile workers, etc. formed part of their given trade's general union.

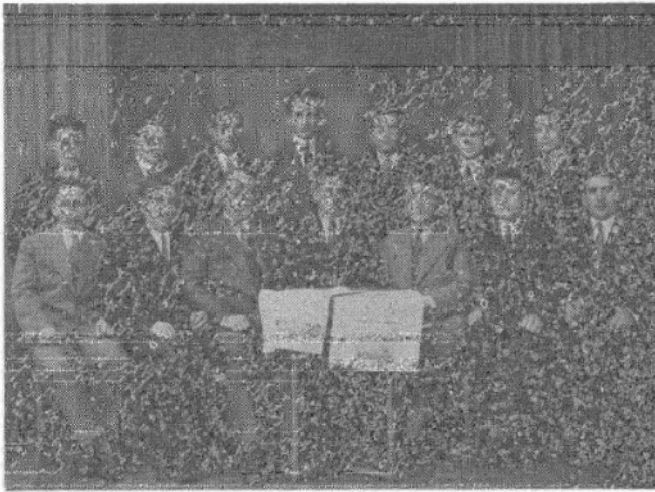
The Cultural Bureaus mostly unified those Jewish professional unions that were under the political influence of the Bund. Jewish professional unions, which were affiliated with other parties such as *Poalei Zion*, the

Communists, or *Vereinigte*, especially at first, stood to the side - but they were organised in their own Central Councils. At first, the Częstochowa Cultural Bureau encompassed only four professional unions: the clothing industry, wood, food and brush [industry] workers. The rest of the Jewish professional unions in the city were included in the Central Council which was headed by the *Vereinigte*, later the Independent Socialist [Labour] Party¹⁰. The Cultural Bureau, which was

⁹ [TN: This institution is subsequently sometimes also referred to as "Cultural Council."]

¹⁰ [TN: "Niezależna Socjalistyczna Partia Pracy"; political party headed by Bolesław Drobner, with which "Vereinigte" merged in 1922.]

organised in March 1923, therefore founded parallel unions under different names. Thus, for instance, an offshoot of the haulage workers, under the leadership of the Cultural Bureau, was called the "Transport Workers Union"; that of the butchery workers – "Food Workers", etc.



The Management of the Food Industry Professional Union (Bakers). Seated (R-L): Mildsztajn Lajbel, Grabianski Ludwik, Lebek Leon, Jaronowski Izrael, Federman Raphael, Altman Becalel, [and] Zusman Majer. Sstanding (R-L): Bajgelman Mojsze, Laska Zyskind, Klabisz Stanisław, Fajtel Fajwel, Kolton Icek, Jakubowicz Mordche, [and] Ickowicz Abram.

The Cultural Bureau was headed by Raphael Federman, who had switched over to the Bund and, who formerly, as member of *Vereinigte*, had stood at the top of the Central Council. Other prominent activists of the Cultural Bureau were the Bundists Mojsze Lederman (leather workers), Abram Frydman, Abram Rozenblat, Cyna Orzech (bakery workers), Mojsze Berkensztadt, Szymon Rozental, Andzia Manowicz, Eljasz Sztajnic, Lajbisz Kamiński, Josef Kruze [Krauze?], Henech Fefer, Zysser Cyncynatus, and Icek Stopnicer.

Besides the regular professional work and cultural activity, the Cultural Bureau also occupied itself with extending aid to the unemployed. In March 1926, the Cultural Bureau distributed food to 303 families, [paid for] from funds it had received from the National Council of the Jewish

Professional Unions in Poland. In that same month, the Cultural Bureau also distributed aid, which it had received from the Częstochowa *Kehilla*, to 204 families. In the summer of that same year, the Cultural Council distributed a large sum of money from America to about 500 families of the jobless. All in all, in 1926, 2,390 families - which comprised 6,948 individuals - benefited from the relief operations of the Cultural Council.

Over the course of 1926, in addition to the four professional unions mentioned above, other professional unions from the branches of the chemical industry, metal, leather, transport, butchers, printers and painters joined the Cultural Bureau. At the conference [held] on 15th January, where a new Cultural Bureau leadership was elected, fifteen professional unions were represented, numbering around 1,150 members. At these elections, the Bund received thirty-five votes, the Communists fifteen and the Leftist *Poalei Zion* three. The new council was made up of seventeen Bundists, seven Communists and one Leftist *Poalei Zion* member. Resolutions were adopted regarding the Jewish labourers' right to work and the employment of Jews in municipal institutions, and regarding the right to use the Yiddish language in the general HMO¹¹.

During that period, the "*stowarzyszenie*" (association) of the commercial employees, which was transformed into a modern professional union, joined the Cultural Bureau. This same union also ceased to be a bastion of assimilation. The union's rich library, with 15,000 books in different languages except for Yiddish, was later unified with the Cultural Bureau's Medem Library, which only had books in Yiddish. The foundation for the Medem Library was laid by Jakow Rozenberg, who donated one thousand *złoty* in memory of Wladimir Medem, following his death in 1923. The first librarian at the Medem Library was Comrade Andzia Manowicz. During the horrific Nazi occupation, the library functioned illegally in the home of Comrade Rajzla Berkensztadt.

¹¹ [TN: As opposed to Zionists, the Territorialists championed the Yiddish language instead of modern Hebrew, and were opposed to creating a Jewish State in Palestine.]

At the Cultural Council's conference of 5th November 1937 eight Jewish unions, with over one thousand members, were represented.

By 1st January 1939, the Cultural Council represented the following seven professional unions:

- 1) clothing industry – 438 members;
- 2) food – 106;
- 3) leather – 73;
- 4) commercial employees – 200;
- 5) hairdressers – 52;
- 6) transport – 80;
- 7) Socialist craftsmen – 104.

[They were] 1,052 members in total, of whom 766 were men, 168 women and 118 minors. Besides these, another 690 Jewish workers were organised in divisions together with Polish labourers in the unions of textiles, metal, construction and chemicals. At the start of 1939, there were a total of 1,472 Jewish workers and employees organised into the professional unions.

An uncommonly important area of work of the Jewish professional unions was the organisation of the younger workers, who were the most wronged and most exploited element.

We can form a picture of the Jewish working young's conditions of work and wages, based upon the correspondence from Częstochowa which was printed in the *Jugend Wecker* [Awakener of Youth], 1927, № 19. There, we read:

The working day of the young labourers in the trades of clothing, leather and wood is one of 10-12 hours. We find at young workers of eleven and up. Their wages are 4-5 gulden [viz. złoty] a week. The situation of the girls, who work in linen, clothes, and with milliners, is a particularly difficult one. Here, we can even encounter ten-year-olds, who work from seven in the morning until eight at night, with a half-hour break for lunch.

The majority of the minors are not insured in the HMO. The only exceptions are those who work in workshops together with older workers. We find youths who hire themselves out for a two-year apprenticeship - and they work absolutely for free.

In the chemicals industry, the situation of the youth is also a bad one. There are some 200 minors employed in it, 30% of whom are Polish. In this same branch of industry, one can encounter youths aged 10-12, who work up to 13 hours a day – for a weekly wage of four "whole" gulden.

There are cases when the Labour Inspector comes to visit the little factory and they lock up the young workers in the filthy factory hut, in order to avoid any form of examination. The manufacturers even allow themselves to beat young workers for such "impudence" as not fetching water for the lady of the house. One can only dream about a paid holiday (wakacje).

From that same correspondence, we also learn about the efforts on part of the youth to organise themselves to fight for improved conditions:

We have now set out to establish a youth division within the Chemicals Union. The first steps have already been taken. Two organisational meetings have been held and a temporary

commission has been chosen, whose task it is to organise all the young workers of the chemicals industry. This work is being conducted out by the local Youth Bureau (the leadership of the youth divisions of the Cultural Bureau, founded in 1925).

A decade later, the situation of the young Jewish workers in other branches of industry was no better than that of the young chemical workers in 1927, and the Jewish professional unions set out to organise them for the struggle. Here, in the *Jugend Wecker* from 1936, № 22, we read an interesting report on a strike of young Jewish metal workers:

In Częstochowa, there are a couple of dozen metal factories which have hitherto not been organised into the Metal Union. Those working there are, for the most part, young Jewish labourers, who earn eighty grosz and [up to] one gulden for a day of arduous toil. Furthermore, they work there under the most horrific hygienic conditions. The workers did not even dream of a holiday (wakacje). The Metal Union, aided by a group of Zukunft¹² members, began a wide propaganda to draw the workers into the Union – and it was indeed successful. It was immediately resolved to put an end to the dreadful exploitation that has been in force for years. The Union put forth [the following] demands: 1) a collective settlement; 2) a rise in wages; 3) hygienic working conditions. The negotiations dragged on for many weeks and achieved no results. It is noteworthy, that the Jewish manufacturers chose members of the 'Endecja' as their representatives to negotiate with the workers. On Tuesday, 25th August, the workers went on an occupation-strike inside ten factories. In total, 360 workers went on strike, 80% of whom were youth.

The sorrowful handling on the part of the Jewish manufacturers in this strike – allying themselves with the *Endecja* antisemites against striking Jewish labourers – was unfortunately not an isolated case. There were even worse instances, where Jewish capitalists sacked Jewish labourers from their factories, merely for having dared to go on strike – and even incredible cases where Jewish manufacturers hired *Endecja* hooligans against Jewish strikers. This is what we read in a report from Częstochowa, in the *Volkszeitung*, dated 6th December 1936:

Jewish and Polish labourers work in the Jewish factory 'Pol Metal', whose owners are Messrs Jelen and Edelis. There, working conditions and wages are very bad. The workers began to organise, which greatly displeased the Jewish manufacturers. As soon as they found out about it, first of all, they fired the few Jewish labourers who were employed there. The Jewish workers were given a fortnight's wages on the spot and the factory became "Judenrein".

And here is a letter, which was reprinted in the *Volkszeitung*, dated 11th April 1938:

During the occupation-strike at the Szaja & Frank factory, Mr Frank, with the aid of a band of 'Endecja' bruisers, attempted to drive the strikers out of his factory. When this failed, he managed to convince the 'Endecja' female workers to break the strike and promised he would give them employment. That is exactly what happened. They broke the strike, left the factory and sent their husbands - 'Endecja' members - to drive those remaining out of the factory. After 97 days of striking, under the most terrible conditions, the supposed democrat (Frank) dismissed ten Jewish labourers from their work. All the rest remained.

The same happened in Epszajn's button factory, where they fired the Jewish female workers.

¹² [TN: "Future"; the Bund's youth organisation.]

That same letter tells of a large Jewish metal factory on ul. Warszawska which, when several Jewish labourers left to serve in the military, in their place they hired *Endecja* members who, "after work, set themselves the 'sacred duty' of picketing Jewish shops and, in unison, to sing:

*Żydzi muszą być w Palestynie,
Bo to są zdrajcy i świnie'*
(Jews must be in Palestine,
Because these are traitors and pigs)."

That same letter goes on to report of instances where Jewish manufacturers wanted to play on both strings - of Jewish nationalism and of antisemitism. During strikes, Jewish manufacturers tried to convince Jewish workers not to go with the *Endecja*, and the *Endecja* - not to go with the "Jewish good-for-nothings". They tried to persuade the backward Polish workers that it was all about the sacking of the Jewish workers.

Jewish capitalists, themselves, brought wood to the antisemitic fire in Częstochowa.

The Jewish Professional Movement in Częstochowa wrote a glorious page in the history of the local Jewish community.
