

Icek Gurski, S. Fajnrajch, Fajtel Szmulewicz & A. Chrobolovsky

SS (Zionist-Socialist Workers Party), “*Vereinigte*”, “Independent”

The beginnings of the SS Party in Częstochowa date from 1902. The first groups of Labour Zionists had already arisen in Minsk and Dr N. Syrkin had already founded the first Zionist-Socialist group abroad¹ – *Cherut* [Freedom].



Standing (R-L): D. Oberman, J. Goldsztajn, Dawid Szymkowicz. Seated (R-L): Gurski, Lajbisz Lehrer (“Aleksander”), J. Lewenhof

In Częstochowa, the first Zionist workers group organised itself under the leadership of [Dr] Józef Kruk (Józef “Number One”). The first into the group were Dawid Malarski and Majer Fajnrajch. They were joined by Mendel Szuchter. The first group of intellectuals comprised Icek Gurski, Olek Tempel, Hela Birman, Bronka Koniarski, Maks Dankowicz [and] Matwey Dawidowicz (an engineer on the Herby railway). Later, Nachum Singalowsky came to Częstochowa to study at the business school. Also studying at that school were Michał Alter, Herszl Gotajner, Kuba Goldberg [and] Katz from ul. Warszawska. All of them joined the Zionist-Socialist Movement.

The group’s first agitation point was on ul. [Prawe] Wały. One of the first meeting places was at the house of the teacher Zygmunt Majorczyk on ul. Strażacka. There were also gatherings at the Talmud-Torah on ul. Garncarska and at the Crafts School. The rendezvous point for the intellectuals was [Dr] Józef Kruk’s house.

In the summer of 1903, following the split of Zionism into “*Tzeirei Zion*” [Zionist Youth] and “Ugandists”², this group separated from the [mainstream] Zionists. The first middle-school youth group was also founded in that period, as part of the Labour Zionist Union.

In 1904, following the conference in Świder, near Warsaw, and afterwards in Odessa, the group adopted the name “SS” ([Russian initials for] “Zionists-Socialists”).

In 1904, the SS organisation in Częstochowa conducted a widespread campaign for the establishment of a self-defence [squad]. This was in the aftermath of the Kishinev pogrom. Mass meetings were held. Speakers appeared at the schools and fundraisers were conducted for this purpose in Częstochowa and vicinity.

¹ [TN: France and Germany; he was banned from the latter in 1904 and returned to Russia.]

² [TN: While both factions advocated the establishment of a Jewish homeland, the former (mainstream Zionists) considered Palestine as the only option, while the latter (Territorialists) sought for alternative locations – such as Uganda, Argentina, etc.]

The Częstochowa organisation also took part in the purchase of weaponry abroad for the self-defence squads in southern Russia. These arms were smuggled across the border at Herby with the aid of Eng. Matwey Dawidowicz.

In 1904, a eulogy for Herzl was held at the Częstochowa synagogue. Among the organisers of the gathering were Mokraujer (General Zionists), [and] Natan Gerichter and Chemie Fiszman (*Mizrachi*³). The SS demanded that their speakers be allowed to appear at the meeting. Against the wishes of the leading Zionists, the representative of the SS, Icek Gurski, went up on stage and voiced his opinions on Dr Herzl and the Zionist Movement. Following the eulogy, a large SS demonstration was held in the street.

It was during this period that the SS' first illegal proclamation was published. It was mimeographed at the home of Olek Tempel.

At the start of 1905, Aron Singalowsky, Nachum's brother, arrived in Częstochowa. With his rhetorical skills, he greatly aided the creation of the SS mass-movement in Częstochowa, which based itself on objective conditions of Jewish working life in the city. Many small Jewish factories and several large ones existed in Częstochowa and the SS organised the workers there in the struggle for better economic conditions.

No less in favour of the development of the SS Movement was the circumstance that Częstochowa was an emigration-point. Masses of Jewish emigrants = helpless, at the mercy of smugglers and swindlers - streamed through Częstochowa in search of new homes. This stimulated the local Jewish intelligentsia and workforce to think of an organised, systematic solution to the Jewish emigration problem.

The SS' Odessa [founding] declaration of 1905 was celebrated in Częstochowa at a great gathering in the Olsztyn woods. The brochures with the declaration, printed abroad, were smuggled in through the Częstochowa border and were sent all across Russia.

The SS organisation became the strongest factor in the Jewish life of Częstochowa. People turned to it to settle disputes between employers and their office workers and labourers.

The work in the professional realm encompassed the celluloid branch, with Wajnberg's celluloid factory at the top; the metal branch, with Rozensztajn and Szaja's little factories; the bakery workers, tailors, cobblers, cap-makers, countermen, *marszandkes* (female milliners), etc.

Besides the group of intellectuals who were part of the leadership, the organisation [also] had a great many sympathisers among the bourgeoisie. One of these was Moryc Neufeld.

The small meetings which began at Szmul Szuster's on the meat-market Street [ul. Targowa], grew into great mass gatherings in the Olsztyn woods, at Szymson Djabo's by the mill or at the graveyard. Discussions with other parties were also frequently arranged, mostly with the Bund. They would be held under the open skies, in closed premises and in the factories. Some of these discussions lasted all day. One discussion, with a member of the PPS, took place in Wajnberg's factory. The Jewish PPS speaker - I think - was Feliks Perl from Kraków, later one of the leaders of the PPS in independent Poland.

One, who was also very popular with the workers of the SS in Częstochowa, was Sz. Niger, who appeared at a gigantic mass gathering that was held at the cemetery.

³ [TN: Religious Zionists.]

With the aid of the cantor of the “German *Shul*” (the [New] Synagogue on ul. Dojazd), an SS meeting was arranged at this synagogue, at which L. [sic Meyer-Isser] Pines appeared, who later received the title of doctor for his *History of the Yiddish Literature*.



J.J. [sic] Kruk and G. Bornsztajn

The favourite speaker at the mass meetings was “Comrade Aron” (Dr A. Singalowsky). His effect on the masses was simply hypnotic. He also commanded great respect amongst the intelligentsia and, when he would appear at a synagogue during prayer services, the congregation always listened to him with bated breath.

Also among the leaders of the Częstochowa organisation was Josef Number Two (Josef Rabinowicz from Warsaw). One of the most active intellectuals was Moryc Grynbaum - in those days still a student.

Among the so-called “half-intelligentsia,” [those who] distinguished themselves with their activity [were] Michał Alter, Józek Finkelsztajn, Gutek and Ania Bornsztajn (both from Zawiercie), Kuba Goldberg and Jakób Goldsztajn.

The most active among the women was Hela Birman. Apart from her conspiratorial assignments, she also led the information work amongst the women and ran a clandestine school, where girls were taught to read and write.

An entire array of heroes and active figures also emerged from the awakened Jewish masses. Besides the names already mentioned above in the first group, [those who] played a significant role in the Częstochowa SS organisation in those days [were] Kopl Gerichter, Mojsze Weksler, Dawid Akerman, Icek Zarnowiecki, Szaja-Jakow (Sz. Mencoﬀ), Mendel and Josl Berliner, Owieczka, Fradel Bratt, Zacharia Lewensztajn, Fajtel Szmulewicz, Mordche Altman, “Kostek” [and] Icyk Szlosser. Among the commercial employees (the “*prikazchikes*”⁴), Szmul Ajzner was active.

Dawid Guterman (“*Jajcorz*”⁵) and Mendel Szwarcbaum held important places in the organisation.

In 1905, the SS’ [labour] exchange was in the New Market, to the side of ul. Tylna [Back] Street or ul. Strażacka. The rendezvous point was at Golda’s teahouse, at the very centre of the Jewish Quarter. It was always clamouring with people there, like in a beehive. Golda’s teahouse was also visited by the workers from other parties, who came in order to have discussions with the SS members. One of them was Mendel *Malarz* [painter/decorator] (Mendel Wolf), the most dogged Bundist of the day.

The two great events in the history of the organisation, during the summer of 1905, were the fight with the “Good Boys”, who were driven out of the Jewish street by the SS and the tragedy at Landau’s celluloid factory, where five or six Jewish girls were burnt [to death] in the fire. The SS organisation brought to a halt all the factories large and small which had Jewish workers, and held an enormous funeral for the victims at the cemetery. Aron Singalowsky gave one of his most lyrical speeches there.

The winter of 1905-1906 was a hard one. Golda’s teahouse was frequently attacked by the dragoons,

who hacked [at people] with their rifle-butts as [if they were] cabbage⁶. The “white cap-bands”

⁴ [TN: From the Russian “приказчик,” or “counterman.”]

⁵ [TN: Possibly “egg-seller,” from the Polish “jajko” (egg).]

⁶ [TN: Yiddish idiom meaning “to beat mercilessly.”]

rampaged in the streets. The intelligentsia fled. Aron Singalowsky also left Częstochowa. His last appearance in Częstochowa was at a mass gathering in Wajnberg's factory, which was held during the hardest days of the state of war, under great peril. During that winter, the work in the financial field was carried out by people whom the masses themselves had produced. There were also newly-arrived activists from abroad. One of them, whom the masses loved, was Comrade "Jean", who had arrived from Paris. He always dressed like a poor person. Having a slight leaning towards anarchy, he disagreed with the means that were employed against the employers and contractors.

In spring 1906, the Freedom Movement was revived once more, but with less mass meetings, and more circles and [small] gatherings. In the summer, two intellectuals joined the work - "Jakób" and "Abraham", who were both from the Pinsk region.

Comrade Basza, with her very colloquial way of speaking, was particularly well-liked. She came from the Bobruisk region and worked in the entire Zagłębie area.

"Reuben", who worked as a pharmacist in Neufeld's wholesale chemist, and "Don", a thoughtful and silent [man], who passed through Częstochowa on his way to America like dozens of others, also deserve to be mentioned.

That summer's tragedy was the incident with the three comrades, Dawid Lewenhof, Dawid Fajnrajch and Josl Berliner, who were sent to the provinces to raise money and used revolvers to this purpose. Josl Berliner got a short term in jail. Dawid Lewenhof and Dawid Fajnrajch were sentenced to six years in prison. The former died in jail. The latter was freed in 1912, mentally beaten.



Standing (R-L): G. Bornsztajn, Binyamin [and] M. Altman; Seated (R-L): M. Fajnrajch and J.I. Zarnowiecki; In the centre: Sz. Menco

In the middle of the summer of 1906, Comrade "Aleksander" (Lajbisz Lehrer) arrived in Częstochowa. As one from Warsaw, he was close to the *Częstochowers* in his speech and spirit. Besides having a spiritual influence over the workers, Comrade Aleksander [also] dedicated himself to the organisation of the trades.

Then Dawid Lewin from Homel [Homyel, Belarus], also known as Comrade "Binyamin", took over the leadership of the Częstochowa SS Organisation. He was a man with great wisdom and organisational capabilities. He was the founder of the self-defence in Homel. Due to his head of black hair and black beard, he was referred to, in the bourgeois circles, as "*Święty Ojciec*" (Holy Father). He had great authority within the organisation and great influence over the members.

The library, which the SS opened that same summer, was of great significance for the Movement.

The self-defence [squad] against pogroms, for which preparations were made several times in Częstochowa, held an important place in the activity of the organisation. Self-defence groups were also sent out to the little *shtetls* around Częstochowa, where

there were rumours of [impending] pogroms. But things never reached the point of a pogrom or attacks on Jews at that time.

That summer, Częstochowa was shaken by the terrorist bombing which the SS carried out on ul. Warszawska against one of the worst chiefs of police. The SS' meeting place, at the time, was in Kohn's garden on the Second *Aleja*.

At the close of summer, under the leadership of Comrade "Binyamin", a drama circle began to function in the organisation and performed an array of pieces. Rehearsals were held at Kopl Gerichter's house on ul. Krótka.

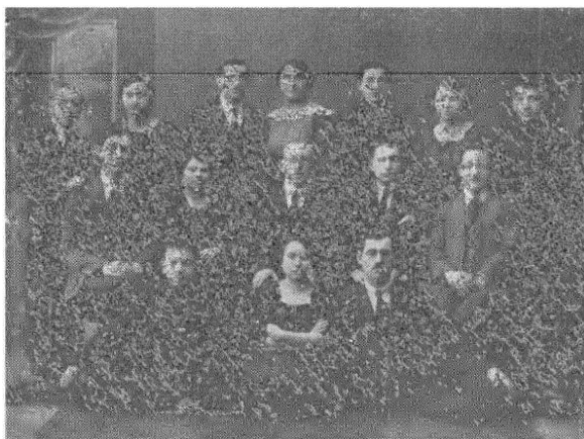
In 1908, Comrade Mendel Szuchter was sent to Siberia for his activity in the SS organisation.

In 1910, "Markus" and R. Federman, who had switched over to the SS from the SDKPiL⁷, headed the SS group. Fajtel Szmulewicz, Symcha Kalka, Mojsze Weksler [and] Jakow-Icek Zarnowiecki were also active in the SS organisation in Częstochowa.

Until the First World War, a regular organisation did not exist in Częstochowa. However, a large group did exist, in which A. Chrobolovsky, Symcha Kalka, Majer Fajnrajch, Fajtel Szmulewicz, Gradon, Kon [and] female members Aronowicz and Fefer were all active. The group would gather from time to time and arrange undertakings - usually with the goal of raising funds. Berl Gutman [was] the only member of the Central Committee [who] came to Częstochowa frequently. [The writer] Moyshe Litvakov⁸ also once travelled through Częstochowa. The meeting, at which he then appeared, was held in the lowermost room of the café on the Third *Aleja*.

Every 1st of May announcements arrived, addressed to the counting room at the *Malarnia*, where A. Ch. was an employee. The counting room attendant would pick them up from the post office and bring them together with all the parcels. Mojsze Weksler, the treasurer, was the distributor of the flyers – and, when necessary, he invested his own money.

The SS played an important role in the Literary Society, the *Lira*, the founding of the Craftsmen's Club, the creation of the Yiddish press and in the battle for Yiddish with the *Handlowces* and in other societies, as well as in the founding of legal professional unions. They were all labourers, such as Fajtel Szmulewicz, Symcha Kalka, Gradon, Kon and others or commercial employees, such as A. Chrobolovsky, Federman and Szyferblat, the SS [Party] sympathiser.



Co-workers of the Vereinigte Cooperative

During the First World War, the SS organisation in Częstochowa expanded further as a mass movement. The most prominent leaders at the time were R. Federman, Herszl Gotajner, Michał Alter, Szyja Nirenberg, Jakow-Icek Zarnowiecki [and] Abe Wenger. The very capable Dudek Szlezinger distinguished himself in particular. [Whether] directly or indirectly, the Popular Bakery, the Educational Society for Jewish Workers, the workers' kitchens, the I.L. Peretz Kindergarten and an entire array of professional

⁷ [TN: Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy (Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania); a Marxist political party.]

⁸ [TN: One of the founders of the SS Party.]

unions were created by the Organisation during this period.

The system of electoral classes⁹ notwithstanding, during the elections to the City Council under the German occupation, the Organisation had four Councillors elected – Szyja Nirenberg, Torbeczko, Szlojme Horowicz and A. Lypszyc.

In the declaration which the Councillors read before the City Council, there were some expressions for which the German occupation force would send people to the Modlin [Fortress]. One of these phrases was “The light comes from the East”. This was [already] after the revolution in Russia.



Images from the electoral campaign to the City Council

After the end of the First World War, A. Chrobolovsky returned from captivity in Austria and Józek Finkelsztajn from the Soviet Union. They put themselves at the organisation’s disposal.

In the first days of independent Poland, the SS militia assisted in disarming the Germans, and they brought weapons (rifles) to the [SS] Club’s premises at *Aleja* 43.

[Translation:]

Częstochowa Council of Labour Delegates

Legitimation of the Electoral Committee

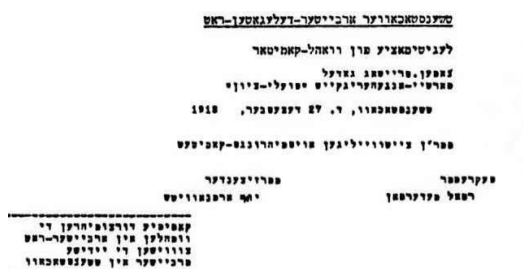
Name: *Frajtag, Godel*
Party affiliation: “*Poalei Zion*”

Częstochowa, d. 27th December 1918

For the temporary executive committee

Secretary	Chairman
<i>Raphael Federman</i>	<i>Józef Aronowicz</i>

Commission for the execution of the elections to the Workers Council among the Jewish workers in Częstochowa



The SS was represented in the provisional workers council by eleven delegates (Bund – 5; *Poalei Zion* – 6) [and] on the executive board by three (Bund – 1; *Poalei Zion* – 1).

In connection with the bloody pogrom in Lemberg [Lwów] that was organised by Polish legionnaires, the Częstochowa SS Organisation published a proclamation protesting against the contemporary “People’s Government”¹⁰ headed by Ignacy Daszyński.

On Saturday 4th January 1919, a festive gathering was held, at which the SS, by decision of the conference in Warsaw, changed its name to “*Vereinigte*” [United].

⁹ [TN: Indirect election system whereby the voters are divided into classes according to their financial standing, such that the vote of one wealthy individual who paid the most tax was equal to those of the tens of thousands who paid less – and those who paid nothing were completely unrepresented.]

¹⁰ [TN: The Provisional People's Government of the Republic of Poland (Polish: Tymczasowy Rząd Ludowy Republiki Polskiej).]

Wenger [and] Jakow-Icek Zarnowiecki were employed. The work of providing sustenance, such as the workers kitchen, the workers restaurant, etc., was led by Szyja Nirenberg. Herszl Gotajner managed the bakery and the cooperatives. At the head of the schools stood Raphael Federman, the Chairman, who held the reins of the whole organisation in his hands. A. Chrobolovsky was the secretary and he dedicated himself mostly to the cultural work that was organised in *Shtral*¹⁴. He stood at the head of the evening courses for the working youth, and edited the weekly newspapers *Unser Wort* and later *Das Neue Wort*.

The organisation's centre of activity was the hall of the workers kitchen at ul. Strażacka 11, in Garbiński's building, whose name was changed to "New World Hall". It is there that all the mass protests, party meetings, banquets, dance evenings, literary evenings, etc. were held. The Bund also held a memorial meeting there, following the death of Vladimir Medem.

The *Vereinigte* faction on the City Council, led by R. Federman, who for some time was also secretary of the City Council, was factually the only one that came out sharply against the antisemitic policies of the *Endecja* majority and against all the injustices that were being perpetrated against the Jewish populace. This faction - together with the PPS - protested against the arrest of the Bundist Councillor Józef Aronowicz, and demanded of the City Council intervene for his release. This faction also sharply and bravely condemned the pogrom in 1919, many of whose ideological leaders were sitting precisely on the City Council. It also protested against the staff of the bloodstained [Symon] Petlura being billeted in Częstochowa.

Persecutions and repressions were poured upon the organisation, which came from both the government in Warsaw and the local rulers, including City Council.

In 1920, the *Vereinigte* Club's premises at *Aleja* 43 was expropriated and the Club was liquidated by the police. Later, the premises of an entire array of professional unions were [also] expropriated. The fact that the police very often forbade speaking or singing in Yiddish (everything like in the Tsarist times, and many times even worse) created great hindrances in holding lectures and concerts.

The organisation withstood everything, and continued to develop.

In 1921-1922, the *Vereinigte* organisation finally opened a branch of the Warsaw "Workers Emigration Union". Rajzla Fajertag was employed at this department's office at ul. Dojazdowa 19. The emigration to America was even then already limited, but brothers, sisters, children and wives could still travel to their relatives with affidavits. The Bureau's assistance was particularly important in eliciting outbound passes for the emigrants, as this required an immeasurable amount of formalities, papers and other little notes from the dozens of [different] offices, as was customary with Polish bureaucracy.

During that period, Berl Gutman, Icek Gordyn, Pinie Bukshorn, Sz. Gilinski, Jakow Pat, L. Pines, M. Mandelsberg, Dr Ajger from Łódź and Frizzman gave lectures in Częstochowa or appeared there at *Vereinigte*'s mass meetings.

Pinie Bukshorn was also a poet. His song *Abandoned Factories*, based on the motif of Maria Konopnicka's *Rota* [Oath], was at first sung at all mass meetings. In Częstochowa, he fell ill with influenza and, for some time, lay sick in the Częstochowa hospital.

Szlojme Zusman, with a whole series of lectures before a chosen circle, assisted greatly in raising the Yiddish¹⁵-Socialist awareness of the politically active workers.

¹⁴ [TN: Beam, ray; a youth organisation. See above, p. 79, "Evening Courses."]

¹⁵ [TN: "Yiddish" in the original, instead of "Yiddishe" (Jewish); as we know, the *Vereinigte* Party was territorialist, and advocated the use of Yiddish instead of Hebrew or the local language.]

In 1922, *Vereinigte's* downhill tumble in Częstochowa began. Several reasons brought this about – the emigration, which emptied the ranks of the most active figures; the split [within the Party], and the defection of great numbers of workers, activists and youth to the Communists, as well as the economic crisis from which the financial institutions suffered. But the greatest calamity of all came from the leaders in Warsaw, the majority of whom fled - some to the Bund and others to the Communists.

In the summer of 1922, the conference of unification with Bolesław Drobner's party under the name "Independent Socialist Party" was held in Częstochowa at the New World Hall. The Jewish workers in this party organised themselves into a separate section. The Party, as a whole, recognised the necessity of a concentrated emigration, industrialisation and agrarianisation¹⁶ of the Jewish workers.

In October 1922 the elections to the *Sejm* were held. The organisation in Częstochowa - now already the "Independent" - once again, nominated Dr Józef Kruk as candidate for the Częstochowa district and, this time, waged the electoral battle among the Polish workers also.



At this time, however, the relations with the PPS were established. A few labour activists and leaders of the PPS went over to the Independent. One of the most well-known among them was Antoni Domański, a worker in *Warta*, who was popular with the Polish workers in Częstochowa. In 1926, he was elected as Councillor, representing the Independent and, together with Drobner, switched back to the PPS.

The Częstochowa "Independent" organisation, too, led lively activity both amongst the Jewish and the Polish workers for a number of the following years. *Das Neue Wort* was published during the entire winter of 1923 at the Kultura printing press, which the organisation had founded, together with three associates. At the New World Hall, mass meetings and lectures in Polish and Yiddish were held. The "Independent" organisation in Częstochowa contributed a great deal to bringing the Jewish and Polish workers closer to one another in

general.

A group of Częstochowa SS [close] upon emigration – M. Alter, H. Gotajner, R. Federman and D. Gerychter

The Independent Socialist Party was, at first, part of the Vienna "Two-and-a-half International"¹⁷. In 1923, when the Vienna International was liquidated and it merged with the Second Socialist International¹⁸, the Party as a whole also joined the same International. The majority in the Częstochowa organisation, under the leadership of A. Chrobolovsky, voted against the Party's decision.

Many Communists operated under Independent's legal protection. This brought about heavy repressions against the leaders of the organisation on the part of the "*Defensywa*" (Secret Police) and the police. Frequent searches and confiscations of all paperwork were carried out in the premises and the homes of the leaders.

¹⁶ [TN: The development or expansion of farming or farm productivity.]

¹⁷ [TN: The International Working Union of Socialist Parties (IWUSP); a trans-national organisation of political parties for the co-operation of socialist parties.]

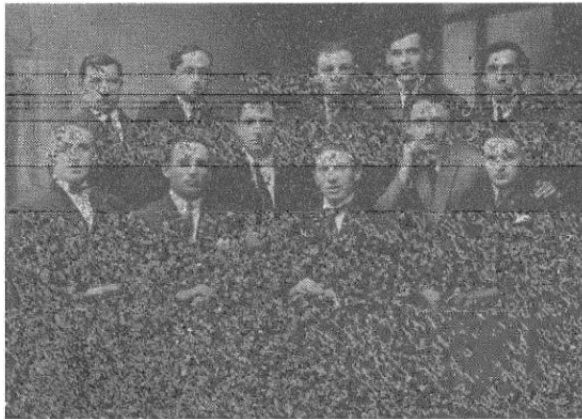
¹⁸ [TN: The two Internationals merged to become the Labour and Socialist International.]

In 1925, the Chief of Police forbade the Independent from demonstrating together with other parties on 1st May.

Dr Józef Kruk, who appeared in Częstochowa frequently, was convicted in court and imprisoned for some time in the Piotrków and Częstochowa jails.

Before the start of the Second World War, the Polish government liquidated the Party definitively, and sent Dr Józef Kruk to the sorrowfully notorious concentration camp in Kartuz-Bereza, from which he was [eventually] released after great efforts, particularly from abroad. He left the concentration camp with a severe illness.

After the last group of Independent, led by Dr Kruk, defected in Warsaw to the *Poalei-Zion*, in Częstochowa - as has been reported to us - Jakow-Icek Zarnowiecki, the old SS member who had gone with the Party through all its metamorphoses, defected also. He was one of the first martyrs who were killed by the Nazi murderers.



***The Committee of Independent;
Seated (R-L): D. Szlezinger, M. Weksler, Dr J. Kruk,
J.I. Zarnowiecki, A. Chrobolovsky and Sz. Nirenberg;
Standing (R-L): M. Alter, Win, A. Bratt, Sz. Frank,
L. Berkowicz***

After R. Federman switched over to the Bund and A. Chrobolovsky emigrated to America, Dudek Szlezinger took over the leadership of the organisation. He was as highly popular with the Polish workers as with the Jewish ones. He had the assistance of active members, such as Szyja Nirenberg, Wolf Fajga, Abram Bratt, Lajbis Berkowicz and, for a certain period, Motek Pływacz also.