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## The *Częstochower Landsleute* in the DP Camps in Germany

The defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945 freed groups of Jews from various German concentration camps, who then settled in the American, English, Russian and French occupation-zones in Germany.

In Bayern [Bavaria], which was occupied by the Americans, the Surviving Remnant created a central committee in München [Munich], which began to function and regulate the life of the rescued Jews - both of those who were in camps, such as Feldafing, Landsberg etc., and also of those who lived in the cities.

### Economic Structure

The *Częstochowa landsleute*, like all other DP Jews, could not even think of incorporating themselves into the economic life of Germany. As [those who had been] persecuted and [who had] suffered at the hands of those [who had] ignited the fire of the Second World War, it was the obligation of the nations, [which emerged] victorious over Nazism, to care for and to protect the victims of Nazism - meaning the DP's. The first forms of financial care were shown by UNRRA [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration] and, subsequently, by the IRO [International Refugee Organisation]. The JOINT [American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee] also provided simultaneous support. The *Częstochower* relief associations in the North American continent also sent aid in the form of packages and money to individual *landsleute*.

### Organisation

The organisation of the DP's was of great communal significance. The DP's' issues brought about the rise of an entire array of agencies which were adjoined to central committees. The central committee in the American zone was in München and, in the English zone, in Bergen-Belsen. Regional committees came under the purview of the central committee. They took care of the problems of the city and camp committees. One may deduce the variety of work, which every city and camp committee [undertook], from the fact that every committee had an entire range of divisions: Presidium, Executive, Bureau of Business, Bureau of Finance, Bureau of Housing, Bureau of Religious [Affairs], Department of *Kibbutzim*, Medical Department, Dental Department, professional training and a whole array of others. An entire array of committees also had drama groups, choirs and sports clubs. The Bureau of Culture oversaw children's education, schools for children, language courses for adults [and] different undertakings [such as] press and publications.

The organisational apparatus required a great number of officials to carry out all the necessary functions. These functionaries received wages in the form of food allotments from the JOINT, which were an important aid for the Surviving Remnant in the German DP camps.

The DP's regarded Germany as a transit place to emigrate to Israel or to other free countries, for which they prepared by studying professions and languages. The professional courses were conducted by the ORT\* Association and through the separate committees. The professional courses were both for men and women and encompassed metal-cutting, mechanics, carpentry, tailoring, masonry,

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\* [TN: Acronym of the Russian "Общество Ремесленного Труда" – Association for the Promotion of Skilled Trades.]

embroidery, dentistry, pharmacology, photography and a whole array of other professions. Characteristic is the fact that one of the main leaders and instructors of the ORT professional courses was the Częstochowa *landsmann*, Engineer Orlinski. The chief of the Central Committee's Department of Health was Dr Cwi Kantor. The Head Physician and chief of the hospital in the Landsberg DP camp was Dr Jerzy Dobrzyński. There were also nurses - Częstochowa women - who worked in the Landsberg DP camp hospital and in the infirmary in Bamberg.

In the Legal Department of the Central Committee in München, lawyer Estera Epstein occupied a distinguished position. She and her sister Tamara came forth as experts and witnesses in the Częstochowa trial in Leipzig, at which German Nazi criminals, who had been overseers in the HASAG camp, were tried.

In the field of religion, Rabbi Olewski was the Chief Rabbi in the English zone in Germany, Isroel Josef Kutner *z"l* was the cantor and the *shoichet* [ritual slaughterer] in Celle. Isroel Josef Kutner was killed in a motor accident on 14<sup>th</sup> Elul 5706 ([10<sup>th</sup> September] 1946), at the age of thirty. He was everywhere where Jewish DPs lived in the English zone in Germany. In the American zone, there was Efrogim Nechemje Trombkowski *z"l*, the City Cantor in Bamberg. Efrogim Nechemje Trombkowski died from an operation on 6<sup>th</sup> Elul 5707 (22<sup>nd</sup> August 1947) at the age of 26.

In the areas of culture and education, those active were Mrs. Birenbaum, a teacher of English in Bamberg; Rena Frank, an administrator and teacher in the children's school in Bayreuth; Benjamin Orenstein, director of the Regional Historical Commission in Bamberg, which encompassed three administrative regions: Oberfranken [Upper Franconia], Mittelfranken [Middle F.] and Unterfranken [Lower F.], in which there were twenty-two historical commissions, whilst simultaneously being a lecturer at the Central Board for Culture and Education in the American zone in Germany; and Wolf Glikzman, who was an associate of the Central Historical Commission in München.

There was an entire row of Częstochowa *landsleute* who were chairmen of city and camp committees. The office of chairman of a committee was one of the most responsibility-laden, as it encompassed all the activities of that city committee. The chairmen were H. Win in Schwabach, Cwi Rozenwajn in Ainring, Szymon Mlodynow in Fürstenfeldbruck and also in various other cities. Dawid Jakubowicz was the financial leader in the Feldafing DP camp. M. Krauze was the UNRRA officer in Zeilsheim near Frankfurt-Am-Main. Henoah Pradelski was the General Secretary of the Federation of Polish Jews in the American Zone in Germany. H. Dilewski and others distinguished themselves in sports and G. Richter distinguished himself as a solo singer.

### **Political and Social Activity**

In the beginning, i.e., in 1945-46, only one single party existed in Germany and that was the *Histadrut Ha'Tzionit Ha'Achida* [United Zionist Federation]. As envoys from Israel arrived, they began with political activities. The result was that all possible parties arose, just like in the "good times" before the War. All parties began conducting their activities and issuing weekly newspapers and, in the Histadrut, only [the supporters of the] right-wing [faction of the] *Poalei Zion* [Party] remained. It was dissolved at a conference held in Stuttgart on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1947 and the *Poalei Zion* (ZS [Zionist Socialists]) Histadrut party was founded on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1947 which was, in reality, the MAPAI [*Mifleget Poalei Eretz Yisrael*; Workers' Party of the Land of Israel].

Częstochowa *landsleute* were represented the agents of an entire array of parties: Dr Cwi Kantor, Vice-Chairman of the Revisionists World Alliance; Aron Gelbard, member of the left-wing *Poalei Zion* central [office]; as well as others, from MAPAI and also from the Workers Committee, which had its main centre in the Feldafing DP camp. Yet no one attempted introducing political motives into the

activity of the *Landsmannschaft*. Quite the contrary - the *Landsmannschaft* united everyone and made them brothers, creating a home-like, friendly atmosphere.

### **Częstochowa *Landsmannschaften***

The Częstochowa *landsmannschaften* in Germany arose as consequence of three main factors:

1. Holding *yuhrzeit* [Anniversary of Death] services for the fallen and murdered martyrs;
2. Immortalising the struggle and destruction of Częstochowa Jewry in Holocaust literature;
3. Creating a friendly environment, which would conduct cultural and relief activity, as well as maintaining contact with all Częstochowa institutions around the world.

The first *Yizkor* [Memorial] Service took place in the American zone in Germany on 26<sup>th</sup> July 1946 at the Feldafing DP camp. The memorial service was dedicated to the third anniversary of the heroic battle and liquidation of the "Small Ghetto" in Częstochowa.

[The] Chairman of the meeting was Aron Gelbard, who also gave a talk on the underground movement in the "Small Ghetto". Other speakers included Aron Gelbard, Abram Sztajnbrecher, Dawid Jakubowicz, Cwi Rozenwajn and the writer of these lines, who represented the Regional Committee of the liberated Jews in the American zone in Germany. In addition, there was also a literary programme, which consisted of a recitation of songs that had been found in the Częstochowa ghetto and in the HASAG camps. Frania Kornfeld and Benjamin Orenstein recited works of their own. Reports on the event were published in *Unser Wort* [Our Word], a weekly of the Regional Committee in Bamberg, № 16, from 5<sup>th</sup> July 1946 and in *Dos Freie Wort* [The Free Word], a weekly of the Feldafing Camp Committee, № 39, from 12<sup>th</sup> July 1946.

The event took place one year after the liberation of the concentration camps. All were immersed in sorrow and pain, [with] tragic and horrifying experiences, which manifested themselves at the gathering. Not all were able yet to grasp that the horrific reports were true. The majority of those present at the meeting still thought that they would travel back to Częstochowa and find Dad and Mum, their family, homes [and] factories - all as it once was. When the speakers delivered their speeches, someone only had to utter the phrase - "Jewish Częstochowa, you were destroyed in a holy battle", all the audience would break out in a lament. This is what occurred with each orator who pronounced a similar sentence. The phenomenon is a deep psychological problem - that the *landsleute*, including all Jews, could themselves not believe what had occurred, despite being a living testimony themselves. The phenomenon was not only present amongst the audience in the hall, but also amongst the speakers on the stage.

One of the speakers, after lecturing for a couple of minutes on the role of the *Arbeiterrat* in the Częstochowa "Big Ghetto", looked around the hall which consisted of a wooden barrack and at the audience - Częstochowa *landsleute* who had come from various DP camps and cities such as Feldafing, München, Zeilsheim, Bamberg, Landsberg, and many others - [and] exclaimed, "If so, our misfortune is then even greater than we had imagined, because those assembled here are actually all that is left of Częstochowa". With these words, the speaker simply burst out in a great lamentation and the audience along with him. The speaker was Cwi Rozenwajn - his tears then expressed more than words [could have] and left an enormous impression on the entire audience who, for the rest of their lives, will never forget that episode.

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The meeting in Feldafing was held in memory of the revolt and the liquidation of the "Small Ghetto". The second meeting was held in memory of the mass annihilation of Częstochowa Jewry, which fell during the days between *Yom Kippur* and *Simchas Torah*. This date is accepted by all Częstochowa *landsleute* around the world. The meeting was held in Landsberg and was arranged, on a large scale, so that all surviving Częstochowa *landsleute* from all the DP camps in Germany would be able to participate. The organising committee comprised the lawyer Estera Epstein, Chairwoman, Dr Jerzy Dobrzynski, and Zajdman. Representatives of the surviving remnant's highest authorities were also invited to the meeting.

The meeting took place on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1946, in the large Beit Ichud [Unity House] theatre hall in the Landsberg DP camp.

1,200 *landsleute* attended the meeting, with an entire row of representatives of the surviving Remnant's agencies and of the press, namely the Central Committee of the Liberated Jews (Dr Samuel Gringauz), the Regional Committee of the Liberated Jews in Franconia and editor of *Unser Wort* (Benjamin Orenstein), the Federation of Polish Jews (Hench Pradelski), the Editor of *Unser Welt* (Dr Cwi Kantor) [and] the Editor of *Yiddische Zeitung* [Jewish Newspaper] (M. Frydenzon).

Detailed accounts of the meeting were published in *Yiddische Zeitung*, Landsberg, № 43 (55), 25<sup>th</sup> October 1946; *Unser Wort*, Bamberg, № 29, 25<sup>th</sup> October 1946; *Fun Letzte Churbn* [From the Latest Destruction], München, № 3, October-November 1946 edition, p. 99 and in a whole series of other newspapers.

Estera Epstein acted as Chairwoman and, in her opening speech, she presented a historical overview of the tragic events in Częstochowa during the time of the Nazi occupation. Cantor Efrogim Nechemje Trombkowski performed *El Moleh Rachamim* ["God Full of Compassion" - memorial prayer], which brought everyone to tears. Akyba Koszycki said *Kaddish* [prayer for the dead] and G. Richter sang a series of sorrowful songs, which were appropriate to the programme.

The speakers at the meeting were Dr Samuel Gringauz, Dr Cwi Kantor, Henoch Pradelski, Benjamin Orenstein, Mendel Goldberg and Chaim Sztajer, a Częstochowa *landsmann* who had participated in the Treblinka uprising.

How does one explain that almost all the Częstochowa *landsleute* from all the DP camps flowed to the meeting, coming from hundreds of miles, from all parts of Germany? Dr Cwi Kantor, in his talk on an individual characteristic that is very typical of all [Częstochowa] *landsleute*, explained [this] saying,

*A dynamic driving force urged me here today to Landsberg, to take part in this mournful ceremony of the remnants of Częstochowa, about whom we are eulogising here. I have come here to unite my collective feelings in a collective eulogy and in a collective Kaddish as one who, in the city of Częstochowa, has lost all those nearest to me.*

The large and well-attended meeting provided the organisers with the conviction that it would be more than fitting to organise a convention, at which to coordinate the entirety of Częstochowa *landsleute* activity in a centralised manner. The individual *landsmansschaften*, in the separate DP camps, could not maintain contact with all the Częstochowa *landsmansschaften* abroad in order to arrange such grandiose assemblies. To this end, a conference was called, again at the Landsberg DP camp, for Sunday, 8<sup>th</sup> June 1947. The result of the conference's sessions was the establishment of a headquarters for the Częstochowa *landsmansschaften* in the American zone in Germany.

The Central Administration comprised Dr Cwi Kantor as Chairman (from München), Estera Epstein as General Secretary (from Landsberg), Benjamin Orenstein as Chairman of the Culture Committee (from Bamberg), Mendel Goldberg as Chairman of the Honorary Court (from Heidelberg), Dawid Jakubowicz (from the Feldafing DP Camp), Dr Jerzy Dobrzynski (Landsberg DP camp).

The Board of Directors comprised Henoeh Pradelski as member of the Honorary Court (from München), Cwi Rozenwajn as member of the Culture Commission (from Ainring DP camp), Szymon Mlodynow as member of the Culture Commission (from Fürstenfeldbruck), I. Monowicz (from Geiselhöring), Ziskind Szmulewicz (from Fürstenfeldbruck).

Without doubt, the Central Administration contributed extensively to the communal life of the surviving remnant, standing in contact with all divisions in Germany, with Częstochowa itself and with all the *landsmansschaften* around the world.

Members of the Central Administration participated in the Second Congress of the liberated Jews in the American zone in Germany, which took place on 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> February, in Bad Reichenhall. Those who participated then were Dr Cwi Kantor, Estera Epstein, Benjamin Orenstein and Szymon Mlodynow.

Not only did the Central Administration participate in the congresses of the Federation of Polish Jews, but also held distinguished positions within the Federation. During the Second Congress of the Federation of Polish Jews, which was held in Bad Reichenhall on 23<sup>rd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> November 1947, the following Częstochowa delegates were elected: Henoeh Pradelski – as member of Management (Executive); Adv. Mendel Goldberg – Chairman of the Honorary Court; Dr Cwi Kantor – member of Council and the writer of these lines – representative in the Council.

The second central *Yizkor* meeting in the American zone took place in Fürstenfeldbruck, where Szymon Mlodynow was the chairman of the city committee. He organised the event, while Ziskind Szmulewicz and other Częstochowa *landsleute* of that locality assisted.

Even though the journey to the location was very complicated, as it entailed changing trains (transfer) a couple of times, the theatre hall was nevertheless packed. A religious ceremony was conducted, which, to this day, has become a tradition for all Częstochowa societies around the world. The speakers at the event were Dr Cwi Kantor, Mendel Goldberg, Aron Gelbard, Benjamin Orenstein and Szymon Mlodynow.

The event left a deep impression on those who attended.

Germany did not consist solely of the American zone. It also had a Russian and an English [one].

Concerning the Częstochowers in the Russian zone in Germany, only the following may be asserted: that a group of Częstochowers had settled in Gardelegen, a city in the province of Sachsen [Saxony]. Initially, the city was occupied by the English military forces, but the English subsequently gave the city over to the Soviets. The Soviet military authorities soon let the meaning of “freedom” be felt and especially in their treatment of the Jewish DPs, amongst whom were Częstochowers. The Soviet commander decreed that all DPs were to leave the city and travel back to Poland. All the DPs, exclusively [the] Jewish [ones], exhausted [and] starved, wished for the time being to rest a little and to then see what to do. The Soviet military commander showed his “freedom methods”. Just as in the time of the Nazis, the Jewish DPs were surrounded by the Soviet soldiers armed in readiness for battle, by force, and with the aid of the German police, the DPs were put into rows and led away to the train station and deported back to Poland. This method of the deportation differed in nothing from Hitler’s

method and was carried out in the name of “freedom” and in the name of the “Sickle and Hammer” symbol.

In the English zone, the Cześćochowa *landsleute* were concentrated in the Bergen-Belsen DP camp and in the city of Celle. They conducted joint activities. The committee of these Cześćochowers consisted of Rabbi Olewski, cantor-*shoichet* Isroel Josef Kutner z”l, Chaim Stawski, M. Kochman, L. Buchwalter, G. Biatek, F. Fridman, H. Fridman, Prejzerowicz, Chaim Stawski [sic] and others.

From 1945 to and including 1948, they arranged *Yizkor* gatherings, during which Rabbi Olewski directed the religious part of the events. The Bergen-Belsen DP Camp Cantor would also appear (Cantor Kutner died in 1946), [as well as] their own and invited guest speakers.

The third central gathering arranged by the Central Administration of the Cześćochowa *landsmannschaften* took place in October 1948 at the Synagogue of München. Two publications from the Central Administration were issued for the event: my book “*Churban Czenstochow*” [The Destruction of Cześćochowa], in Latin [viz. Polish] transcription and the journal “*Unser Yuhrzeit*” [Our Death Anniversary], edited by the writer of these lines, Dr Cwi Kantor, Estera Epstein, and Cwi Rozenwajn.

The programme for the third event, [which was] held in München, was identical to the programme for the gathering in Fürstenfeldbruck.

Following the assembly, a convention took place featuring the same participants of the assembly. Estera Epstein, General Secretary of the Central Administration, delivered an activity report, in which were highlighted the variety of activities of the Central, especially:

- aid for sick *landsleute*, by obtaining for them, with great effort, places in hospitals and sanatoria, financial and moral support
- representing the Cześćochowa *landsmannschaften* in the Surviving Remnant’s central agencies
- bringing to justice the Nazi criminals who annihilated the Cześćochowa Jewry
- contact with the Cześćochowa societies around the world
- publications and
- an entire array of local activities.

Despite having directed all the activities mentioned and having been the spiritual soul of the Central Administration, Estera Epstein ended her report with a proposal to dissolve the Central Administration and the local *landsmannschaften*. After a long discussion, the proposal was approved and, with it, the chapter of the Central Administration of the Cześćochowa *landsmannschaften* in the American zone in Germany, in the English zone and also of the local *landsmannschaften* in the individual DP camps and in the cities came to an end.

### **The Motivation for Dissolving the Central and Local *Landsmannschaften***

During the discussion surrounding the proposal, the following reasons were expressed:

- 1.) The Surviving Remnant cannot, and must not, stay in Germany any longer, as there are possibilities for emigration.
- 2.) All the institutions of the Surviving Remnant are on the eve of liquidation. Therefore, the people of Cześćochowa cannot have their own organisation.
- 3.) The Central Administration does not intend to, and will not, appeal for more aid from the societies around the world, as this could delay the emigration process of the Cześćochowa *landsleute* from the DP camps.