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The Memory of Szaja Jakow Mencoŧ z''l



If a man stands by a press-machine in an American workshop from [his] middle age to the very end of his life; if a man is smelted for decades in America's smelting pot and yet does not lose his Jewish-human face - [but] remains a staunch Socialist - [then] his life was of some worth [and] his memory is therefore dear to us!

This was Szaja Jakow Mencoŧ, peace be upon him.

Szaja Jakow Minkof He presented his brief biography and the societal and Socialist course of his life in counted lines in the book *Czenstochover Yidn* [end of book, pp. LX-LXI] - a child of poverty, orphaned at a young age, at the age of 17 he discontinues his studies at the *yeshiva* and becomes a worker at the then famous Wajnberg comb-factory in Częstochowa, in order to become the provider for his orphaned family.

This factory was a stronghold of the SS [Zionist-Socialists]. He joins the SS Movement and, with the very same ardour, diligence and shrewdness with which the pious boy Szaja Jakow had formerly studied the Talmud, he applies himself to the teachings of Socialism. For this, he was, in fact, nicknamed "Spitzkopf"^{*3} (sharp-minded). His first teachers were Dr Józef Kruk ("Józef Number One"^{*4}) and "Aron the Red" [sic. Yellow] (Dr Aron Singalowsky z''l). He remembered them lovingly and reverently all his life - [even] when he had already joined the Jewish Socialist Federation [in America] and, in the last period, the Bund.

With his intelligence and sharpness, he soon transcended the ranks of the working masses and, in 1906, together with a group of intellectual labourers, he already stood at the helm of the SS Organisation in Częstochowa.

He leaves Częstochowa in 1908 and, following a brief sojourn in Vienna, Zürich and Kraków, he comes to America. Here, his trail stretches through Lincoln (Nebraska), Chicago [and finally] to Los Angeles, where he becomes a resident.

In America, he was active in the Trade Union Movement, in the *Arbeiter Ring*, in the Workers Committee, in the [Jewish] Socialist Federation and in the Bund - [and] these are just faint traces of his highly active life.

His path, from his youth with his black forelock [and] permanently dishevelled hair, until he had a head covered in silvery white, but ever youthful burning eyes - was a steady path [and] a straight one, without wobbling [and] without stumbling. All his life, his thirst for learning and reading never left him. The wall [lined] with books in his modest, little study, which has been left orphaned after him perhaps even more so than his life companion Gittele and his three offspring - is the finest testimony to his spiritual life.

^{*3} [TN: Probably a reference to "Max Spitzkopf, the King of Detectives, the Viennese Sherlock Holmes", the hero of Yiddish pulp fiction detective stories, which were very popular in the early 1900's.]

^{*4} [TN: According to *Czenstochover Yidn*, p. LX, his teacher was "Józef Number Two," or Józef Rabinowicz from Warsaw.]

To his merit must be added the real fact that his opposition to brutal despotism did not lead him astray down the paths of intolerance, anti-socialist and anti-democratic actions, which are concealed under a Socialistic veil. In private conversations and [also] publicly, he always protested against such phenomena in our social life.

To the last day of his life, his gaze did not become dimmed. His mind remained clear [and] his life pure - untarnished.

Departing from this world at 69, he left us too soon. He could have still been alive, had he ceased working at the workshop several years ago, as the doctor had advised him. But, compared with the friends of his youth, such as Mendel Szuchter, Zacharia Lewensztajn [and] Kopl Gerichter, who were ground under the wheels of the *American Machine* at an early age - he was, nevertheless, a wonderful exception.

He was like an oak, rooted in the Jewish-American Workers Movement. His place remains empty. The man's worth and his place in life become apparent, now that he is gone. We shall strongly miss Szaja Jakow Mencoﬀ - the earnest [and] pure person and Socialist.

Honoured be his memory!