

Zvi Rosenvein

## Raphael Federman (an outline)

It had been my intention to write a longer work about our current, jubilee celebrant, Raphael Federman. All are in agreement that Raphael Federman deserves that his tempestuous, fascinating and creative life should be written about in the greatest detail. Sadly, I cannot do this at the moment. Both mentally and physically, I am unable to write the work on Raphael the way I should have wished to. I belong, regretfully, not to the iron-firm natures to which Raphael Federman belongs. He is able to take, upon his shoulders, the most difficult experiences [and] the bitterest disappointments and yet remain firm in his idealistic faith.

Indeed, [it is] the times [that] have formed the diversity of our characters - after all, Raphael matured and was active in an epoch of renaissance in human history, when the air was full of faith and hope! The next generation, to which I belong, grew up in the shade of decline, when all values and ideals collapsed - when the winds of the impending disaster already hung in the air. It therefore turns out that, in the years in which we both live, I - the younger in years - am the **old man**, [who is] consumed with the images of destruction from the past, uprooted from the present and despairing of the future, whilst Raphael Federman is, once again, full of youthful ardour and faith and continues to be active in those circles where it is possible for him to be active.

When I think of Raphael Federman - and I think of him very often - I see him as a symbol of a grand, revolutionary, heroically-fighting Jewish generation, which is already disappearing - a generation which, vigorously and zealously, changed the face of Jewish and general human life; a generation which, with its ideals, changed the spiritual, cultural and social Jewish life, and even physically changed the external appearance of the Jew.

From the benighted, humiliated, belittled Jewish masses, they - the revolutionaries - raised free, proud, combative Jews who fought for their political, economic and human rights. They educated large cadres of a worker-conscientious intelligentsia. [They] built schools, organised drama circles [and] libraries, and helped build a huge, mighty [and] wealthy literature in Yiddish.

This generation, in which Raphael Federman occupies a foremost position, together with the struggle it conducted to change and elevate Jewish life, simultaneously also conducted the struggle to change and elevate the standard of living of the oppressed non-Jewish labourer. This Jewish revolutionary had understood that the fate of Jewish life is dependent upon the fate of humanity as a whole.

And that is why this Jewish revolutionary generation was so active and occupied the foremost positions in the fight to create a new, just [and] more beautiful world.

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In my frequent moments of nostalgia, of deep yearning for the once effervescent, active Jewish life that was so brutally torn out by its roots, an image of the bygone Jewish life in Cześćochowa often swims out before me:

I am a boy; it is the First of May - not a regular day. Even the air in the stuffy, filthy, little *ul. Garncarska* smells different today. The mood of the toiling, harrowed people of the little street, too, is different - a festive atmosphere prevails. But this is not the usual festive [mood], like on the other Jewish holidays - this is a holiday charged with suspense and anticipation.

The talk in the little street was that, today, great workers' demonstrations would take place and that the antisemites were preparing to fall upon the demonstrators. I am truly burning with curiosity and expectation, and no less with fear, also – who knows what calamities these demonstrations may bring for the Jews?

Without my parents' knowledge, with some of my friends, I run to the *Aleja*, to walk along with the demonstration.

The *Aleje* were packed with thousands of incited Poles. And here we see the demonstration approaching - the air becomes electrified, as it were. Thousands march with their gigantic, red flags, the multitude of banners [and] the militant slogans in the Jewish and Polish languages. Beside the demonstration, the workers' militia strides, holding hefty sticks. They keep the order and the thousands of enraged Poles do not dare fall upon the Jewish labourers!

I notice, among the demonstrators, several acquaintances from my courtyard - from the little street where I live. Yet I hardly recognise them - they have somehow grown into different people in front of me today. Their paces [are] so firm! Their gait [is] so confident! Their eyes have such a flame of hope!

At the head of the demonstration walks a man who often turns his face to the masses and calls out in Yiddish and Polish, and the street fills with the hallowed clamour of the thousands of demonstrators repeating these cries.

One of my schoolmates from *cheder* tells me that the man leading the demonstration and making the calls is named Raphael Federman.

With the contemporary *cheder* boys, Raphael Federman had grown into a symbolic figure. He is the fighter for Jewish and human values! And more than one *cheder* boy began then, on that May Day, to think about liberating himself from the narrow, little *ul. Garncarska* [and] from the tales of demons and ghosts which fill the world - and began to seek out the *real* evil forces which enslave the world.

Very often, when I meet with the grey-haired Federman today, I look back to that brazen, militant labour leader, Raphael Federman, of that first 1<sup>st</sup> of May demonstration. And the tears choke me, thinking, "Where are those thousands of demonstrating working idealists now?"

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Despite belonging to a different movement, I have nevertheless followed Raphael Federman's appearances and social activities with the greatest interest. His appearances as *dozór*\* at the sessions of Częstochowa's Jewish *Kehilla* administration were filled with the fire of protest of the toil-weary, poor workers and common people, whose representative he was. And his appearances as councilman at the lectern of the general City Council were of great importance.

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\* [TN: Viz., as member of the *Dozór Bóźniczy* (Synagogue Supervision) – the official term in Polish for Jewish *kehilla*.]

In the City Council, Federman let the voices of protest of the entire oppressed Jewish populace which, as Jews, were persecuted by the *Endecja* majority, be heard.

R. Federman courageously demanded equal rights and equal subsidies for Jewish institutions; every one of his appearances at the City Council caused a storm. It is especially worth mentioning one of his appearances at the City Council - in the Yiddish language! One can hardly imagine how much courage and lust for battle it demanded to deliver a speech in Yiddish at the lectern of the contemporary antisemitic City Council! Only Raphael Federman could show these!

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Among his activities on the American soil, Federman is much to be thanked for the publication of the book *Czenstochover Yidn* and, currently, this book, *Czenstochov*. I would, however, like to present some outlines of how I see Federman, the social activist, during these last years in New York.

I did not meet him in the first years here - the years he writes about in his autobiographical book, *On the Shores of the Warta and East River* - during which he wanted to travel back to Poland. I met him at a time when he had already come to terms with the idea of staying here in New York. This - how should I call it? - *bourgeois stability*, is particularly to be sensed in his thinking and feeling. Federman is now no longer the militant rein-breaker. He now walks in his thoughts and emotions along the path of *slight* resistance - of coming to terms with the new American circumstances.

I believe that, in this respect, Federman is no exception. I see this in all the former Jewish revolutionaries who were not in the ghettos. Although they do feel extreme pain, and it is needless to say this, Federman, too hurts deeply for the loss of Our People, yet they do not grasp the great spiritual ruin - the ruination of ideas - which the destruction brought with it. Federman, just like his generation's other revolutionary leaders, still lives with the bygone concept of a Jewish life [and] with the concepts of Socialism. The life, here, comes to them as a continuation of the earlier life. They cannot grasp - and they shall never grasp - that Jewish life and all the concepts of the liberation of mankind were burned in the crematoria of Auschwitz and Treblinka - together with the flag-carriers and fighters of old.

As Federman's personal friend, I am glad to see him self-controlled, peaceful and perhaps happier. But, for me, he will ever remain the combative Raphael Federman of that heroic First of May demonstration in Cześćochowa - the symbol of a tempestuous life, which has already forever disappeared.



**The Jew in the Ghetto Battle**  
*drawn by Nota Kozłowski*