

KURLAND Bernard Ber (1898–1943), clerk, commercial agent, sports and social activist. She was born on 13th June 1898 in Miechów, the son of Izaak and Pesla Pola née Kon (Kohn), sister of → Natan Kohn.

Kurland had a higher education, probably in economics. He began working in Częstochowa as an accountant in a company belonging to → Joachim Dawidowicz, later becoming an authorised signatory for the firm. For a short time before the outbreak of war in 1939, he became independent as a manufacturer of chemical products and as the representative of foreign companies. (His office was at przy ul. Kilińskiego 16).

At the same time, he worked in a number of social organisations. He was one of the founders of the Commercial Workers Union. He cared about lifting the intellectual level of traders and improving their economic situation. He was not politically active.

In 1927, on the list of the Independent Jewish Intelligentsia, he stood for election to the Częstochowa City Council – however, he was unsuccessful. Tall and strongly built, he was active in Jewish sports. In 1925, he was a board member of the Jewish Gymnastic and Sports Association. In 1927, in another Jewish sports club – “Warta” Częstochowa Sports Club – he also sat on the board there and was a co-founder and co-host of its social club (operating in a tenement at II Aleja 26). From 1936, he was a board member of “Makabi” Jewish Gymnastics and Sports Association.

In 1939, he lived at ul. Kilińskiego 16. He also worked in several communal organisations. At the beginning of 1940, he was co-opted to the Council of Elders (*Judenrat*), replacing those who had been fired for sabotaging the work. He was entrusted with the difficult position of head of the Forced Labour Department. In this position, he displayed extraordinary qualification, courage and determination. When the Częstochowa brigades were arrested in the eastern territories, in November 1940, he went to Cieszanów and bribed the German commander in order to release the Częstochowa Jews and send them home. He was still counted amongst the “tough”, who strictly carried out the Germans’ orders, disregarding public opinion. On 23rd March 1941, on the recommendation of the *Judenrat* executive, together with → Dawid Borzykowski and → Natan Gerichter, he took over all the agencies of the Society for the Protection of the Health of the Jewish Population TOZ.

In the summer of 1942, he was the only member of the *Judenrat* to support the proposal of the *Arbeter-Rat* (Workers’ Council) to buy firearms and to create a

self-defence against the actions of the German police. From 22nd September 1942, the first day of the liquidation of the Częstochowa ghetto, he was working in “Metalurgia” and assisted in the selections. At that time, he saved many people, presenting them as specialists in various fields – mainly craftsmen. But in connection with this, → Liber Brener did not allow him to smuggle Jews through the cordon of German police without payment. The Council of Elders, which he also represented, charged a ransom for passing outside a selection, which it shared with the Germans. However, he did help in providing food for the Jews in hiding. In the forced labour camp, the “Small Ghetto”, he headed the Labour Department. He used his position to support the resistance movement. He also made escapes possible by assigning people to external workplaces.

On 20th March 1943, he initiated the escape of Jewish intelligentsia, transported by truck to be shot. After a few days, the Gestapo found five escapees and captured them. The commander of the German police, Degenhardt, “pardoned” Kurland. After the liquidation of the last members of the *Judenrat*, he was the only Jewish representative. On 26th June 1943, during the liquidation of the “Small Ghetto”, the lives of a group of 12-15-year-old boys hung in the balance. Degenhardt wanted to send them to their deaths. Bernard Kurland turned to the HASAG Pelcery director Lüht, to intervene. Lüht stated that he needed the boys in the factory. On 19th July 1943, he also assisted in a night selection of Jewish workers carried out by the German guards, foremen and engineers. The next day, on Degenhardt’s orders, he was added to a group destined for death. He was taken to the Jewish cemetery, where he was shot and buried in a mass grave (No. 32 III).

His wife was Mindla née Edelist (2nd December 1897 Częstochowa - 1943), the daughter of Jakub Wolf, a teacher, and Kaza née Bemaska. They had a daughter - Tola Teodora (25th September 1922 Częstochowa - 1943). Mother and daughter perished in an execution on 20th March 1943 at the Jewish cemetery. The entire Kurland family has been inscribed for posterity on a mass grave (No. 28–31 III).

Brener, *Widersztand*, pp. 15, 102, 110; Mizgalska-Osowiecka, *Żydzi w samorządzie*, p. 64; Orenstein, *Churban Czenstochow*, pp. 172–174; Sętowski, *Z dziejów Żydowskiego Tow. Gimnastyczno-Sportowego*, p. 260. – Einhorn, *Wybrany*, p. 138–139. – “Express Częstochowski” 1927, No. 262, p. 3; “Nasz Głos Powszechny” 1936, No. 1, p. 3. – *Spis abonentów sieci telefonicznych 1939*, p. 50. – materials (excerpts from civil registers) in the ODDC collections.

Wiesław Paszkowski