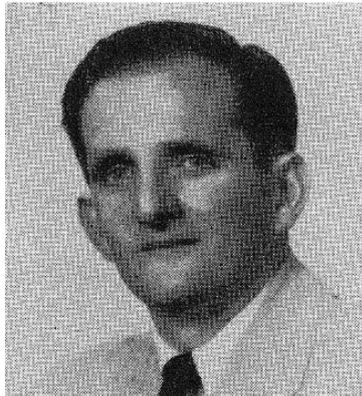


Dr Benjamin Orenstein

## Cwi Rozenwajn [aka Zvi Rosenvein]



The name Cwi Rozenwajn has grown to symbolise the fight of the Jewish youth against the Nazi regime during the Holocaust epoch.

He was born in December 1918 in the city of Częstochowa, which had the eighth largest Jewish community in Poland. He comes from a strictly religious, Chassidic orthodox family.

His parents took great care that their son Cwi should receive a general religious education, so they sent him to the then well-known and famed Machzikei Ha'Das *Talmud Torah*<sup>1</sup>, where the studious Talmudic expert Reb Icchok, whom people called "Icchok the lame", was in charge.

In parallel with studying the Talmud and Kabbalah<sup>2</sup>, he read, with the same assiduousness, anything that came to hand - be it general, Zionist or Socialist literature. He was particularly influenced by the writings of A.D. Gordon, who called upon Jewish youth to cut ties with the Diaspora life and psychology.

In 1932, he joins the pioneering Gordonia Organisation and begins to climb up in communal life. A year later, he is already representing the Organisation at various instances and conferences and appears delivering lectures on Zionist and Socialist themes. At the age of 20, in 1938, he becomes a contributor to the weekly *Częstochower Cajtung*, in which he writes a column [entitled] *In the Shadow of Doom*. This series of articles made a colossal impression on the serious-minded youth due to his pessimistic ideas regarding Jewish life and the future of the youth in the Diaspora.

One year later, on 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939, the Second World Inferno breaks out. On Friday morning, Hitler's Germany attacked Poland and, on Sunday at nine o'clock in the morning, Hitler's motorised units have already occupied Częstochowa. On the very next morning, Monday, 4<sup>th</sup> September, a pogrom took place under the false pretence that Jews had shot at the Germans. This day is marked in the history of Częstochowa as "Bloody Monday".

In front of Cwi Rozenwajn was placed a historic test - what was to be done now? How to continue maintaining the Organisation? What could be done to alleviate the hunger and want, which were causing epidemic diseases and mortality?

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: Public religious primary school, larger in size than a "cheder".]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: As Kabbalah is considered the most advanced and elevated of Jewish studies, and as such is reserved only for particularly pious and scholarly adults, it would certainly not have been part of the curriculum at Rozenwajn's boys' school. If he did, in fact, study Kabbalah as a child, he would have done so secretly, of his own accord.]

The first thing was to reorganise the long-established pioneer training farm and conduct the illegal activity there and also amongst the youth in town. An illegal conference was called, with the participation of the representatives of the Central [Office] in Warsaw - Cywia Lubetkin and Josef Kapłan. At this conference, new guidelines and organisational activity were delineated and Rosenvein became one of the main leaders of the Organisation in Częstochowa.

His task was to conduct cultural/educational activity amongst the pioneering youth and to preserve the integrity of the Organisation. Clandestine meetings were held regularly at the homes of Małka Weltman at ul. Berka Joselewicza 1, Cela Kac at ul. Warszawska 21, Chaja Fridman at ul. Garncarska 5 and Mania Cieciora at ul. Kiedrzyńska 14. Cwi Rozenwajn also appeared at all these gatherings, arousing and encouraging, and lifting the spirits of the youth to endurance, courage and struggle.

Events developed at an alarming pace. Troubles, torments and Nazi atrocities poured down like a deluge. One of the first plagues of persecution was seizing Jews for unpaid, forced labour, in addition to which Jews were beaten and tortured during this slave labour.

Cwi Rozenwajn and other young communal activists were also amongst the forced labourers. They set themselves the goal, first and foremost, to organise the forced labourers into a new, clandestine organisation, which was to take such forms as to suit the conditions at the time. Among the main activists and organisers were Cwi Rozenwajn, [Leizer] "Malay" Szmulewicz, Abram Łażniarz, Juda Mandelbaum and others.

The highpoint of the organised work was manifested on a historic date - 12<sup>th</sup> May 1940. On that day, the forced labourers, from a whole series of workplaces, did not go home but, straight after work, went to an illegal mass-meeting, which was held at the former People's Bank<sup>3</sup> at Aleja 22, seized the premises and barricaded all the exits and entrances. Cwi Rozenwajn, Izrael Szyldhaus and "Malay" Szmulewicz appeared with fiery, militant speeches in front of the thousands of assembled, forced labourers. This was the date of the establishment of the new clandestine organisation, which encompassed all the forced labourers regardless of political affiliation and, later, built the foundation for the armed Jewish Combat Organisation in the "Small Ghetto".

The Organisation was named the "*Arbeiterrat*" [Workers Council], and Cwi Rozenwajn was among its top leaders, in the Presidium of the Organisation. The only one of the three speakers, at that historic illegal mass-meeting, who has survived is Cwi Rozenwajn - may he live long, long, healthy years.

As regards the importance of the *Arbeiterrat*, suffice it to mention the fact that there are two chapters dedicated to this organisation in the book *Churban Czenstochow*. The head researcher of the Holocaust epoch, the late Dr Filip Friedman, wrote the following of the *Arbeiterrat*:

*"... a rare institution during the period of the Nazi tyranny"*

(see: *Unser Yuhrzeit*, Bamberg, 1948, p. 10).

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<sup>3</sup> [TN: Apparently ref. to the *Spółdzielczy Bank Przemysłowców i Kupców* (Industrialists & Merchants Cooperative Bank), which was located at Aleja 22.]

The historian Raphael Mahler writes that the activities of the *Arbeiterrat* were like a large beam of light in the general darkness (see: *Jewish Culture*, New York, 1949, № 4). It is, therefore, no wonder that the *New Yorker Wochenblatt* [NY Weekly], dated 25<sup>th</sup> February 1949, features the following passage:

*“Cwi Rozenwajn was one of the pioneers of the resistance movement in Częstochowa - a roaring, heroic, combative, revolutionary soul, who fought against the Nazi regime. His activity was followed, with the greatest deference, by the leaders of the heroic uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto, and it was their opinion that he had to expand his activity and revolutionary ardour to other cities also. He was sent out to Będzin, where he became the spiritual and practical leader of the resistance movement.”*

Following the collapse of the Nazi powers, Cwi Rozenwajn was in the Ainring DP camp, in the American Zone in Germany. He was a member of the Central Administration of the Częstochower Landsmannschaften and of the Cultural Committee. He was most instrumental in publishing of the book *Churban Czenstochow* and was a member of the Editorial Collegium of the one-off publication *Unser Yuhrzeit*.

In 1949, Rozenwajn came to America, to New York. He was Secretary of the World Secretariat of Częstochower Landsmannschaften, Societies and Associations. He also edited a bulletin and was co-editor of the large book *Czenstochov*, which was published in New York in 1958, in which he is represented in a whole series of pieces. In that same year, 1958, he participated, with very fine articles, in the publication *Pages of Destruction and Struggle*. Besides these, Cwi Rozenwajn has published an entire array of articles in various newspapers and journals. His literary pseudonym is “Tzrayn”.

Cwi Rozenwajn was a disciple of Dr Filip Friedman at the United Teachers’ Seminary<sup>4</sup> in New York.

Cwi Rozenwajn is among the most colourful of personalities, in the history of Częstochowa, who led a heroic struggle against Nazism.

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<sup>4</sup> [TN: Obviously referring to the Jewish Teachers’ Seminary and Folks University, where Dr Friedman was dean from 1949-1954 (see “Guide to the Papers of Philip Friedman” in the YIVO archives.)]

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