

## **The Biography of a *Częstochower Landsmann* in Israel**

### **Godl Frajtag**



Godl Frajtag, who settled in [the Land of] Israel in 1925, is one of *Częstochowa* Jewry's unique personalities. He was raised in a religious, nationalistic environment and, in the earliest years of his youth, joined the *Poalei Zion* [Labour Zionism] movement, faithfully serving the ideals of Zionist Socialism. For him, this movement was the social school that ripened his ideals, views and thoughts. He has been inseparably bound to the idea of Labour Zionism from 1912 to this very day.

There had always been discussions within the movement and also differences of opinions, which reached the climax of splitting into Right and Left [factions]. Godl Frajtag became a right-wing *Poalei Zion*ist and was as solid as a rock in defending the twenty-one articles<sup>1</sup>, the main one being to fight for our own national, independent state in [the Land of] Israel. This ideal was not manifested in Godl Frajtag just theoretically, but also in practice – and, in 1925, he decided to leave for [the Land of] Israel.

Being friends with all *Poalei Zion* members, both right and left-wing, the two factions held a festive banquet in his honour. At this banquet, a comical living newspaper was put together, and a contest was held for the most fitting name for the newspaper. The contest was won by Jakow Fefer, who is now in Israel, for the name "*Two Cats in a Bag*" – which was because two rival factions had taken part like two friendly groups.

In *Częstochowa*, the *Poalei Zion* Left were more numerous. It was therefore deemed that the Left had ousted the Right [as members], with all the particulars the very young fellows knew at the time - they made a list of all those who were expelled and put it in a black frame. Among the names of those banished in the black frame was also the name of Godl Frajtag. Upon his departure, at the banquet, all the differences of opinions disappeared – and all of them, from either side, expressed themselves with the heartiest and friendliest words regarding Godl Frajtag's profound and devoted idealism. The name of the living newspaper, therefore, met with the general approval of all those present. A song was also spontaneously composed at this banquet, written by Leon Zajdman.

Until his departure to [the Land of] Israel, Godl Frajtag was active in all fields of Jewish cultural, social, economic and political life. His activities have a history dating back to the First World War. He was one of the founders and managers of the [Poalei Zion] *Arbeiter Heim* (Workers' Home) cooperative, kindergarten, primary school, public kitchen and kitchen for the

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: Presumably of the Labour Zionist constitution.]

intelligentsia. This was during a period when hunger and want had seeped their way into the majority of Jewish homes, because most of the Jews had lost all sources of income as a consequence of the War.

Over the period of German occupation, in 1915, a group of *Częstochower landsleit*, including Godl Frajtag, were sent away to Germany, where they were employed as railway workers. Godl Frajtag organised a *Częstochower* society of the deported *landsleit* there. In 1917, the group was sent back to Częstochowa, where they [also] worked as railway labourers. The group of Jewish railway workers belonged to the Metalworkers' Union and Godl Frajtag was a member of the board.

When Poland gained its independence and the Polish government took over the railway, the first thing it did was to sack the Jewish railway workers. Godl Frajtag undertook a campaign to make the Polish government [either] reinstate the Jewish employees or indemnify them. The Polish government, which was notorious for its antisemitism, preferred to choose the second option and paid the Jewish railway workers compensation.

When General [Józef] Haller's bands were assaulting Jews and perpetrating pogroms upon them, Elkune Chrobołowski<sup>2</sup> organised a self-defence [squad] and Godl Frajtag was one of the active members of this organisation. Elkune Chrobołowski lives in Los Angeles, in the United States.

After the First World War, *landsleit* throughout the world began sending financial aid to Częstochowa for the institutions. Godl Frajtag gave a speech at the [opening] ceremony of the kindergarten and primary school, in which he declared that many of the children, who would study in these institutions, would grow up to be fighters for [the People of] Israel. The assembled crowd started whistling and laughing. Godl Frajtag, upon telling this story decades later, declares he can still hear those whistles ringing in his ears to this day. [But] this did not deter or abate him, in the least, in his general national and *Poalei Zion* activities. He affirms that a certain number of those "whistlers" arrived in [the Land of] Israel and have, in fact, settled quite well and fine.

Even though Godl Frajtag had "laughers" and "whistlers", he also had a great many hearty and cherished friends, who respected him greatly. This is proven by the fact that a large number of his admirers came to the train [station] upon his departure, and Symcha Rajch decorated him, on their behalf, with a silver badge for his merits as a communal activist and devoted idealist.

Upon arriving in [the Land of] Israel, Godl Frajtag organised a society of *Częstochower landsleit*. The number of Jews at the time was still a very small one and the economic conditions were not very elevated. So, the first question was how to create jobs for the immigrants to earn their livelihoods. Godl Frajtag, with his vigorous, entrepreneurial spirit, organised a house-building society [viz. cooperative] named "*Kvutza* Frajtag" [Frajtag Group]. In this manner, the *landsleit* were able to receive work and make a living.

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<sup>2</sup> [TN: Later known as Alkona Chrobolovsky.]

Godl Frajtag was in constant contact with Częstochowa and was the permanent Land of Israel correspondent for the newspapers *Częstochower Cajtung* and *Unser Weg*. Thus, he maintained continuous contact with the *landsleit* in Częstochowa.

He also organised a tea-packaging plant in Tel-Aviv under the name "Karat Tea", which exists to this day.

In the social arena, Godl Frajtag became convinced that the then small number of *Częstochower landsleit*, [even] with the best will [in the world], could not play a prominent part in the *Yishuv*<sup>3</sup>, and that the best thing would therefore be to organise an association of all the Polish Jews, within which all the smaller groups – viz. the [individual] *landsmannschaften* – would find an adequate mode of expression. He thought it and did it. Godl Frajtag met with an entire array of representatives of Polish Jews, such as Abram Lerner from Łódź, Benjamin Groskop from Lemberg [Lwów], Józef Pomrok from Radom, Berl Diamant from Chmielnik and a whole series of others, whereupon the Association of Polish Jews was formed – and it did hugely important work in the realm of helping new immigrants become settled, [provided with] mutual aid and so on. The *Częstochowers* were represented in the Association by Godl Frajtag and Mojsze Zylberszac.

Immediately following the founding of the Association, elections to the Tel-Aviv City Council were held. This was in 1927 and the Association won six seats, two of whom were *Częstochowers* - Rabbi Szajewicz (known, in Częstochowa, as the "Rabbi of Wola") and Godl Frajtag. The Association of Polish Jews even founded a bank, which was named "*Bank Oley Polin*" [Immigrants' Bank Palestine-Poland] and is nowadays called "*Bank Israel-Britannia*" [Israel-British Bank].

Godl Frajtag visited Częstochowa three times. The first time was in 1929 and, on that occasion, he conducted wide-ranging agitation for masses of Jews to leave Poland and emigrate to [the Land of] Israel. Besides lecturing on the matter at various meetings, he also wrote about it in the Częstochowa newspapers. The second time was in 1934. Then, Godl Frajtag visited Częstochowa for the third time in 1937, when he participated in the Paris World's Fair - his company. "Karat Tea", was awarded a silver medal there.

Godl Frajtag belongs amongst the unique activists of Częstochowa Jewry.

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<sup>3</sup> [TN: Heb., "Settlement"; name used in ref. to the body of Jewish residents in Palestine prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.]