

Message from Kopl Konarski of Belgium

The writer of this message, Kopl Konarski, is a *Częstochower landsmann* who has already been living in Belgium for many years. During the years of his childhood and youth, he absorbed spiritual Częstochowa into his soul, with all of its vital aspects of communal, cultural and organisational life. This put a seal on him for his entire life.

His activity distinctly shows that he carries on all the traditions of his hometown, which vibrated with all manner of communal institutions. Kopl Konarski is no more and no less than an Executive member of the Central Administration for Communal Activities in Antwerp, the responsible Administrator of the Beis Menucha Le'Zkeinim [Heb., Rest Home for the Elderly], Secretary of the Villa Altol children's colony (summer camp), Vice-Chairman of the ORT Union in Belgium, Committee of Management member of the Jewish Cooperative Loans Fund, member of the Editorial Council [of the] *Central Journal*, which handles social, communal and general issues, besides which he belongs to dozens of other local, regional and national institutions.

Kopl Konarski is a diamond broker by trade, and he is concurrently a significant contributor to the institutions to which he has been elected. He was awarded a medal by King Leopold II of Belgium for his social and communal activities.

Kopl Konarski visited Montreal in August 1961, and in the following message he gives his impressions as "a guest for a while who sees for a mile".

The Editor



Kopl Konarski

As I write these words, my mind is enveloped by the impressions that were made upon me during a visit in Montreal. I had come to visit my brother Charles Konarski and the family. However, the Czenstochover Landsmanshaft immediately found out and the Executive called a special meeting with my participation. It was the first time I had met the *landsleit* and I hardly recognised them - we had not seen each other for thirty years. In the best of cases, I had known them as children. Their names were still familiar to me and I also knew the streets where they had lived well, as I knew every stone of those streets and alleyways. I had walked down them with the uplifted spirits of childhood, in joy - if such had ever been - but mostly in sorrow and suffering, in contemplation and soul-searching.

As soon as the session commenced, my musings were diverted. Firstly, the Society's General Secretary introduced me. I truly do not know where he obtained so much information about me. I was so surprised, that I felt I would be unable to utter a single correct sentence. As luck would have it, I was actually not given the word - instead, regular discussions ensued.

The impression which I received from the communal report was that this was not a meeting being held by a relatively modest *landsmannschaft*, but by the Central Committee of some nationwide movement. What were the reports about? [They were] about the trials against Nazis that were being held in Germany, organisational bonds with New York, Chicago and Toronto, works on Czenstochowa published in the press and the preparation of a Canadian publication - viz. this book itself.

In the correspondence section, thank-you letters were read from *landsleit* overseas - from Israel and other countries - expressing thanks for the financial aid which the Society had sent them and, especially, for the friendly and kind attitude. Letters soliciting aid were also read and it was, in fact, decided to meet the requests of *landsleit* who were sick.

Each item of the agenda, which was handled, revealed to me the Society's separate fields of activity.

Once I had become acquainted with the Society's entire activity, I was asked to speak. By then, I was already enveloped in altogether different feelings. I already saw, by that time, not only a distinguished, active Executive, [fully] knowledgeable as to how to organise its activity, but I [also] perceived the bygone Jewish Community of Czenstochowa in miniature. I saw and felt that the members of the Executive were carrying on the traditions of the once glorious spiritual centre of Czenstochowa.

In front of me, I perceived men, each of whom had taken a long, thorny road of suffering, need, struggle, as well as a spiritual and physical wrangle. I saw and felt that these *landsleit* possessed a proper understanding towards those upon whom Destiny had not smiled - towards those who, after years of suffering under the Nazi regime, could not regain their physical equilibrium.

In my address, I shared news of Czenstochower *landsleit*, spoke a little about Belgium in general, and stressed the fact that the Society of Montreal needs to serve as a model for all Czenstochowa institutions.

The meeting made a colossal impression upon me. It refreshed, in my memory, the home of old - the home, where I spent the years of my childhood and youth, the home where I dreamt, thought and aspired to a world of honesty and justice.

Your humility in conducting such large and important relief and communal activities deserves very great recognition and gratitude.

With all my heart, I wish success in your activities.

Kopl Konarski



Officials of the Czenstochover and Vicinity Aid Society of Montreal

From (R-L, seated): Mojsze Frank - Minutes Secretary, Jankel Nightingale [Nachtigal] - Past-President, Jakub Świętarski - President.

From (R-L, standing): Abram Wajnsztok – Finance Secretary, Izrael Jakubowicz - active Executive member, Szmul Gelkopf - Treasurer.
