

E. Ben-Moshe

Rafał Federman (A Brief Biography)



It is impossible for me to imagine Częstochowa without [calling to mind] the prominence of the fiery, ebullient and fighting personality of Rafał Federman who, in his impressive activity as representative of the *Bund*, became an inseparable part of Częstochowa's scenery and of what was done in all fields of its life.

When I was still quite a young man, I did not know Federman. At that time, he was already a famous man, whose reputation preceded him. Even once I had matured and had begun [my] public activism, I did not belong to Federman's "camp" - the *Bund*.

He was not content with just distancing himself from Zionism, but was simply an anti-Zionist and, as the leader of the *Bund*, he fought Zionism relentlessly. That said, it should be noted that he was a Jew who was proud of his Jewish origins and who commanded respect with the [various] factions of the Jewish public and, particularly, with the Jewish proletariat, who regarded him as socialism's brave dreamer and fighter. The Poles, too, treated him with deference.

I vividly recall one occasion, on which I heard that workers' parades and demonstrations had been organised ahead of 1st May and, it was to be assumed, there would be confrontations with the police. In my great curiosity as a young lad, I went out onto the street to observe the events and it was, indeed, a magnificent sight. A multitude of people marched audaciously and courageously, with many red flags flying gloriously above, with Rafał Federman marching at their head. When the procession reached the assembly place, Federman set upon the authorities in a scorching speech and preached brazenly and fervently for the realisation of socialism. He reached his peak when the *Bund* demonstrators met the protestors of the Polish Workers' Party (PPS). He continued his address and, in his daring words in the Polish language, he ignited the entire mixed audience of workers, both Jews and Poles, who carried him on their hands as a token of their admiration and gratitude.

Federman also gained renown for his appearances as a representative of the workers on behalf of the *Bund*, in the *Kehilla* Council and the City Council, which were always exemplary.

He was a courageous fighter against antisemitism and its manifestations, denouncing it absolutely fearlessly at every opportunity and proving its blind hatred and flawed demagoguery.

Federman, who was bound to the city of Częstochowa with every fibre of his soul, even now cannot detach himself from the memories of his past.

When I arrived in New York and Federman found out that I had served as a soldier in the British Army and that, as a Częstochowa *landsmán*, I had been the first to visit this city in 1945, he requested of me in a letter to visit him and to tell him about the city and its remains and of its appearance following the Holocaust.

However, he was not content with the descriptions given by others, but travelled personally to Częstochowa, to absorb the atmosphere of Jewish Częstochowa. But his disillusion was extremely bitter upon perceiving the ruination of the city, in which everything had been destroyed and wiped out.

He also came to visit Israel in 1950, to see the fruits of that Zionism which he had fought against most of his life.

Federman traversed the country to its length and breadth, visiting *kibbutzim*, *moshavim*¹, cities and towns. After he had met the *Częstochowers* in Israel, Federman - the distinct *Bund* leader - "acknowledged" Israel's reality. Choking with tears of emotion, he spoke of the great creation that had taken place in Israel and [said that] he was delighted with what he had seen. Federman, with his characteristic honesty, fully admitted that he considered the State of Israel to be the only corner for the entirety of the globe's Jewry [and] that, in it, was the seed from which the trunk would rise, the branches sprout and the fruits be brought forth.

On his second visit to Israel in 1955, it was felt that he found the departure difficult and that he yearned to return and be united with his multitude of followers living in Israel, whom he loved so dearly.

¹ [TN: A type of Israeli settlement similar to a kibbutz, usually a cooperative agricultural community of individual farms.]