

Abram Gotlib

The Jewish Labour Party “Bund”*

This party, which was already created at the end of the 19th century, began its work in Poland, including in Częstochowa, in the first decade of the 20th century, shortly before the 1904-1905 revolution.

In 1902, the “Bund” had already come into contact with Częstochowa, following the pogrom which took place then in our city.

The party delegated, to us, one of its most active people, Max Liber, who later, in 1917, was elected as one of the leading personalities of the “Bund”, through his active participation in organising the revolution in Russia.

Max Liber investigated, in detail, the reasons for the pogrom and its tearful results and published an accurate description in the illegal, foreign organ of the “Bund”, “*Posledniye Novosti*” ([Ru.] “*Latest News*”, #92, dated 30th October 1902).

The Russian government, which endeavoured to conceal the truth regarding the Częstochowa pogrom from the broad public, especially abroad, was very upset by the “Bund’s” great “*chutzpa*”.

But within the circles of the Częstochowa Jewish workers, sympathy for the party grew precisely due to this.

At that time, the situation for Jewish workers was terrible. All large factories, even [those] belonging to Jewish manufacturers, were locked to them. They had to work alone, as independent craftsmen or as “apprentices” with small Jewish entrepreneurs, who ran very small and poor workshops, simply in their narrow apartments, working their employees 10-12 hours a day and this for very small wages. It is, therefore, no wonder that agitation, regarding the implementation of an 8-hour workday, had a large following from the workers.

The “Bund” participated actively in organising a three-day political strike, which transpired with adherence. It also took a great part in conducting the grandiose funeral for the seven victims (five female and two male workers), who tragically died during the great fire at Seweryn Landau’s celluloid factory.

The “Bund” then published an illegal announcement, in which it required workers to strike on the day of the funeral and to take part in it *en masse*.

Thousands of workers, indeed, attended the funeral, which took several hours. All speakers, in their obituaries, demonstrated to what extent the working-class was not properly protected from such calamities, due to the fact that manufacturers did not see to it that, in every workplace, safety measures were in place.

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The Częstochowa committee, also, affiliated itself with the Polish regional committee of the "*Bund*", so as to stand together protecting the interests of the working masses.

Antisemitic hatred then intensified then and rumours spread that dark elements were organising a pogrom on Jews.

The "*Bund*", which still remembered the bitter taste of the 1902 pogrom, together with other Jewish workers'-parties, decided to organise self-defence, under the name: "*Boyevyye Otryad*" ([Ru.] Combat Squad). The "*Bund's*" Central Committee delegated Dawid Kac to Częstochowa, who organised and armed the self-defence.

Sadly, the organised self-defence squads had to fulfil another task – protecting poor merchants from Jewish hooligans, from the so-called "Good Boys", who used to assault the stallholders in the marketplace and demand money from them or merchandise from their meagre "*stragany*" [Pol.; stalls], beating those murderously who refused to pay them [this] "poll-tax". In adherence to the instructions of the police, they also used to assault and beat Socialist activists. The armed Jewish workers put an end to this anarchy and, through a well-organised attack, liquidated these criminals and the Jewish merchants breathed freely.

On 8th October 1905, an assembly of *Bundists* was held, in which over 200 male and female members participated, in honour of the 8th anniversary of the "*Bund's*" existence. There, a resolution was passed which expressed satisfaction with the successful struggle and activity of the "*Bund*".

At the end of 1905, the "*Bund's*" Central Committee in Częstochowa was comprised of Abram Lipnik, Aleksander Golde, Uriel Flajszer, Ester Alter, Henie Gorelik and the female member "Anjuta".

At the same time, the assembly expressed gratitude to the 6th conference of the "*Bund*" for its decision to establish a Polish regional committee and demanded that this decision be implemented as soon as possible.

The *Bundist* party also held different party-meetings from time to time.

Of a particularly important significance was the party-assembly in the summer of 1906 when, in all *Bundist* organisations, the question was handled as whether to reunite with the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party.

Two opinions became crystallised - to agree or not to agree.

The Częstochowa organisation decided not to give in!

The organisation was also represented at the electoral conference of *Bundist* organisations, which elected delegates to the 5th Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party. In Częstochowa too, a "little *Bund*" existed, which distinguished itself with its honest and selfless work for the party.

Among others, those active within it included the later renowned lawyer Stanisław Neufeld and Szlomek Birnbaum, the son of the well-known cantor, Reb Abram Ber.

The "*Bund*" did not confine itself, in Częstochowa, to only political, educational work, but also conducted a fierce struggle for the improvement of the working-man's financial position. Together with other parties, it organised professional unions in different fields and ensured that it was represented in the managing boards of these unions. It also conducted affirmative, educational work

against financial terror and threats on part of the bourgeoisie, because it understood that, only thus, was it possible to attain favourable and lasting results.

The tsarist power, understandably, disliked all this. It set forth its dark forces to smother the revolutionary spirit. It began repressions and arrests and overfilled the prisons with the best and most active workers' activists of all schools of thought.

Apathy pervaded the broad masses. A great part had to flee abroad.

Częstochowa, which was near the German border, became the escape-point for political emigrants, who were forced to cross the border with false documents or to be smuggled, with the aid of the so-called "*pulpaskes*" [?]. Lone emigrants, without financial means, who scrambled to cross the border as quickly as possible, came regularly to Częstochowa.

The organisation had no monetary means with which to aid them. It proclaimed a fundraiser among its members for this purpose.

To what extent the financial situation was bad, it is enough to mention that this "fundraiser" only brought in 28 roubles and 50 kopeks! The working masses wished to help, but simply had nothing. The "*Bund*", at least, saw to it that the emigrants should not fall into the hands of people-smugglers.

The "*Bund*", nevertheless, did not become swept up in the general apathy and, during the elections to the first Russian Parliament's foundation assembly (the so-called "*Gosudarstvennaya Duma*" - The State Duma), it proclaimed the creation of an election-fund and all its organised members taxed themselves with a day's work wages and also enrolled themselves onto the voters' lists.

On 1st May 1907, the "*Bund*", as with other parties, issued an announcement in honour of the international workers' holiday.

In the years 1908-1915, when the Reaction raged so and the conscious working-class was enveloped with apathy, there existed, nonetheless, "cells" of devoted party-members, who made an effort to strengthen the faith and aspirations of the Jewish workers.



In the First World War, Częstochowa was soon occupied by the German army.

Although, at the beginning of the War, the German military was brutal enough to the civilian population, it was still much better than the Russian *satraps*.

A little later, the German invaders permitted social work. In our lines, too, a revival emerged. The *Bundist* organisation set out to organising itself. It arranged lectures with an increasingly, larger attendance. The weekly periodical "*Lebensfrage*" [Life-Question], which was edited by Vladimir Medem, was widely distributed amongst us.

At the end of 1916, *Bundists* established their workers' club, named after the deceased leader Stanisław Grosser. The club was a home for *Bundists* and their sympathisers and a centre of cultural activity.

In 1917, the club received greater financial aid from its members abroad, which enabled the party to intensify its work in various fields.

At the time, the committee comprised Jakob Rozenberg – Chairman, Józef Aronowicz – Secretary, Herszel Frajman, Abram Rotbart and a few other committee-members. Among the most active was the member Stroz.

The most important place in the party was taken by Józef Aronowicz, who was a talented speaker, and who, with his frequent lectures, helped break the influence of the assimilationist circles on the social life in the city.

It is obvious that the four years of the First World War had a colossal impact on the lives of Jewish people in general and for the working masses in particular.

The transfer of power, from the tsarist *satraps* to a self-governing and an independent Polish State, created a new era which was the most intensive and also colourful one in the history of Jewish settlement in Częstochowa.

A new epoch also began in the communal life of the Jewish workers' parties.

The newly-created Workers' Council, in which all workers' schools of thought took part, Polish and Jewish, had a very important significance.

It contained representation from the Polish Socialist Party (P.P.S.), the Communist Party, *Narodowy Związek Robotniczy* (N.Z.R.) [National Workers' Union], Christian Democrats (Ch.D.) and the Jewish workers' parties: "*Bund*", United (S.S.) and "*Poalei Zion*".

The *Bundist* representatives were Józef Aronowicz, Zalman Tenenberg, Max Brum and Abram Rozenblat.

Józef Aronowicz held an impressive talk at the Workers' Council against the antisemitic proposals of the *Chadecja* [Ch.D.], that Jews not be admitted to the Workers' Council and the impudent proposal was overthrown.

Sadly, both the Workers' Council and its militia existed only for a short time.

Following the creation of the independent Polish State, the Jewish population again stood before the task of fulfilling its civil obligation. Elections for the first City Council were set and, although the electoral regulations were still "tailored" by the German invaders and the rights of the working-class in general were very limited, nevertheless, the Jewish workers' parties organised themselves for the electoral battle and, to the first City Council, "*Bund*" member Józef Aronowicz was elected as a City Councillor.

Councillor Józef Aronowicz, in his principal declarations and speeches, explained the "*Bund's*" stance on a series of political and social questions regarding the city and the country, as well as against the Polish-Soviet war.

Rafail Federman, "United's" City Councillor, introduced a proposal that the City Council should demand the immediate release of Councillor Józef Aronowicz, in order that he should be able to carry out his obligations to his voters. P.P.S. Councillors also supported the proposal, which was accepted and Aronowicz was freed.

In accordance with the demand of the Central Jewish Schools Organisation (Z.J.S.O.) in Poland to unite all Jewish secular schools which each party had built for itself, in June 1922, a common

organisation was created, in Częstochowa also, of all three tendencies -“United”, “*Bund*” and “*Poalei Zion*” Left.

When, in 1922, “United” merged with a small splintered group of the P.P.S. which was headed by Dr Bolesław Drobner, together, they founded the “Independent Socialist Party”. Rafail Federman, together with a large group of members, went over to the “*Bund*” and this caused the “*Bund*’s” influence to broaden in Częstochowa.

In 1923, the “*Bund*” began publishing its own weekly, “*Arbeiter Wort*” [Workers Word].



“*Bund*” Board of Management in 1929
Sitting (from right to left): wife of Z. Cincinatus, R. Federman, Ch. Halberg-Cincinatus, M. Lederman and Mrs Lederman
Standing (as above): Mojsze Tuchmajer, Z. Cincinatus, B. Cincinatus, L. Kaminski, A. Rozenblat and Zilberberg
Bottom: the portrait of B. Michalewitz; to its right – Szymson Jakubowicz, left – Izaak Stopnicer

In 1925, the Bundist faction in the City Council issued a demand that the municipality subsidise the Jewish secular schools. At first, the City Council authorised assigning the symbolical support of 1,500 *złoty*ch, but in 1926, on the demand of *Bundist* Councillor Rafail Federman, the subsidy was increased to 4,000 *złoty*ch.

The unification of the three workers’ parties around the Jewish secular schools was like a thorn in the eyes of the Polish government, which desired to weaken these united forces. It was forced to wait twelve entire years before, in 1936, it dissolved the Częstochowa division of the Jewish Schools Organisation, in which the aforementioned parties were represented and in which they worked together.

At the initiative of the “*Bund*”, a division of the Z.J.S.O. was reopened in 1938. A new board of management was appointed, comprising A. Perec, M. Bekenstadt, U. Jaronowicz, W. Fajga, Sz. Jakubowicz, A. Bratt, G. Prędko, J. Kaufman, and J. Szymonowicz. All three Jewish workers’ parties were represented.

At the start of 1939, the new division of the Z.J.S.O. opened an afternoon-school for children in the Polish State’s “*Powszechna*” [Pol.; Universal] public school. At the afternoon-school, Yiddish and the history of the Jews were taught.

(It was not long before the blood-thirsty Asmodeus, Hitler, may his name and memory be obliterated, hurled himself upon Polish Jewry [and] destroyed all its spiritual and material treasures.

The greater part of the “*Bund*’s” leaders and the broad masses of working-people and idealists were killed in the horrific blood-deluge. Only a few individuals remained alive and were scattered and spread across the seven seas throughout the entire world. A few of them were also able to come to Israel.)



*The board of management of the professional union of woodworkers and [their] employees
In the picture (alphabetically): A. Blum, A. Berkowicz, M. Braun, Jakub A. Frajtag, Z. Cincinatus and H. Szklarz*