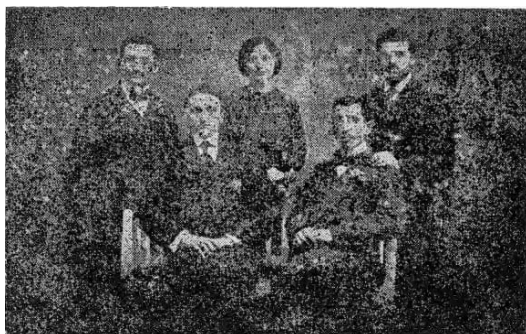


Abram Brum

A Bundle of Memories About the Left “*Poalei Zion*” in Częstochowa



A group of the first “Poalei Zion” members

I came to Częstochowa after the “*Poalei Zion*” Central Committee had already taken over the inheritance left by the Zionist-Socialist “*Vereinigte*” [Ger. United] party (Dr Józef Kruk’s party), which consisted of a series of cooperative shops and its own cooperative bakery.

Leon Zajdman was appointed as director of the cooperatives. The party’s premises were then located at Aleja 12. The situation inside the party was unbearable. The premises owned a broken-down, dishevelled shack. The party’s intelligentsia had distanced themselves. A few loyal party-members alone carried the heavy yoke of the internal party-work.

On “active service” in the party were Rafail Zajdman, Rozenchwajg, Prędko, Baromhercyk, Kaufman and Tenenbaum. Tenaciously and obsequiously, they proceeded with the party’s work on the premises of the “workers’ home” association, which was always under observation and visited by police secret agents of the contemporary *Endecja* [National Democracy movement] government in Poland.

At that time, the locales that operated fictitiously under the name “workers’ home” were completely liquidated everywhere.

In all of Poland, of our party’s locales, under the name “workers’ home”, only remained in two - in Łódź and Częstochowa. Due to all this, even in Częstochowa, Party Committee meetings were held, not at the locale, but in the private homes of members. Often, all documents were moved to the cooperative’s premises, in order to avoid control from government agencies.

In 1930, the government liquidated the “workers’ home”. Without having a locale from where to conduct our party-work for a long time, our political and social work certainly suffered in an entire series of professional and cultural organisations. Our members were active in the professional tailors’ union, and, there, led with the cells and had a great influence on the working class. Our influence spread amid the professional unions of the leather and bakery workers in particular.

From time to time, we also dedicated ourselves to receiving influence in school-grounds on the youth movement and particularly in the sports union “*Gwiazda*” [Stars]. We succeeded in this and new, young forces came into our ranks, who worked enthusiastically for our party’s benefit.

In 1932, we rented at premises at ulica Warszawska 5. We registered the locale with the authorities as an “association, evening courses for workers”. At the new locale, the party’s work activated and appointed representatives to all professional unions and cultural institutions.

The members Szymonowicz [and] Jakubowicz led our “needle-workers” units; with the leather-workers, our units were led by Baromhercyk, Dajczman, Szwarc and Józefowicz. In the professional union of the bakery-workers, which was always under the influence of the “*Bund*”, our member Abram Brum was admitted to the management as well as the presidency.

With the *Endecja-Sanacja* [“Sanation” (healing) party] regime, the International Workers’ Day holiday had to be celebrated under harsh conditions, especially in Częstochowa. For a long time, we contented ourselves with arranging internal May celebrations and May *akademie*, but with the growth of the great party-work amongst youth and sport unions, in the final years before the outbreak of the Second World War, we organised, almost every year, great May Day demonstrations and marched with our party-flag throughout the city. Our flag fluttered among the carriers with general-political tendencies, as well as of our [own] party tendencies. Due to the incredible May-demonstrations, the government, obviously, could not put up with it and shrank the area for our marches to just from the 1st Aleja to the bridge and back.

Visited by mounted police and secret agents, our members always stolidly proclaimed our resolutions in Yiddish and in Polish. Our demonstrations left an impression. The marching of the sports club “*Gwiazda*” (Stars) in their uniforms, as well as the brazen youth among the older members of our children’s’-movement, “*Jung Borochov*”.

(An honourable page in the history of “*Poalei Zion*” in Częstochowa was written by the youth who were led by a youth-committee - among them Szymonowicz, who was heroically killed during Nazi rule, following his release from the camp, on the way from the city courtyard.)

Other belonging to the youth committee included Izrail Diamant and Cypora Gotlib (now in Israel), Dajczman, Baromhercyk, Halberg, Goldberg, Szwarc and Geldbart. All led the legal and illegal political work, organising May demonstrations, Borochov *akademie* and ceremonies in commemoration of international workers’ struggles. They were the creators of the “*Jung Borochov*” organisation and provided their dashing uniforms. They also organised meetings and outings for the “*Poalei Zion*” youth of the entire region. The brilliant outing that took place in 1932 in Olkusz, with the participation of 1,500 youngsters from 10 cities, was also included in their active work.

The youth obviously actively participated in all the party’s public undertakings, especially in the very large operation of the party before the pro-Palestine workers congress. They also took part in the collective discussions and “box evenings*”, which were organised by other political schools of thought, such as the “*Bund*”, “*Zukunft*” [Ger. Future] and the communists. They also partook in frequent meetings with “*Ha’Shomer Ha’Tzair*”.

The children organisation, “*Jung-Bar*” (Young Borochovists), was mostly made up of children who studied at the Y.L Peretz school, children of the city’s poorer Jewish population.

The teacher Ch. Gerszon Chojnowicz, who lives in Israel in *kibbutz* “Heftziba”, helped to create the children’s organisation. The “*Jung-Bar*” management committee was made up of Szulim Halberg, Goldberg, Cesia (Cypora) Gotlib, Szwarc and Mordka Baromhercyk. Its young members participated in “rings”, outings, children’s games and also helped to spread the youth-press. They also participated in sports competitions.

The cultural work of the Left “*Poalei Zion*” was divided into internal and public areas. Those involved in the internal work partook were Leon Zajdman, Gerszon Prędko, the deceased member Wajs, Abram Brum and others. Besides party assemblies, which were very difficult to arrange with the

* [Translator’s note: At these evenings, questions which were written on notes and placed in a box were read and answered publicly.]

regime, the party was divided into narrow circles. The same happened with the youth, where the members Brum, Kaufman Tenenbaum and Abram Baromhercyk led the work.



A group of the Left "Poalei Zion" branch management of the "Poalei Zion" party (Left)

Our members were also representatives in general, social and cultural institutions, such as schools [and] general libraries. In the management of the schools-organisation, our party was represented by Kaufman and Leibish Tenenbaum.

All our public and cultural-literary undertakings had a following amongst the masses, in particular the visits of Zerubavel, Buksbaum [and] Lew. During our local election-campaigns, members from Łódź, Miodek, Stoljarski, Genia Lewi and Cytrynowski, greatly helped us.

In our cultural-literary gatherings, participants included Dr Rafael Mähler, Dr Emanuel Ringelblum, Dr Ajzensztadt, Mina Abelman and Leibel from Kraków.

When persecution against the Labour Movement commenced before the War, when members of our party and of other revolutionary parties were arrested and tried, our members participated in relief-action for the political detainees and arranged house-parties and fundraisers, organised patronages over those languishing in the prisons and aided them with money and food packages.

In 1937, our party participated with a great following in the elections to the Zionist Congress. [It] sold many *shekels* and worked energetically in the election campaign.

In the final years before the War, the Polish fascists, the *Endecja* and the *Sanacja* people, became increasingly more violent, the hatred against Jews yet stronger, the laws regarding *shechitah* [ritual *kosher* slaughter] – forbidden, the famous "Owszem" declaration*, assaults on Jewish students following the pogrom in Przytyk. Częstochowa was not spared [any of this].

* [Translator's note: The reference here is to a declaration made by PM Felicjan Sławoj Składkowski, stating that whilst violence to Jews was deplorable, boycotting and shunning them - Owszem! (Of course!)]

On Saturday, 19th June 1937, at 10:00 o'clock in the morning, the meat-worker Józef Pendrak, a member of the Nutritional Association, was assaulted by a Polish hooligan, Stefan Baran. Seeing as how Józef Pendrak had a permit to carry weapons, in order to protect himself from the attack, he fired a few times and wounded the assailant, who died on the way to the hospital. The tragic event immediately caused a great commotion in the city. The antisemites at once took advantage of [the situation] and began attacking Jews walking in the streets. Our Party Committee decided to organise a self-defence [unit]. House-committees were quickly organised in all the Jewish houses. The youth was mobilised in the same manner as in wartime. For self-defence, a telephone centre was fixed, for speedy connection with all parts of the city. Provision of the necessary equipment to crush the attack was also seen to.

On Saturday afternoon, an open pogrom began and Sunday afternoon, during the prayers at the cloisters, from the *Rynek Warszawski* [Warsaw Market Square] side, a mass of furious peasants, with students at the front, appeared. Their cry of "*Hit Jews!*" deafened the streets.

But, at a signal, from all the houses on Nadrzeczna, Garncarska, Senatorska and Kozia streets, our members came forth, together with other Jews who were called by us to take part in the self-defence, and put up a fierce resistance. The heated *pogromchiks*, poor fellows, retreated in shame, and thus was averted the cruel attack, planned by our enemies, on the densely populated Jewish area in the city.

The party suffered greatly from the outflow of members who left Częstochowa.

Our party always took part in the election-campaigns to the City Council, conducted propaganda, every time receiving a few hundred votes. But, unfortunately, it was never able to achieve a seat. That was how it was in the years 1925-1927. The same also [happened] at the elections to the first Polish *Sejm*.

Only before the last World War was it possible, through an alliance with another workers' party, to introduce the writer of these lines as a representative of "*Poalei Zion*" in the City Council. Sadly, his activity was a short one. (The bloody war ended it all).