

**Abram Zak (Buenos Aires)**

## **Dr Józef Kruk**

When we speak of Dr Kruk, we must read some pages of the beautiful chapter of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Poland between the two world wars. The name of Dr Kruk epitomises that heroic struggle for rightness. From his earliest years, Dr Kruk has devoted his whole life to this struggle.

Dr Józef Kruk's path to Socialist Zionism was one of emotions, filled with dynamics, as suits his revolutionary spirit.

Dr Kruk fought for his ideals with a double weapon - with the word, as one of the most popular orators in Poland, as a tribune of the people, both in the Jewish and Polish street and with writing, as a fine writer-publicist in the Jewish and Polish press.

We must also not forget that, in pre-War Poland, the road was not scattered with roses for a workers' leader and especially not for a Jewish one.

Not far from Brisk in Lithuania was the tearfully renowned location of Kartuz-Bereza, with a gruesome concentration camp and Dr Kruk could not avoid being a "lodger" there.

Over the course of the years, Dr Kruk published various periodicals [and] an entire series of [literary] portraits of famous Jewish and non-Jewish political personalities and theorists, such as Zangwill, Liebknecht, Bebel, Jaurès, Lenin, Trotsky, Kautsky, Kropotkin, Róża Luksemburg, Vera Figner, and many, many others. Dr Kruk was proficient in all the movements of different nations. He was well acquainted with their leaders and they are masterfully described in his portraits.



*The "Independent" Committee; sitting, from right to left:  
D. Szlezinger, M. Weksler, Dr J. Kruk, J. Zarnowiecki, E. Chrobołowski, and  
Sz. Nirenberg.  
Standing, from right to left: M. Alter, A. Win, A. Bratt, Sz. Frank, and L.  
Berkowicz*

It befell Dr Józef Kruk to be present at the Battle for Jerusalem<sup>68</sup>, during the siege, and he lived through the historic events with great exhilaration. The Jewish revolution swept him away and gave him such wings as had none of all the other revolutions. His enthusiasm and wonderment for Jewish heroics may be seen in his collection of essays, entitled *Tzvaot Ha'Shichrur* ("The Armies of Liberation"), which was published in Israel immediately upon the Jewish State's first year.



**As an addendum to the writer Abram Zak's article, we also present a few biographical notes concerning Dr Józef Kruk.  
(The Editors)**



Józef Kruk was born in 1885 to a wealthy family, which was very much assimilated. In the beginning, he studied in a private Polish school and later in the Russian gymnasium. At the Częstochowa gymnasium, he organised a students' circle, which was engaged in Jewish history and literature. He later organised various students' circles in the gymnasia of Piotrków, Sosnowiec, Będzin, Zawiercie, Łódź [and] Suwałki.

In 1903, a conference of all these students' circles was held in Świder, near Warsaw. Exactly at that same time, the first circle of Workers-Zionists was established in Warsaw and, at the gymnasia-conference, Józef Kruk, together with Józef Leszczynski and Józef Czernichow-Danieli, presented a programme similar to that of the Workers-Zionists. A Students' Zionist Socialist Union was [then] formed, whose central committee was based in Częstochowa and whose main leader was Józef Kruk.

In 1905, when the general strike broke out in Russia, Kruk, together with a group of Polish and Jewish labourers, implemented the general strike in Częstochowa. Together with a few Polish socialists, he also led a strike at the Częstochowa gymnasium for classes not to be conducted in Russian, but in Polish instead. Kruk was consequently banned from the gymnasium.

His lodgings were the place where the first activists, who organised the Zionist Socialist Workers Party in Częstochowa, used to congregate.

From 1906 [and on], Kruk studied in universities abroad (Zürich, Munich, Halle and Berne). In Zürich, he married the student (later medical doctor) Raja Rapoport, who had also actively taken part in the Świder gymnasia conference in 1903 and, later, in the students' circles. Józef Kruk was the leader of the fledgling Zionist Socialist Workers Party's "Central Foreign Committee" and he was in close contact with the European socialist parties' leaders. At the student-immigrant assemblies, he conducted public debates with Vladimir Lenin, Georgi Plekhanov, Leon Trotsky and Róża Luksemburg.

At the outbreak of the First World War, Józef Kruk and his wife were living in London, where he became close friends with Israel Zangwill and participated in the *Territorialist* movement. He also helped Vladimir Jabotinsky organise the Jewish Legion.

Dr Kruk performed various activities amongst the working masses in Whitechapel. Together with the Russian revolutionaries, he organised the London Committee of Delegates of the Russian, Polish, Jewish, Georgian, and Latvian parties. Future Soviet ministers also belonged to this Committee -

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<sup>68</sup> [TN: From December 1947 to 18 July 1948, during the 1947–48 Civil War in Mandatory Palestine.]

Tchitcherin and Litvinov. With the outbreak of the revolution in Russia, Kruk and his wife travelled to Leningrad, where he became a member of the local "Workers' Soviet" [viz. Council].

Later, Józef Kruk came to Warsaw, where he became the chairman of the United Jewish Socialist Workers Party ("S.S." and "Seymists") and Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Der Neuer Weg* [The New Way]. He took part in the international socialist congresses and was a member of the Executive Committee of the [Labour and] Socialist International. There was not even one single city or town in Poland where Dr Józef Kruk did not hold conferences and lectures on socio-political and literary themes. He was arrested dozens of times and was sent to the Kartuz-Bereza concentration camp, from which he was only freed through the energetic intervention of world-famous personalities, such as Romain Rolland, Henri Barbusse, Bernard Shaw, and Bertrand Russell. Afterwards, for two years, he lay in a sanatorium suffering from lung disease.

When Hitler's armies occupied Poland, Józef Kruk and his wife stole across the border [in the] woods and arrived [first] in Białystok and, later, in Wilna. From there, the Kruks made their way through Norway, Denmark, Sweden and France to the Land of Israel, where they arrived in 1940, settling in Jerusalem.

The Częstochowa *Landsmannschaft*<sup>69</sup> chose Dr Józef Kruk as its Honorary Chairman. In the Land of Israel, Dr Kruk is engaged in fruitful publicist activity, publishing articles in the newspapers *Davar*, *Ha'Poel Ha'Tzair*, and *Letzte Naves*<sup>70</sup>.

The Jews of Częstochowa [in Israel], together with Israeli leaders, marked their famous landsman's 70<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> birthdays with jubilee celebrations in Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv, at which speakers included President Yitzchak Ben-Zvi z''l, the Chairman of the *Knesset* Yosef Sprinzak z''l and (long years may they live) the President Zalman Shazar, Izaak Grünbaum, Golda Meir, Zalman Aran, Dr Zerach Warhaftig, the member [of the *Knesset*] Yona Kesse, the former Israeli ambassador Dr Benzion Razin, and the Chairman of the *Landsmannschaft*, Dr Horowicz.

The Jubilee-Committee decided to publish Dr Kruk's memoirs, which will appear both in Hebrew and Yiddish.

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<sup>69</sup> [TN: Ger.; association of refugees coming from the same region.]

<sup>70</sup> [TN: "Word," and "The Young Worker," in Hebrew, and "Latest News," in Yiddish.]