

**Adam Sztajnbrecher**

## **Jews in the Communist Movement**

The Communist Movement, also, had great influence on the Jewish population in Częstochowa. There, the Jewish intellectual Jerzy Fride and the Jewish leather-worker Mojsze Kaneman camped side-by-side.

Kaneman became active in the Communist party in the later years. He was chairman of the leather-workers' professional union, at Nowy Rynek 2 [New Market Square]. He died in the 1920's, in Częstochowa, from tuberculosis.

In the ranks of the S.D.K.P.L [*Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy*; Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania], the progenitor of Communism [in Poland], were found Dr Frankenberg (still a student at the time), together with the Jewish shoemaker Jankiel Wasiliewicz. (Wasiliewicz was, in later years, active in the illegal Communist Party and, during the period of Hitler's invasion, actively participated actively in the anti-Nazi underground movement in Częstochowa. His daughter also took part in the anti-Nazi struggle and fell in action.)

Kohn (from ulica Stradomska), who later played a central role in the political life of Soviet Russia (his further fate is unknown), also took an active part in the said revolutionary party.

Max Opatowski also took an active part in "S.D.K.P.L". In the later years, already in independent, liberated Poland, Max Opatowski was incarcerated several times for communist activism. He was the secretary of the professional union of Workers of the Tailors' [Guild]. (During Hitler's invasion, Max Opatowski was among the first organisers of the anti-Nazi underground movement in Częstochowa. He was killed in Treblinka.)

The same ranks also contained Gustaw Zorski (until the 1920's, he belonged to the Communist Party and, later, he entered the Polish Socialist Party, "P.P.S."). A renowned political activist and a lawyer by profession, Marya Prawer, Zorski's wife, was active in the Communist Party. (Also, Koniarski the lawyer [and] Szlojme Frankenberg were among the organisers of the anti-Nazi struggle organisation in Częstochowa, together with Izaak Rzensinski.) Well-known, not only in Częstochowa, Dawid Richter also took his first political step in the ranks of the "S.D.K.P.L". [He was] the son of a poor family. He lived on ulica Warszawska, in the "red house". This house received that name due to the fact that most of its tenants were communists - Tobiasz, Jochimowicz, Szmulewicz and others. The house belonged to the tombstone engraver, Frank.

Dawid Richter reached a central position in the Communist Party. During the time that the "Bureau for Jewish Affairs in the Central Committee of the Communist Party" existed, Dawid Richter belonged to this bureau. He spent long years in different political incarnations. He was often in Soviet Russia on official missions for the Communist Party in Poland. Richter was also a talented journalist, writing under various pseudonyms in all the Communist Party's publications.

Usually, he was in Warsaw, but his wife, "Black Feige", with their two children (a son and a daughter), lived in Częstochowa until the end.

(Hitler's invasion of Poland found Richter in Warsaw, from where he managed to cross over to Białystok, which was then already occupied by the Soviets. There, Dawid Richter re-entered vigorous political activity and he published a central newspaper. In 1941, when Hitler also attacked the Soviet Russia, Dawid Richter was murdered by the Nazis. Dawid Richter's son Jerzy was active in the anti-Nazi struggle movement in Częstochowa.)

As I have already mentioned, the Communist movement in Częstochowa had great influence over the Jewish population. It conducted vigorous political activity and consolidated a large number of Jewish workers in its ranks. The communists' greatest activity occurred in the 1920's, when the central point existed – the semi-legal locale at Nowy Rynek 2.

On these premises were found a great number of professional unions, which were under the influence of the communists. This "semi-legal" locale also enabled the communists to consolidate Jewish workers for political causes, under the mantle of professional unions. Thanks to these unions, they were also able to continue maintaining party-functionaries. One of the strongest professional unions, at the time, was that of the Workers of the Tailors' [Guild], the so-called "Needle Union", which encompassed the majority of the tailors, specifically those in the bespoke men's and women's garments area, as well as the cheap ready-to-wear ones. The secretary of that union was very often, at the same time, also a party-functionary.

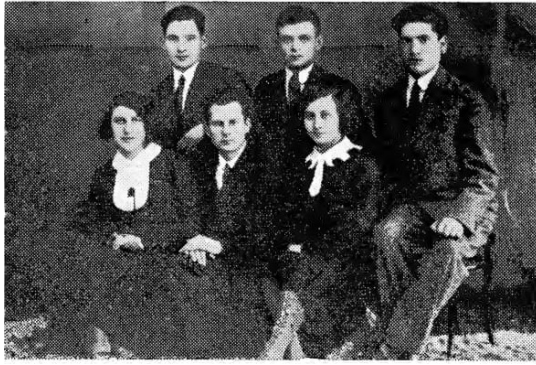
Among these secretaries were the aforementioned Mark Opatowski, Tobiasz, Chaim Dreksler (They were all among the pioneers who organised the anti-Nazi struggle in Częstochowa), Elek Lewensztajn (sat long years in prison for communist activism) [and] Mojsze Richter (a younger brother of Dawid Richter). In the later years, he was also a party-functionary in Warsaw. He spent the last years of his life in Montevideo (Uruguay) and was part of the central leadership of the Communist Party there. He was also the editor of its main organ. He died there after the last World War.

The Chairman of the "Needle Union" was Chaim Jakob Flammenbaum. He was also elected through the Communist Party as a Częstochowa City Councillor. He was in the prisons, where he became ill, and he died in Częstochowa.

The second largest union, in both its membership number and activity, was the "Leather Workers" union, which encompassed all the gaiter-makers, cobblers and tannery-workers. The Chairman of the Leather Union was Mojsze Kaneman, about whom I've already told.

The secretaries (at different times) were, among others, Leon Tenenberg, Szymon Prędko (sat in jail, [then] went away to Russia, where he was arrested and exiled. Afterwards, he was freed and sent to the front to fight the Germans. He survived the War and was again arrested in Soviet Russia. He was later rehabilitated and returned to Poland. He now lives in Warsaw. He visited in Israel in 1963.), Lipman Berliner (came to the party straight from a *yeshivah*, where he had sat and learned with great diligence [and] was then pursued by the police, [He] emigrated to Belgium, where he lives to this day), Faitel Warszawski [and] Berek Jurysta (died in Warsaw after the War).

The locale at Nowy Rynek 2 also contained the "Painters' Union", whose Chairman was Jakob Wajnrajch. He, too, came straight from the Talmud and the *yeshivah*-bench. The same was [the case] with the secretary of the Painters' Union, Joz, who has already been living in Israel for many years. He also came into the Communist Movement straight from the *yeshivah*. Together with them, there were also Judl Krakowski, Henig (Witas, who lives in Israel), Fridman and many others. (During the years, Jakob Wajnrajch also belonged to the group of the first organisers of the underground struggle organisation against Nazism in Częstochowa, He was killed in Buchenwald.)



*A group of communist activists*  
*Sitting (from right to left): Mania Brzoska, Izaak Gotlib and*  
*Ruchel Pfefer*  
*Standing (as above): Adam Sztajnbrecher, Szymon Prędko*  
*and Fiszel Pfefer*

organised the anti-Nazi resistance combat-organisation in Częstochowa. He also belonged to the international underground movement against Nazism in Buchenwald.)

That address also contained the “Metal Union”. Its Chairman was Bernard Brokman, [its] Secretaries were Szmerek Jochimowicz (pseudonym: *Stok*) and Adam Sztajnbrecher. Jochimowicz went away to Soviet Russia for making an attack on a provocateur. In the 1930’s, he was killed there, together with many other communists.

In Częstochowa, Jochimowicz worked as an instructor at the vocational school on ulica Garncarska, in the locksmiths-mechanics department.

(Adam Sztajnbrecher, together with those mentioned above, was in the first pioneers’-group, which

The same locale also contained the “Chemistry Workers”, “Woodworkers” [and] “Hairdressing Workers”. These professional unions were led by Judl Krakowski, Zygmunt Zilbersztajn, Fuks, Szmulewicz [and] Szlojme Goldberg (a son of the well-known porter, Majer Riz). He left Poland and went to Soviet Russia, after shooting the informer Pejsach Henechowicz. He was killed there in the 1930’s.

The communist professional unions, of course, also conducted a fierce struggle in the financial arena. They demanded better working conditions and conducted strikes in the factories and workshops. But the main activity was concentrated in the political arena. They took part in all the central, as well as local, political campaigns. They organised mass protests, distributed illegal literature and periodicals, posted illegal announcements all over the city, hung up communist banners and illegal red flags on the electrical wires, pasted illegal literature over all the walls, organised successful street demonstrations on 1<sup>st</sup> May and on the anniversary of the communist October revolution in Russia, Anti-War days [and] International Women’s Day, as well as unemployed demonstrations. They also organised “*masówki*” [Pol.; mass meetings] for the workers of all the large factories, such as “Warta”, “Częstochowianka”, “Pilcer”, “Stradom”, “*Huta* [Pol.; ironworks] Raków” and others.

The communists also conducted a broad range of cultural activity. They organised a drama circle at their premises, under the directorship of Kuna Lewensztajn. In the later years, Lewensztajn was part of the “Wilna Troupe” and, after the War, he was a member of the Jewish State-Theatre and appeared together with Ida Kamińska. Culture evenings, lectures, “living newspapers” and diverse cultural projects were also organised.

At that time, the Communist Party had three Częstochowa City Councillors, among them being the tailors’ worker Chaim Jakob Flammenbaum. The majority of the votes for the communists were in fact Jewish. A large part of the Jewish workers and folks’-masses, as well as the Jewish intelligentsia and student youth, believed that the communists would address the Jewish masses’ bloody questions.

The police closure of the premises at Nowy Rynek 2 was sorely felt in Częstochowa, especially by the Jewish communists. Their activity had been diminished. They transferred their activity over into the professional unions of the “P.P.S.”, “*Bund*”, “*Poalei Zion*” Left and the “Independent Socialists”. As

members of the professional unions, the activity of the "Red Factions" [and] "Left-Wing" increased in these places. The premises of the Commercial Workers (at 2<sup>nd</sup> Aleja 20), where the Secretary was Izydor Herszlikowicz (a contemporary functionary of the Communist Party in Częstochowa) were also extensively utilised. Izydor Herszlikowicz was, in later years, shot by the Communists in Warsaw as a provocateur.

The communists had the use of the premises on ulica Krótka, in a house belonging to Zilberszac. The Secretary of the club was Adek Landau, one of our party-functionaries (killed in Sosnowiec by the Polish political police who, during interrogation, tortured him to death). At that same locale were active a group of former "*HaShomer HaTzair*" members, who had joined the Communist Party. They were Jusek Działowski and others of his friends. The library that was there became more intensively used, [as well as] the "*Ferma Ogrodnicza*" (a pioneers' training- *kibbutz* and also private lodgings, especially those where the communist painters worked). "Special excursions" to it were organised.

The Jewish communists made up for the loss of their premises at Nowy Rynek 2 with an intensified activity in the factories where they worked. They organised strikes, financial as well as political.

In the 1930's, there were strikes against antisemitism and fascism, against fascist pogroms and other troubles. Such strikes took place in all factories where Jewish communists worked. At the factory of the Horowicz and Partners (H.I.S.), one strike lasted three months. The workers at the factory of the Landau brothers, "Wulkan", "Metras", "Stal", "Altman", "Zilbersztajn" and of many other smaller factories, also went on strike.

A special role was played by offshoot organisations and associations which were created by the communists. One of the principal offshoot organisations was the "MOPR" (International Relief Organisation for Revolutionists). Besides the political tasks which this organisation needed to fulfil, it was also a mass-movement to collect money for political prisoners. To the leadership of the "MOPR", among others, the Communist Party appointed Lajbisz Frank (who was in "*Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*" for many years), Natka Rozencwajg, Dorka Berliner, Jechiel Rozencwajg and many others. All these came to communism from "*Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*". The "MOPR" generally operated amongst the Jewish intelligentsia, with whom this activity was very popular.

There also existed an association named "*Ogroid*", whose task was dealing with agricultural problems (especially in connection to Birobidzhan). The organisation was led by Józef Hajman (former member of "*Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*"). He was also later a party-functionary in Warsaw. He was forced to leave Poland and became a political emigrant to France. (During the War, Józef Hajman took part in the French underground movement against the Nazis and was killed in Oświęcim [Auschwitz]).

There was also the Society of Readers of "*Fraynd*" [Yid.; friend], a daily newspaper published illegally in Warsaw (in the Yiddish language) by the communists (Dawid Richter was one of its main editors). This Society, besides seeing to the paper's distribution, also occupied itself with social and political activity.

A sports-club named "*Ogniwo*" [Pol.; The Cell] also existed. The Jewish communists were very active amongst the students in the Częstochowa high schools. Thus, there were communist cells in all the city's high schools. There was even a cell at the State high school, to which among others, belonged Mietek Perec (son of the renowned public activist, the dentist Perec from the Nowy Rynek. Mietek is alive and lives in Warsaw), Heniek Tencer (later, he was among the pioneers of the resistance movement in Częstochowa. He was killed by the Nazis), Mietek Pruszycki, Paweł Lewkowicz, Alek Bem, Mietek Wajnberg [and] Janek Lewkowicz. From the Jewish high schools, there was Simek

Abramowicz (one of the well-known worsted manufacturers on the 1<sup>st</sup> Aleja. He, too, participated in the resistance movement in Częstochowa and fell in battle), Adzik [?] Hocherman, Icek Bratman, Pola Tenenbaum (killed by the Nazis) [and] Jerzy Kopinski (now lives in Warsaw). From the Axer high school, there was Emma Geszychter (now in Warsaw), Dora Oderberg (killed by the Nazis), Herman Lichtman [and] Mietek Braun. Almost all of them were arrested at different times and were expelled from their schools.

It was not only school students who sacrificed their future in the struggle for Jewish rights. Grown, mature people also renounced a good, comfortable life, being unwilling to agree to conditions that harmed Jewish national honour.

We should mention the handling of the electrical-engineer, Ernst Sztajnhardt (a member of the municipal Communist Party Committee). The Belgian-French Electric Society promised him the position of head-engineer, but on condition that he should officially convert to the Catholic faith. Although Sztajnhardt was, at the time, in a difficult financial situation, he refused the offer. Sztajnhardt was from Warsaw and had, for many years, lived in Częstochowa, where he married Giza Proskurowska, the daughter of Alter Proskurowski (from ulica Piłsudskiego).

Jewish communists from Częstochowa also fought on the battlefields of Spain, at the time of the "People's Republic", against Franco-Hitler-Mussolini fascism.

Amongst those who participated in these freedom-fights was Fiszle Pfefer (from the Stary Rynek). He was forced to leave Częstochowa due to political persecution and went to France as a political emigrant.

Upon the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, Fiszle Pfefer enlisted as a volunteer in the fight against the fascist Franco. During the Second World War, he fought in the French underground army against Nazism. He fell with the military rank of an officer. He left a wife and a son. His wife Hele (from the Ministry of Interior) also belonged to the Party in Częstochowa. She died in Israel in 1965 (their son is in Israel). Awigdor Rozen (Wyczek) also fought in Spain. He died, after the War, in Szczecin (Poland). Heniek Guterman fell in Spain. Inzelsztajn fell there as well, with the rank of officer. Jankel Moszek Unglik from Kłobuck (near Częstochowa) played an important role in the French underground army in the fight against the Nazi invader. He lived there under the name "Jacques Kaminski". He now lives in Warsaw. Chaskel Wirsztel (from ulica Garncarska) also took part in the fight against the Nazi invader (lives now in Paris). Paweł Jakubowicz and Mietek Broniatowski were also among the fighters.



We must also note the great proceedings against the Częstochowa communists that took place in January 1929, in which the following male and female members of the party were sentenced to very severe fines - Simche Huberman, Ester Swerczynski, Szmul Lazarowicz, Lea Kochman, Herszel Borzykowski, Shulem Berlinski, Leib Borzykowski, Izrail Rapaport, Salomon Pawłowicz, Hela Szpic, Izidor Herszlikowicz, Chaim Sztern and Leib Ingelsztajn.

When we write about the Jewish communists in Częstochowa, we must also mention the victims who fell in the 1930's in Poland and Soviet Russia. Among others also killed were Bronka Liberman (from ulica Krótka, who was active in Częstochowa and was forced to leave home as a political emigrant) [and] Szyja Sztern (the son of a baker on ulica Garncarska). He fled from Częstochowa to Soviet Russia after carrying out an attack on the informer Szuchter and was killed there. The same destiny was shared by Józef Mager (Jossele), who fled to Soviet Russia after murdering a

provocateur. Bronka Swerczewska from Kłobuck was active in the party in Częstochowa, was imprisoned in Piotrków, and, from there, fled to Soviet Russia, where she was tragically killed. Józef and Gita Rapaport were both active in the party in Częstochowa and in Łódź. He spent many years in various prison. He was known as "*Po Pięć*" [Pol.; "five each", or "for five (złoty or groszy)"]. They fled to Soviet Russia as political emigrants and were arrested there and sent to penal servitude. Fortunately, they remained alive. They were "rehabilitated" and returned to Poland. They live now in Warsaw.

The names listed do not fill the list of the Częstochowa communist victims!



(In 1939, when Hitler's army fell upon Poland, the Jewish communists turned to the Polish government and requested weapons in order to fight the Nazis together with the Polish army, but the Polish government denied the request.

Many communists left the city together with the Polish army. They included Elek Lewensztajn with his wife Lesza, Masza Kochman, Zygmunt Zilbersztajn, Fajtel Warszawski, Józef Frenkel "*Dziadek*" [Pol.; grandfather] (released from prison), Leib Borzykowski, Perec Silman, Renia Woznica and many others. Sadly, almost none of them returned.

Already in the first days when the Nazis entered Częstochowa, they arrested and sent to Oświęcim [Auschwitz] the known Jewish communists Witek Zlotnik (from the Nowy Rynek), Pawłowicz (a brother-in-law of Dudek Szlezinger) [and] Leizer Silman (known as "Gandhi"). The first two were killed in the mass-grave that is called Oświęcim. Leizer Silman (from ulica Piłsudskiego) instead, managed to survive. He was active in the resistance movement in Buchenwald, as well as in Oświęcim. He now lives in Warsaw as 'Leon Stasiak'.

Thus, the Jewish communists in Częstochowa made a significant contribution in the fight for national rights against discrimination, antisemitism and fascism, outside their city and also outside the borders of Poland.

These facts put a stamp on the historical events which developed in the particularly difficult living-conditions of the Jews and will doubtlessly be valued as revolutionary manifestations in the fight for Jewish rights. This evaluation will certainly be made through the historical essence of these events and it will be noted for generations as to how Jewish workers and intelligentsia, working-youth and student-youth, risked their lives in the fight for a better tomorrow.

The highest humanistic principles were, at that time, in the period of romantic idealism of the communist movement, etched on the illegal red flags. They pulled with them many Jews to the struggle for their realisation.

But, in the actual conditions created, they did not come to pass –  
The dreamers have departed, together with their sweet dreams!



[B. Borochof Workers' Primary School (July 1922)]



["Vereinigete" [United] Primary School (Grade 2) (June 1922)]