

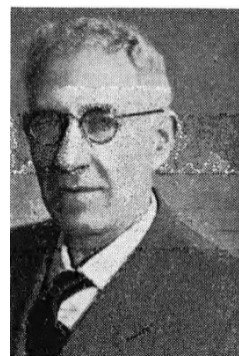
Abram Gotlib

The “*Poalei Zion*” party in Częstochowa

“*Poalei Zion*” had already become active in Częstochowa 1904. It was established by the Zionist high schools and was conducted by Szyia Fridman - son of the editor of “*Ha’Tzofe*” [The Observer], which appeared at that time in Warsaw.

The revolutionary socialist idea, as well as the influence of Nachman Sirkin, who wanted to merge Zionism with Socialism, also infiltrated Częstochowa. Here too, there were arguments about Yiddish and Hebrew.

Following the split within bourgeois Zionism, due to The Uganda Proposal, the same occurred in the Zionist-Socialist circles. Two parties were created - the S.Z (Socialists-Zionists) and “*Poalei Zion*”. The split was conducted at a conference in Kraków.



At the first assembly of “*Poalei Zion*” in Warsaw, in 1904, the Social-Democratic Workers’ Union - “*Poalei Zion*” was created and, from the Częstochowa members, Szymon Pruszycki was elected to the Central Committee.

The leading and active members were, at the time (alphabetically [Heb.]) Eliaz Ickowicz, Dawid Borzykowski, Aleksander Behm, Abram Wiewiorka, Wolf Lewenhof, Izrail Fajman and Szymon Pruszycki.

At the initiative of I. Fajman, evening courses were opened for male and female workers. The course for girls was directed by Gitte Zilbermenc and the teachers were Mrs Wajzer, Leder, Majorczyk and his wife, Kelim and a few others.

Thanks to this educational and organisational work, the party acquired active agitators and organisers, among whom should be mentioned are Judl Danziger, Szymon Waldfogel, Izrail Warszawski, Majer Fajwlowicz, Mojsze Cieszynski and Jakob Kopinski.

In all the political strikes and mass demonstrations that arose at the time and especially in 1905, hundreds of Jewish workers marched under the flag of “*Poalei Zion*”.

The renowned tea-house of “Marjem Lea”, where the members used to meet, was frequently “visited” by the police, who quite often arrested suspicious “tea-drinkers” there.

The “*Poalei Zion*” organisation in Częstochowa also organised a self-defence group and provided it with weapons.

From time to time, Częstochowa was visited by party leaders, among them Ber Borochof and Marc Jarblum.

Following the downfall of the revolution in 1905, the Tsarist government began to persecute the workers’ movement more intensively. Part of the intelligentsia abandoned the movement. Others hid themselves or went abroad. But there were enough who were arrested and sent to Siberia.

Members from the Częstochowa "*Poalei Zion*" who were arrested and sent away included Dawid Borzykowski, Judl Danziger, Izrail Warszawski and Majer Fajwlowicz. Szymon Waldfogel fled abroad. Due to the fact that Częstochowa was near the German border, many of our members came here from faraway Russia and then smuggled themselves out abroad. The party fully aided them.

In 1906, Marc Jarblum (who used the pseudonym "Comrade Solomon") lived in Częstochowa and was editor of the "*Poalei Zion*" regional weekly periodical "*Das Jüdische Arbeiter Wort*" [The Jewish Worker's Word], which was printed in Kraków.

It should be noted that members of "*Poalei Zion*" travelled to the Land of Israel long before the large *Aliyah*. Thus, as early as 1907, the "*Poalei-Zionist*" activist, Józef Kaluszynski, a printing-press worker, who was known as "Y. Arieli", founder of a large printing-press in Tel-Aviv, travelled to [the Land of] Israel.

Later, in 1909, the Finkler brothers (among the first pupils at the Częstochowa horticultural farm) left, as did Gerszon Ickowicz, Chaim Behm, Handelsman, Bluma Rubinsztajn and others.

Sadly, not all remained in Israel.

Although the work in the years 1907-08 was very limited and strongly conspiratorial, the party did everything to maintain its existence.

In 1909, the writer of these lines travelled to Warsaw and, there, succeeded in renewing the contact with the "*Poalei Zion*" Central committee and, thanks to it, the Częstochowa members also received the "information leaflets", which the Central Committee printed every fortnight on a hectograph.

Many times, joint political actions were also conducted with diverse workers' parties. When, in 1912, protest-strikes erupted throughout the Russian Empire against the cruel and bloody suppression of the workers' strike at the goldfields by the Lena River in Siberia, the Jewish workers' parties in Częstochowa also organised a protest-strike.

That very successful strike showed that the Jewish workers, too, felt a great sentiment of responsibility and solidarity.

The writer of these lines represented the "*Poalei Zion*" party in the unified commission which organised the successful protest-strike.

Shortly before the First World War, "*Poalei Zion*" members Dawid Borzykowski, Judl Danziger and Izrail Warszawski returned from exile and Sz. Waldfogel from abroad. Party work took on a greater prominence. But immediately, with the outbreak of the World War, Częstochowa was also occupied by the German army. Economic life came to a standstill, due to the regular requisitions and because Częstochowa was torn from its large Russian market, and, therewith, communal activity was also completely paralysed.

The Germans announced that it was possible to be voluntarily registered for work in the German factories and in the coal-mines. Many workers, including hundreds of Jews, were sent away to Germany for work.

The first urgent necessity was to alleviate, as far as possible, the need among the Jewish masses, which was very great. The workers' parties organised an inexpensive kitchen and a free tea-hall. A

“workers’-home” was also established, which had a great influence on the workers. Through our party’s participation in the different social actions, it grew and became a great mass-organisation.

Later, with the combined forces of the workers’ parties, a bakery-cafeteria was established. Our party was represented in its organisation by A. Gotlib.



A group of “Poalei Zion” members

At the end of 1916, the Germans organised elections for the City Council, according to a reactionary voting system. The “*Poalei Zion*” party called a great mass-assembly and, there, fiercely protested against this voting system.

When the bloody war ended in 1918 and the German army surrendered and allowed itself to be disarmed by the civilian population, the P.P.S took over power in Częstochowa. They disarmed them and created a “folk’s-militia”. “*Poalei Zion*” also took part in the disarming. The government of Independent Poland in Lublin issued a decree under which the civilian population was to give up its weapons to government agencies.

The freshly-organised P.P.S militia entered and seized the “workers’ home” and, there too, searched for weapons and arrested anyone suspicious.

At the transporting of the weapons confiscated from the “*Poalei Zion*”, Icek Rozenchwajg was arrested at the train-station. With great effort, the party were able to free him.

The “Temporary Polish Government”, which was primarily a socialist one, gained the trust of the working classes and, in 1919, six representatives of “*Poalei Zion*” were also chosen for the [newly-] created workers’ councils.

At the City Council as well, two members of “*Poalei Zion*” were elected as Councillors - Aleksander Behm and Szymon Waldfogel (after the latter’s death on 20th February 1920, Juda Danziger, who died in Israel, took his place).

At that time, Częstochowa went through many economic difficulties. At that time, our party opened a food-cooperative and several departments, as well as its own bakery, with which to alleviate the difficult plight of the Jewish population.

Once the party was allowed to conduct its activities legally, it organised different assemblies with the participation of leading personages such as Yaakov Zerubavel, Dr Chaim Zhitlowsky, Marc Jarblum and A. Revusky.

Following the “*Poalei Zion*” conference in Kraków, a split emerged in the party and “*Poalei Zion*” Right and Left were created. The split aroused a conflict among the factions, regarding the assets of the splintered party, but in the end, the financial institutions remained with the left wing.

These frictions did not weaken the “*Poalei Zion*” party, but from it were created two congressional parties: Left and Right “*Poalei Zion*”.



A group of active public figures from the unified Poalei Zion workers' party (in centre, the party's Leader, Marc Jarblum). In the picture are seen (in alphabetical order): A. Behm, Itta Berman, Abram Gotlib, Chawa Gotlib, Ch.Sz. Gotlib, J. Gotlib, two Gelbers, Danziger, Warszawski, Wolf, Leon, Mordka and Rafail Zajdman, three Turners, Trajman, Marc Jarblum, Lipman Montag, Motel Nudelman, D. Filipowicz, Feldman, G. Frajtag, G. Prędkie, Koziwoda, Kotlarz, Lea Koniecpoler, Konsens, Karlsbrum, Rozencwajg, Sz. And Lea Rajch, Rajcher, Szaja and Szwarcbaum