

Czenstochover Yidn

(Review)

In the book *Czenstochover Yidn*, published by the *Landsmannschaft* in America, I believed I would find a comprehensive, historical, mirror-image of Jewish life, struggle and demise of Czenstochowa Jewry.

Regretfully, I experienced a great disappointment reading through the book - and any Czenstochowa landsmann will experience the same feeling.

Even more disappointed will be those *Czenstochover landsleit* who, during the entire epoch of the Nazi tyranny, fought in the underground movement, bleeding and hurting, because the issues of combat generally do find their expression there.

In the general destruction of Czenstochowa Jewry, everyone, without exception, fought, bled and suffered. It is therefore tactless - and from the historical standpoint impermissible - that a single party should ascribe to its name all the heroic deeds, which the Czenstochowa youth of all parties and tendencies displayed.

A historical work demands certain objectivity and consistency.

The *Judenrat* in Czenstochowa oppressed, with all the Gestapo means, first and foremost the poorer population. The wealthier people bought themselves off with money, while the poor were deported to the forced labour camps, sent off to unpaid forced labour, and were also the first victims at the selections, because that is what the *Judenrat* wished.

The Bund, as a socialist party, should have taken under its protection precisely the victims of that Gestapo-appointed *Judenrat*. It is, in fact, the exact opposite - the president of the *Judenrat*, Leon Kopiński, who ruled with a strong hand, with the power of the Gestapo, is actually portrayed as a martyr, a Torah scholar and a faithful Jew.

The claim of the former ghetto policeman L. Jurista, to the effect that ghetto president, Leon Kopiński, and other members of the *Judenrat* supported the "*kibbutz*", must also be categorically rejected.

It was just the opposite - Leon Kopiński was the one who made difficulties at every step of the way, and on account of him and his mishandlings, the "*kibbutz*" at the farm had to be dissolved and conduct its activities clandestinely, and not only from the Gestapo, but also in order that the *Judenrat* should not know.

The best proof is, that the patience of the organised workers of the *Arbeiterrat* exploded, and they besieged the building of the *Judenrat* on various occasions, demolishing the

furnishings there. The forced labourers, exhausted to death and famished, demanded BREAD, and President Leon Kopiński responded with Gestapo and arrests by the Jewish policemen, the leaders of the *akcje*.

I do not wish to touch on the innumerable facts, episodes and details in the book *Czenstochover Yidn* which do not correspond with reality.

We may suffice with the aforementioned facts regarding Leon Kopiński, and the lack of any mention of the *Arbeiterrat's* existence, which was the pioneer of the underground movement in the "Small Ghetto", as well as the tendentious handling of the issue of the underground movement.

In one place [there], L. Brener tells us the following:

"The leftist parties also organised a professional union, which saw to it and fought that the Judenrat should better pay, feed and clothe the workers who were sent, by it, to various German workplaces. [Silent¹] strikes were held and, more than once, the premises of the Judenrat were demolished, when the demands of the workers' delegates were not met." (p. 191)

From this quote we learn that, in the times of the "Big Ghetto", a trade union of workers existed, which led strikes and demolished the premises of the *Judenrat*.

Why does L. Brener tell us nothing of sorrowful activity of the *Judenrat*, against which the workers fought with hunger strikes? Why is it not relayed, that the *Judenrat* took to its aid armed "*Gestapowces*" to disperse the hungry workers and arrest the workers' representatives? Why does L. Brener not mention who were the organisers of the clandestine trade union - the only institution [of its kind] in the whole of Poland during the War?

Then we would have gleaned a different picture from the book. We would have discovered, that the struggle was led by all organisations and parties. We would have learnt about the activity of the *Arbeiterrat* (that is what the clandestine trade union was called) in all fields - the economy, relief funds, culture and politics - which was the preparation for the *ŻOB* organisation (the Jewish Combat Organisation).

However it may be, I wish to assert the following:

I am one of the founders of the *Arbeiterrat* in Czenstochowa, which participated and led in the struggle against the *Judenrat*. On several occasions, I was arrested by the Jewish ghetto police at the instigation of Leon Kopiński, enduring various persecutions and repressions.

¹ [TN: This word, which appears in the original "Czenstochover Yidn", has been omitted here.]



I took part in the negotiations with the *Judenrat* - and the president, Leon Kopyński, who is portrayed in the book *Czenstochover Yidn* as a Torah scholar and a faithful Jew, would bring to these negotiations a "Gestapowiec" of his, with whom it was his custom to get drunk, obviously for money, which had been pressed out of the Jewish populace, in order to exercise pressure on the workers' delegation.

In the "Small Ghetto", there was a single underground

movement named ŻOB – the Jewish Combat Organisation – to which all the organisations, without exception, belonged: Zionists, Socialists, and Communists. Where they took a protocol of 150 members of a Bundist combat organisation, is a mystery².

The book *Czenstochover Yidn* cannot be considered a historical work, but [only] as a fragment of the history of the Bund in Cześćochowa.

² [TN: Ref. to "Czenstochover Yidn", pp. 223-226, see there.]