

surrender. It struggled hard for its existence and tried various ways of prolonging its life. One of these ways was turning the paper into a Cooperative. If I remember correctly, that was in the summer of 1937, several months before the end. What this transformation meant for the workers of the paper I will exemplify with myself. I was a bachelor at the time and, if I am not mistaken, my salary was round about 150 Zloty a month. That was all my income and, at that time, I lived in a rented room for which I paid 50 Zloty a month. Suddenly, without any preparation beforehand, the announcement was made one day that a Cooperative was being set up and that wages would be paid in accordance with the financial situation. I was told that from that day onwards my salary would be in the region of 33 or 35 Zloty a month. The shock was profound. The keyworkers in the Party tried in the course of time somewhat to improve our pay, but in the end they grew tired and the paper was closed down.

In the summer of 1938, when I was already in Eretz Israel, I heard that efforts were again being exerted to renew the appearance of the paper. Dr. Helman and Baruch Zuckerman engaged in the matter in the course of their visit to Eretz Israel and one day they invited me over for a talk and suggested that I return to Poland in order to work on the paper that was due to be renewed. A similar proposal was made to Y. Halpern, who had also meanwhile come on Aliyah. We did not accept the suggestion. The paper in its new metamorphosis began to appear under the name of *Folksvort*, only about two months before the outbreak of World War II, at the beginning of July, 1939. Through the efforts of Dr. Helman, a complete printing shop was acquired and the editorial offices, together with the printing shop, were situated on Nalewki Street, facing *Moment*. *Folksvort* appeared as an evening paper in small format. Dr. Helman continued as editor while W. Romanowski served as editorial secretary. The editorial staff was the same as that of *Dos Naye Vort*, with the exception of those who had gone on Aliyah.

The building in which the editorial offices and print-shop were situated, was destroyed in the bombing of Warsaw. Of the people connected with the paper, almost only those who had gone on Aliyah survived.

## Periodicals of the Zionist left

Moshe Erem

Of the ten measures of woe and destruction that descended upon the world in September, 1939, the Jewish people took nine and outstanding in this suffering was the Holocaust of Polish Jewry, which was uprooted and never returned to its pristine glory. Moreover, whatever Hitler failed to accomplish was completed by "Socialist" Poland, in which the Jewish problem was fundamentally solved. Poland today is a country which implemented to the full the antisemitic vision of a "Judenrein" State. It is doubtful whether in the whole of the tearful history of the Jewish people there is such a perfect example of the obliteration of the existence of a Jewish community in the past. Five hundred years after the expulsion from Spain and the conversion of synagogues into churches, care is still taken to preserve here and there—in Cordova, Toledo, Tudela, Granada and Seville—Hebrew inscriptions, Jewish names, the remnants of gravestones and memorial tablets to Jewish worthies. In the Spanish universities, one can peruse the literary treasures of Spanish Jewry and make use of them for research purposes. In the monasteries of Poland, too, one can undoubtedly find a vast amount of material relating to Polish Jewry, but no mention of it is made nor does anyone trouble to examine it.

Everything is kept under lock and seal and only those who "keep to the line" are at liberty to peruse it. However, there are no areas closed to history, and its scrolls—scrolls of fire—cry out to us in prose and in verse, in cultural and literary creations of all kinds, in manuscript, in memorial documents and in the press. If one is anxious to know wherein our brethren drew their courage and strength to contend with the problems of the times, one need only thumb through the pages of the press of those days, which reflected the day to day death throes, the public struggles, the anguish and despair, the yearning and deep faith, the dreams and illusions of Polish Jewry. Each paper had its particular trend and strain. Each paper reflected its special taste and

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each paper had its readers and adherents. Such was "Arbeter Zeitung", the organ of the Left Poalei Zion. At first, it was the organ of the undivided Poalei Zion and after the rift that set in, in the Movement, at the Vienna Conference (1920), it became the organ of the Left Poalei Zion.

The first issue of the weekly made its appearance on November 14, 1918, on the defeat of Germany, one year after the outbreak of the October Revolution in Russia, the repercussions of which reverberated throughout the world.

The paper was often confiscated by the authorities, closed down for some time and then made its appearance again until it was silenced in September, 1939. The paper made its incursions to the numerous townlets inhabited by the Jews of Poland, bringing to its thousands of readers the message of the Labour Movement and its evaluations of events in the world at large, in Poland, in the Polish Jewish Community and in all the countries of the Jewish dispersion. A special and honoured place in the paper was occupied by Eretz Israel—Palestine as it was popularly known. The echoes of life in Eretz Israel, the political and public struggles, the efforts at creativity and upbuilding in the country, were always reflected in the columns of the paper. Before long, *Arbeter Zeitung* became the central organ of the World Movement in addition to local organs. Just as the Jewish community in Poland was the heart of world Jewry, when a dividing wall arose between Polish Jewry and Jewry in Soviet Russia, so the Jewish press in Poland became the principal artery in the body of Jewry throughout the Dispersion.

The paper was fed by its readers, by reports which were



*Arbeter-Zeitung, Left Poalei Zion weekly, Warsaw, 1918-1939*

sent to it in profusion, and sometimes in a few coarse lines giving details of life in the various Jewish communities. These reports served as a living bridge between distant communities, which became close and nearby. Its portals were always open to debate about ideas and ideals which were accepted as irrefragable, but in complete loyalty to the foundations of the Movement.

Jacob Zerubabel was the undisputed leader of the group. Orator, journalist and gifted literary critic, he was the am-



*Nahum Nir-Rafalkes*



*Jacob Zerubabel*

bassador of the Movement to all countries of the Jewish dispersion. He left behind him a literary and publicistic harvest that was astounding in its strength and variety of themes. Zerubabel was one of the greatest exponents of the teachings of Ber Borochov, a leader and guide, who captured the heart of his audience by his fervour. A leader of the Socialist Movement from its inception in Russia and in Eretz Israel, to which he returned after his wanderings, he died in Tel Aviv a day before the outbreak of the Six Day War.

Nahum Nir-Rafalkes was the outstanding emissary of the Movement in all the stormy days that it underwent. He was its spokesman in its confrontations with the world Communist movement—the Comintern. Possessed of a sharp, analytical mind, his style was nonetheless simple and clear. He was a member of the Municipal Council of Warsaw. After settling in Eretz Israel, he became the representative

of the Movement in the national institutions. He was a Member of the Knesset from the first to the seventh, and for some time also served as Speaker of the Knesset. He was a clever and astute jurist. He died in Tel Aviv in 1968.

Yitzhak Lev took command of the professional struggles, questions of cooperation and municipal affairs, as a member of the Warsaw Municipal Council. He was among the builders of the Sports Organisation *Shtern* (Star). He also



Yitzhak Lev



Joseph Rosen



Shachna Zagan



Jacob Kenner

served as the liaison with the Polish Socialist Party—the PPS—over all its branches. Possessed of great organisational abilities, it was he who initiated the tourism project of Eretz Israel, in order to break through the barrier of the immigration certificates which were withheld from members of the Movement. He made his Aliyah to Eretz Israel during World War II and was one of the activists in “Aliyah Beth”. He died in Tel Aviv.

Joseph Rosen, an orator and journalist of rare ability, served as the spearhead of the Movement in its debates with opponents, particularly with the Yevsektzia and the Bund. He made a name for himself for the pungency of his expression, for his powers of debate, his zeal for the truth and for the uncovering of all manifestations of hypocrisy and of the servility of the “Yes” man. He made his Aliyah to Eretz Israel in 1932 and became one of the chief moulders of the Movement and the builders of its political line. He died in Tel Aviv.

Shachna Zagan was the organisational “dynamo” of the Movement. It was he who settled all disputes and led the Movement with a sure and steady hand, with understanding, always finding the “magic formula” that consolidated the party. By his wisdom and level-headedness, he made himself liked, even by his opponents. One of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto and of the Ghetto revolt, he met his death together with his family in the Holocaust.

Mordechai Buchsbaum was the most outstanding political figure in the party. He served as political commentator in *Arbeter Zeitung*. A representative of the Leftist wing, he was nonetheless a sharp opponent of “Leftist” diversion which nonetheless carried with it the germ of liquidation. His maximalist concept led him in opposition to the careful attitude evinced by many to a confirmation of the idea of Eretz Israel as a Jewish State, as far back as 1936. He met his death at Bergen Belsen.

Yitzhak Shipper, the great Jewish historian and sociologist, enriched the paper with his researches on the social changes in Jewish life, by his deep going analyses which were presented to the reader in clear and polished style. Counted among the leading political publicists, he was at home in Polish and in world policy. In due course he seceded from the Movement and joined the radical Zionist wing led by Yitzhak Gruenbaum. Until his last days he

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Jacob Kenner

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maintained close relations with the Movement. He was killed in the Holocaust.

In Emanuel Ringelbaum, one of Shipper’s gifted disciples and a follower in his path, people saw a splendid link in the golden chain of researchers into Jewish history and sociology. He was the living spirit in the Warsaw Ghetto and in Jewish public and cultural activity. Down to his last days, as he sat in a bunker, he engaged in describing the shocking martyrdom of the Ghetto. Ringelbaum’s literary remains, which were saved from destruction, serve as the most faithful documentation of the Holocaust. He met his death together with his family in the Warsaw Ghetto.

A.S. Juris, the “wonder child” of the Movement, through his shining appearances and writing, added charming lightness to the paper and contributed to a refinement of the taste of its readers. After a long time he left the party to join Mapai. He undertook a mission to South America on its behalf. He died in Israel in 1971.

Shaul Amsterdam was a shining star on the political firmament of the Movement and was for a long time one of its principal spokesmen. In his time, he regarded the teachings of Ber Borochov as the fullest incarnation of the Marxist concept in understanding the processes of the Jewish problem. He eschewed over simplification and a vulgarisation of the national problem and evaluated Borochovism as a universal contribution of great value to Marxist methodology. He was the emissary of the Movement in its debate with the Comintern but it was in the course of this mission that he deserted the Movement and passed over to the ranks of the Communist Party in Poland, reaching the highest places in the hierarchy of the world Communist Movement until he, too, was poled by the axe of the horrible purges and lost his life in that he was accused of treachery and espionage like many in the highest ranks of Communism.

Gershon Gershuni, the youngest member of the group, a delicate soul, was possessed of wide learning, which he placed at the disposal of the Movement and its organ. Of moderate opinions, he at the same time was meticulous over every attempt to treat likely the precept of personal implementation—that of Aliyah to Eretz Israel. Most of his articles were devoted to a consolidation of the teachings of Socialist Zionism and to a criticism of the distortions in the Communist Movement. On his Aliyah to Eretz Israel,

he gained a central position in the life of the Movement and all its metamorphoses. He died in Tel Aviv.

Yaakov Peterzeil, one of the editors of the youth paper of Poalei Zion, was a regular correspondent of *Arbeter Zeitung*. An expert in cooperation and social services, he was greatly beloved by the youth in whom he kindled the spark of “a love of Zion” in its literal sense; he came on Aliyah in 1924. Of weak physique, he accepted the “bap-



Yaakov Peterzeil



Moshe Erem

tism” of physical labour with great joy and excitement. In his party occupation he knew of no fatigue. It was he who initiated the idea of bringing out Poalei Zion collected papers and put the idea into practice. He undertook missions on behalf of the party abroad on several occasions, in order to cement close ties with Socialist circles throughout the world. On one hamsin day, however, his blood pressure rose inordinately high and he succumbed—in 1955.

Daniel Leibl (Alexander) was a thinker of rare order and served the Movement by his deep-going articles. A philologist, he was a researcher in the scriptures showing great intuition and universal knowledge. He was a translator par excellence. Coming on Aliyah in 1924, he tried his hand at physical labour but was very soon picked by the leadership of his Party to take over its organs in Hebrew and Yiddish and to conduct its information services generally. A meticulous editor and proofreader (he worked for many years on *Davar*), he died in Jerusalem.

Max Erik, a literary critic, whose essays aroused wide interest and admiration in Jewish literary circles, was foretold a glorious future in the forefront of literary criticism and linguistic research. He succumbed to the inducement of moving over to Minsk in order to take over the Chair in Yiddish literature at the University there. But he, too, was not spared the bitter fate of the purges and he met his death in prison or in a concentration camp.

Jacob Kenner, secretary of the Borochoch Youth, was one of the editors of its organ. He disseminated the teachings of Poalei Zion throughout Galicia among the poor sections of the working youth, to whom he brought his message with great warmth. He contributed regularly to *Arbeter Zeitung* as spokesman of the youth, giving expression to its plight and yearnings. On the outbreak of World War II, he succeeded in making his way to the United States via the Far East. Late in life, he came on Aliyah to Eretz Israel and died in Tel Aviv.

Shmuel Edelman (Mulah) was one of the most wonderful figures in the Movement. A patron of Poalei Zion in Lodz, he worked with great modesty. He did not know what privacy was since the Party and its struggles were his lot in life. He came on Aliyah to Eretz Israel before the outbreak of the War and took over as something self-understood the secretariat of the World Union. He made every endeavour to create links with the survivors of the Holocaust who were wandering all over Russia and saw to their existence and encouragement. He died in Eretz Israel.

In this list we have not mentioned all the collaborators on the paper, who imbued it with their spirit, love and devotion. We shall mention only several names of people who more or less contributed regularly to the paper. From Eretz Israel was—Z. Abramowitz, J. Yitzhaki, M. Erem (who began writing for the paper as far back as 1919, when he arrived from Soviet Russia), V. Shimoni, the poets Papiernikov and Lev (member of Kibbutz Givat Hashloshah and the writers Joel Mastbaum, Izban and Zipor-Blei; from

the United States—Bezalel Sherman and Abraham Rivotzki; from the Soviet Union—Baruch Eisenstadt (beforehand member of the Centre in Poland), Liema Rosenhaus, Meir Ger, Shlomo Heivin and Zelig Breisher; from Germany—Stiegler and Serpov; from England—Noah Barou; from France—Joseph Friedman; from Belgium—Abush Verber; from Argentine—Chaim Finkelstein.

Lastly, from the inception of the paper, before the split in the Movement, the paper had the privilege of the participation of Zalman Rubashov (Z. Shazar), who graced its columns with all the fervour of his soul, Mark Jarblum (Aniutin)—a guide through the complexes of international Socialist thought; Melech Neustadt (M. Noy) and Anshel Reiss—among the principal combatants for the wholeness of the Movement, who compromised between the Left and the Right but always kept the flame of Poalei Zion ideology burning and guarded it against injury and effacement.

The paper rested on three central themes: Zionism and Eretz Israel; a strengthening of the National pride of the Jews wherever they were; a yearning for the implementation of the Socialist vision.

There was not one issue of the paper that failed to instill in its readers a deep faith in the invincibility of the Zionist idea and of its creative enterprise in Eretz Israel and the upbuilding of the country. Its debate with the Bund, with the Yevseksia, with the assimilationists, with those in the "Folkspartei" who tried to reduce the image of Eretz Israel, was the daily bread of the paper.

A central place in the paper was devoted to the national struggle of Polish Jewry. The debate between revolutionary Socialism and Socialist opportunism, the close connection with the October Revolution, criticism of political reality which infringed on man's right to freedom of thought, and above all, the deep shock during the period of the staged show trials, filled the pages of the paper. The achievements of the Revolution were always stressed but its failures were never covered up.