

The Jews in Lodz during the Period of Partitions 1793-1914

Lodz, one of the greatest towns of contemporary Poland, is a peculiar centre, whose exceptionally dynamic development during the period from the 1820's until 1914 is due to the expansion of the textile industry. When in 1820 the governmental authorities of the Polish Kingdom selected Lodz, a small agricultural-handicrafts town, as a factory settlement, the number of its population did not exceed 800 inhabitants. However, after 94 years of intensive industrialisation, in 1914 Lodz was the greatest industrial town on Polish lands, while the number of population surpassed 500 thousand inhabitants.

The exceptionally dynamic development of Lodz, which became the centre of Polish textile, was the outcome of a number of factors, namely: the beneficial economic policy of the government of the Polish Kingdom in the 1820's, the immigration to the town during the period from the 1820's up to the 1850's of weavers and entrepreneurs from German lands, the absorptive Russian markets - particularly after 1877, as well as the initiatives of this centre's inhabitants - whether Germans, Jews or Poles.

A particular role in the history of pre-1914 Lodz was played by Jewish inhabitants. To this specific problem, the author has devoted the present monography. The first chapter deals with the legal situation of the Jews until 1862, when they received citizenship rights in the Polish Kingdom. The next issue were the causes of the settlement in Lodz of the Jewish population and its territorial origins.

Hence, the intense immigration of Jews to Lodz started during the 1840's, when the town was already an important centre of textile production. In the period up to the 1880's, they came mainly from the territory of the Polish Kingdom. However, after the introduction in Russia in 1882 of a law, which limited the possibility of inhabiting by Jews western provinces (guberniyas) of the Empire, mass emigration of that population started to the territory of the Polish Kingdom, including mainly Warsaw and Lodz.

During the years 1885-1914 more than 40 thousand Jews came from the territory of Russia, of whom more than 10 thousand became permanent domiciles, finding here excellent conditions for their economic activities in the fields of commerce and industry. Whereas in general during the years 1793-1914 the number of the town's population had risen almost 3000 times, from 191 to 500 500 persons, at the same time the number of Jewish population rose by 14 000 times, from 11 to 162 500 persons.

During World War I, Lodz alongside Warsaw became the greatest centre of Jewish population, both on the level of Polish lands as well as Europe. With respect to the vocational structure of Lodz inhabitants, the Jews concentrated in their hands more than 70% of commercial enterprises and more than 47% of industrial ones. Moreover, in the period up to 1914 in real estates. Whereas in 1864 they owned merely somewhat above 10% of the general number of estates in the town, in 1913 the percentage rose to 31%.

A substantial role was played by Jewish businessmen in financial institutions, operating in Lodz. On the whole, in the period prior to 1913 among the 37 financial-crediting institutions, which existed in the town, in 22 of them the Jews had their representatives in the managements and directing boards, while 11 of these institutions had an exclusively Jewish character. It is worthwhile to add, that in the period before 1914 the Lodz Jewish-owned textile industry enterprises had concentrated in their hands 27% of global output and 22% of the general number of employees of the industry in the Polish Kingdom. Amongst the greatest textile industry enterprises in the Polish Kingdom, a leading role was performed by such joint stock companies operating in Lodz as: „I. K. Poznański” , „Sz. Rosenblatt” , „M. Silberstein” , „M. A. Wiener” , „M . Kohn” , „J. Wojdyslawski” , „Stiller i Bielschowsky” , and also the enterprises of Jakub Hirsberg and Maks Wilczyński, Adam Osser, Henryk Hirsberg and Edward Birnbaum, Salomon Barciński and Company, and Borys Wachs.

The Jews of Lodz had played a significant role in organising the cultural life of such a typical industrial town, where life was focussed

mainly upon economic questions. It is worthwhile to point out, that the first bookshop in the town was founded by a Jew, Jankiel Gutsztadt, in 1848. In the period prior to 1914, the majority of bookshops and publishing houses, including printing firms too, were established by Jewish businessmen. These publishing houses printed books and journals in Polish, Yidish, Hebrew and Russian languages. Due to political considerations, the emergence of Jewish newspapers, published in Yidish, was relatively late, namely since 1904. Among the most popular of them, it is necessary to mention „Łodzier Togblat” , „Łodzier Leb” , „Di Nachricht” and „Łodzier Idische Cajtung” . Among the most meritorious publishers and editors, it is worthwhile to mention Moszek and Mendel Hamburski’s, Saul Tewi Hochberg, Abram Baruch Kassman, Isajasz Uger, Abram Tenenbaum and Lejzor Kahan.

In the pre-World War I period, a significant Jewish artistic community had emerged in Lodz. In 1905, at the initiative of Icchak Zandberg, the first permanent Jewish theatre was established, which was placed at the building of the Fryderyk Sellin Great Theatre. In that theatre, a number of famous actors were playing, namely Ester Rachel Kamińska, Fanny Blumental, Klara Jong or Borys Tomaszewski.

In 1912, in turn at the initiative of Juliusz Adler and Herma Sierocki, a second Jewish permanent theatre was founded at Cegielniana Street. It is worthwhile to add, that until 1914 only the Jewish and Polish communities possessed two permanent scenes each; the Germans had at their disposal only one theatre - „Thalia” .

In addition to theatres, the Jewish community had - in early XX century —• created a number of institutions dealing with cultural life. Special role in this field was played by the Lodz Musical and Literary Society „Hazomir” and the Jewish Musical-Dramatic Society „Harfa” , which brought about choruses and musical bands, and also organised spectacles and lecture panels.

At the turn of the X IX and XX centuries in Lodz, a significant circle of plastic artists emerged, among whom the most distinguished were Samuel Hirszenberg, Leopold Pilichowski and M aurycy Trębacz.

Moreover, it is worthwhile to mention the works of such Jewish painters of the period connected to Lodz as Natan Altman, Dawid Modenstein and Leon Hirszenberg (Samuel's brother). It should be elaborated, that painters studies abroad - among others, of Samuel Hirszenberg and Leopold Pilichowski - were possible thanks to the generosity of some Jewish bourgeois families, mainly the Poznaiski's and Silbersteins. Also in Lodz, the career of one of the most talented Jewish sculptors Henryk (Enoch) Glicenstein started, whose talent - yet as a 17-year old boy - was discovered by „Dziennik Łódzki” .

In Lodz too had their origins young talents (poets, painters, artists) - Marek Szwarc, Icchak Lichtenstein, Icchak (Vincent) Brauner, Ida Brauner, Henryk Barciński, Mojżesz Broderson, Pola Lidenfeld, Zofia Gutentag, Icchak Kacnelson and Jecheskiel Mojżesz Neuman, who started their artistic career before 1914 (among other places, in Paris), and after World War I in 1918-1919 founded the known group „Jung Idysz” .

Lodz was also the place of activities of such distinguished Jewish architects as Gustaw Landau-Gutenteger, Dawid Lande, Adolf Zeligson and many others. They worked out the projects of many factory buildings as well residences in Lodz, including the synagogue at Spacerowa Street and Izrael Poznański palaces. Jewish schools, with the exception of religious kheder-schools, which were operating during the entire studied period, started to expand on the basis of initiatives and funds of representatives of Jewish bourgeoisie, and in the first place - the Konstadt family.

During the period from the 1860's up to 1914, in Lodz 12 Jewish elementary schools were established, of which two were 2-class and ten 1-class schools. Jewish vocational schools were founded thanks to the support of the „Talmud-Tora” Society and the

foundation of Jarociński's Jewish family. The „Talmud-Tora” School, operating at 46/48 Średnia Street in a building erected by the Jarociński's, was financially supported by the richest Jewish industrialists - I. K. Poznański, Markus Silberstein, Salomon Barciński, Hugo Wulfshon, Herman Konstadt, Zygmunt Jarociński and Szaja Rosenblatt.

The first Jewish grammar school was established in 1912 on the initiative of the Society of Jewish Intermediate Schools, founded by rabbi and preacher Marcus Braude. It took over the private 8-class Dawid Rabinowicz School at 7 Magistracka Street.

The Jewish community supported also the emerging Polish schools, e.g. in the Tutelar Board formed in 1898 (still with Russian as the lecture language) of the 7-class Traders Assembly Commerce School, the families of Poznański's, Silbersteins and Jarociński's were represented. The Jews were also active in the - established in 1905 — Society for the Promotion of Secondary Schools „Uczelnia” (Mieczysław and Paweł Hertz's, Maksym Szyffer, Jakub Sachs, Teodor Finster), thanks to whom the first Polish grammar school was established. Similarly, the Jews were active in the Eliza Orzeszkowa Educational Society; among them Stanisław Silberstein was the founder of this organisation, in addition to him a considerable contribution to the opening of the first female Polish grammar school at Spacerowa Street was made by: Seweryn Sterling, Helena Sterling, Bronisław Handelsman, Paweł Rosenthal, Dawid Lande.

A significant role in the life of the Jewish inhabitants of Lodz, likewise other centres, was played by the commune. During the pre-1822 period the affairs of the commune were managed by the kahał (i.e. Jewish Community), however after its liquidation by the authorities of the Polish Kingdom, this role was undertaken by the so-called Synagogue Supervision, which officially had its competence limited to religious matters. During the entire pre-1914 period, the Supervision included members selected from among the richest representatives of Jewish society; they were mainly members of such families as: Dobranicki's, Poznanski's,

Silbersteins, Bergers and Goldbergs. Already in mid-XIX century we observe a clear division of Jews into orthodox Jews, including khasyds, and the so-called reformed adherents of German rituals. Actively participated among the latter, members of most rich families, namely: Ginsbergs, Boems, Poznanski's, Silbersteins and Konstadts.

During the 1880's on the initiative of this group, the so-called reformed synagogue was built in Lodz at 2 Spacerowa Street. Among the rabbis, who were active in Lodz, the most distinguished was Elias Chain Majzel, who performed his function in the years 1873-1912. He was able to calm down conflicts arising between the orthodox and reformed Jews, he was also a great social activist.

The Jewish community of Lodz had carried out a very wide charity activity, first through religious brotherhoods of the so-called khewra, and - from 1899 - within the framework of the Lodz Jewish Charitable Society. That activity covered care for the poor and old, orphans and children from poor families. Orphanages, alms houses and vacation camps were organised, also special educational institutions for vocational training were established.

The political activity of the Jewish community, with the exception of the participation of representatives of Jewish bourgeoisie in town's authorities, started as late as the end of XIX century. The first Zionist organisation in Lodz emerged after the first congress of that movement in Basle in 1897. The leader of Lodz Zionists was rabbi Izrael S. Jelski, one of the prominent activists of that movement in the Russian Empire.

Furthermore, the turn of 1897 and 1898 witnessed in Lodz the creation of the General Jewish Workers Union of Lithuania, Poland and Russia, called Bund. The founders of the Lodz centre of Bund were Abraham Mutnik, Borys Frumkin, Izaak Rejsachsohn and Róża Grinblat. Here, a conspiratory printing house was established, where the central organ of Bund „Di Arbajter Sztyme” , and later the local „Der Frajhajts Głok” . The Jews also participated in Polish socialist organisations Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and Social-

Democratic Party of Polish Kingdom and Lithuania (SDKPiL). It is worthwhile to add, that at the time of street struggles on 23-24 June 1905, on the barricades more Jewish workers lost their lives; from the general number of 155 persons killed, there were 79 Jews, 55 Catholics and 17 Protestants.

Finally, it should be stated that the Jewish inhabitants of Lodz played a distinguished role in the development of this industrial centre. Since the 1860's the Jews organised on an international scale trading in products of Lodz textile industry. Next, they invested their capital in furthering the development of that industry. To a serious extent, this nation took charge of the introduction and development of the crediting and banking institutions. They also played a significant role in the development of the town's cultural life, as well as its educational life. Lodz became for the 160-thousand Jewish community a small homeland, living here they coexisted and cooperated with Poles and Germans. It should however be added, that they preserved not only their religious, but also cultural, identity, while assimilative processes proceeded very slowly.