

LEIBEL PANKER

*translated from Yiddish by Carole Turkeltaub
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In the small Jewish town of Kutno, into a shoemaker's family of six children, on the 2nd of April, 1902, the seventh child was born; he was given the name of Leibele. Two years later another child was born to the same family and Leibel's father had to work hard with his hammer to provide for the ten people. In the needy,



Leibel Panker z"l

hardworking home, Leibel had to work since he was 10 years old. Later, he was sent to work with a baker. "The best thing about the baker was eating the bread, which was never enough at home."

In 1914, the Jewish bakers' union was formed in Kutno with the help of associates from the great working city of Łódź. In 1916, Leibel Panker, aged 14, could be seen among the organized workers. He belonged among those who sought to understand the world of commerce, giving up his free time (how much free time could a unionized baker have?) to teach himself to read and write. He was one of the professional bakers who had, at that time, a certain amount of knowledge of both the Yiddish and Polish languages.

Owing to his advancement in labor matters, in 1920 he became the head of the professional bakers' union in Kutno.

The drive to live in a large working-class neighborhood brought him to Warsaw in 1923. This opened up an active professional prospect. Leibel took an energetic part in the strong professional bakers' union in Warsaw. The extreme conservatism in Poland and the constant unemployment in the baking trade was a problem, and young workers were forced to leave. In 1929 one finds Leibel in Paris, where he is again exactly organizing the Jewish bakers' unions. Leibel was equally at ease in the local organizations, as a member of the trade commission until he was arrested by Hitler's criminals.

Day by day, throughout ten years, Leibel remained in the syndicate work. The little knowledge that Leibel had, he used completely in the interests of the Jewish

worker. This comes out at all the meetings of the trade. At one of the meetings, he said: "We do not understand what the French worker says to us. He, the French worker, understands what are our needs and requirements. We are here in the country without a language and with little knowledge of the work. After working and earning not only for our own keep, we can from time to time give financial help to our families in Poland."

In September 1939, he voluntarily enlisted in the French army. Following the collapse of the French military forces, he avoided capture by Hitler's army. Despite the dangers in his connection with the French workers' union, Leibel kept his position in the illegal trade commission of the Jewish bakers' union. He was arrested in 1941. In July 1942, he was transported to Auschwitz. In August 1942, a month after he had entered Auschwitz, he threw himself on to the electric wire fence and was killed.

Taken from the book: "Fighting for freedom"; Published by the Jewish Workers Syndicate Commissions in Paris.