

## **Morten Thing**

### **Jews and the Revolution in Denmark**

When historian Morten Thing incidentally discovered a "Jewish Battle Song" in the "Revolutionary Song Book" of the Danish Communist Party published in 1928, it led him over a period of years to piece together the story of Nikolaj Klass (Nochum Klaz) who had translated a number of Yiddish revolutionary songs into Danish. In Soviet archives that had recently been opened to the public, Morten Thing discovered a file on Klass and his wife Klara concerning their request to be transferred from the Danish Communist Party to the Soviet Communist Party on their return to the Soviet Union in the early 1930s. The file contained among other documents their autobiographies.

Morten Thing then traces the complex story of a Russian Jew born in 1890 in what is now Lithuania. It is the story of the awakening of a Jewish activist and his journey from the traditional shtetl to socialism and later to Communism. It is also the story of an immigrant in search of a better life. In 1912 Klass immigrated to Denmark in search of work and quickly became involved in the Bund - a Jewish fraction of the Russian Social Democratic Party. He was also involved in a number of Danish and immigrant left organizations among others the trade union of Jewish tailors. After the Russian revolution in 1917 the immigrant left in Denmark tended to support the Bolsheviks, and Klass became a member of the Socialist Labor Party (SAP) in 1918. Spurred by fears of revolutionary activities in Denmark, the Danish State Police in 1919 cracked down on the revolutionary left. Klass was thought to be a Bolshevik agent and was thoroughly investigated by the State Police but lack of evidence forced the police to give up the case.

In the mid-1920s the Jewish Communist organization IKOR and GEZERD were founded. Their purpose was to raise money for and carry out a Jewish settlement project in the Soviet Union. Unlike the Zionists, they wanted a Jewish socialist settlement project in the Soviet Union in which Jews would have cultural autonomy. Klass became the leading force in IKOR in Denmark as well as a member of the leadership of the Danish Communist Party. In 1931 Klass returned to the Soviet Union with his family to fight for the Communist and Jewish cause. However, in the late 1930s Jewish Communists and their organizations fell victim to Stalin's purges, and Nochum Klaz and his wife died in a prison camp. Ironically they had left the Soviet Union in search of work and freedom from antisemitism only to become victims of Stalinist antisemitism and the fundamental Communist ambivalence about demands for Jewish cultural and national autonomy.

## **Arthur Arnheim**

### **The reckoning that did not take place**

During the German occupation the Jewish community in Denmark was at the brink of a catastrophe when the Germans in 1943 mounted a campaign against the Danish Jews. After the war when they returned to Denmark, the community leadership did not as one would expect account for their actions during the war, and the members of the community did not demand an explanation.

Several historians have characterized the Jewish leadership during the occupation as passive and some have explained this as a general tendency on the part of Jewish communities during Holocaust period. Arnheim emphasizes that passivity of the Danish Jewish leadership was based on special preconditions. It was partly due to the fact that the leadership was not representative of the Jewish community. The leadership was almost entirely constituted of men from the old Danish Jewish families which only made up 25 percent of the total Jewish population. Furthermore the leadership was recruited from the upper social classes whereas 50 percent of the members of the community were workers.

When the catastrophe drew near, the leadership and in particular its domineering chairman, C.B. Henriques, expressed their ideas about what they believed to be their main responsibility toward the Jewish community. The chairman believed that the administration of the institutions of the community was the main responsibility of the leadership whereas the responsibility of the lives and property of the Danish Jews rested on the Danish authorities and judicial system. The chairman failed to realize that the Danish authorities were powerless after the Germans had come into power.

This attitude of the Danish Jewish leadership had been long established and was demonstrated in a speech by the author Henri Nathansen in 1930. His speech was part of the struggle of the opposition in the community for a more democratic and representative leadership which should base its work on "Jewish spirit and culture." Nathansen pointed out that the leadership was passive and that its activities was part of a conscious assimilationist approach which especially was evidenced in their policy toward the Jewish schools.

It was not Nathansen's views that won. The opposition crumbled and in the end did not have the strength to demand an explanation for the actions or lack of actions of the leadership in the period leading up to the German persecution of the Danish Jews.

## **Kaare Bing**

### **Pinches Welner**

Pinches Welner is a Danish-Jewish author who has published a number of novels and collections of short stories with Danish publishers (see bibliography). Welner has also worked on behalf of Jewish immigrants in Denmark, written for Danish newspapers, and lectured. Kaare Bing portrays Welner by drawing together facts about his life and his descriptions of autobiographical characters in his literary works.

Welner, born in Lodz, Poland (1897), died in Copenhagen (1965).

## **Magnus Ruben**

### **A Danish-Jewish Family in Helsingør during 200 Years**

Magnus Ruben tells the story of his family from the time Meyer Levin settled in Copenhagen in 1701. He was one of the first Jews to obtain permission to settle there. Levin's daughter married Magnus Ruben from Holland who settled in Helsingør and subsequently became the founder of the Danish Rubens. The now living descendant Magnus Ruben draws a portrait of an enterprising and respected family that remained Orthodox well into the 19th century. Today assimilation has, however, reduced the Ruben's name considerably.

## **Arthur Arnheim**

### **"Don Gratuit" - a gift from the Jews of Altona**

Arthur Arnheim points out that only few artifacts exist that illustrate the relations between the Danish kings and the "privileged" Jews of Altona and Hamburg; a relationship that dates back to the time of Christian IV and continued till 1864. In 1767 when Christian VII visited Altona, the Jewish community gave him a money gift presented on a silver centerpiece with an agate bowl. It can now be found at Rosenborg Castle in Copenhagen. This so-called "don gratuit" was the customary voluntary gift that the privileged Jews offered the Danish kings to express their gratitude over the legal privileges granted by successive Danish kings. Before 1767 no descriptions of such ceremonies exist but around 1746 the Jews of Altona gave Frederick V a gift consisting of a so-called globe cup. The cup and its lid are in the form of the two hemispheres that make up the globe. The cup can be found at the Danish National Museum.