

Leon Herzog (Layzor Mayer Herzcyk) was born on January 23, 1919, in the city of Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, an industrial city with a large steel industry, with a 50% Jewish population, active in commerce, small industries and artisanal work: shoemaker, tailors, etc.

Leon was a Jew, and descended from a family of rabbis and poets. Among his ancestors are illustrious names of Judaism: Shmuel HaNagid (*the Prince*: a Spanish Talmudic, grammarian, philologist, poet, warrior, statesman and scholar); Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki – the great French commentator of the Bible); Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg (known as the MaHaRa'M – a liturgical poet, rabbinical authority on Worms in the Middle Ages); and four exponents of Judaism in 16th century Poland, namely Rabbis Yehuda ben Betzalel Loew (known as the Prague MaHaRaL); Moses ben Israel Isserles from Krakow (known as the “RaMA” – author of the Ashkenazi part of Shulchan Aruch); Shlomo Luria, (known as MaHaRaSHaL); and Shmuel Eliezer haLevi Eideles (known as MaHarSha).

His family was well known in Ostrowiec: his father Jacob (Yankele) had a small factory of potato glue, and his mother Rachel had a store, she made hats. Leon was the youngest of 9 brothers. The two older brothers, Bernardo (Berl) and José, emigrated to Brazil in the early 1920s, and two sisters (Rivka and Tsila) followed them on the eve of the second war. His brother Saul (Shaul) had a small bicycle factory (partly manufacturing and partly assembling bicycles) - where Leon had worked since he was a boy.

Leon studied at a public school, and when he finished Elementary school, he entered a Technical school, motivated by the bicycle factory; with the marriage of brother Saul, who went to establish himself in another city, Leon was forced, at the age of 16, to take over the business, and at 17, 18 years old, already directed a small factory.

At that time, anti-Semitism in Poland was great, and according to Leon, it was felt at school - where “teachers insisted on humiliating the Jewish student” and in social contacts. He reports that he played football well, so he was the only Jew accepted on the team; one day after he scored a goal, the players of the opposing team fell on him and started to beat him: “few came out in my defense; I got it, but I also gave back”.

Even before the war, in 1937, 38, 39, there was a resurgence of anti-Semitism due to Nazi influence, “to the point that Jews could no longer walk freely, because they were beaten, in their stores were put signs of “don't buy in the Jew” and the government did not take notice. In Ostrowiec appeared advertising stalls with caricatures of the Jews, painted as bloodsuckers of Poles, as a spider's web ensnaring the Poles.

Throughout Europe, Zionist organizations began to form based on Theodor Herzl's ideas, and at the age of 14, Leon joined the HaShomer group, where he made many friends. He was 17 when the war broke out. He soon understood that German policy was to isolate and weaken Jews through successive discriminatory laws, and that the only chance to survive would be through a false identity as a non-Jew. Because the Germans, when they occupied Ostrowiec, issued different types of identity documents to Jews and non-Jews. They changed the ID cards of all the citizens.

Because of the bicycle factory, Leon was known in the city hall, where these new documents were issued. He managed to get an official who knew him, to produce fake legitimate documents, using

real photos of himself and a small group of friends from the Zionist movement, giving them the identities of non-Jewish Poles. Thanks to this, Leon and all his friends were saved: "We did not lower our heads".

The Germans entered the city on September 7, 1939 and progressively took everything. At first the bicycle factory was still functioning. Leon says that during this period, a young Polish woman who had bought and taken a bicycle, returned a few days later complaining about the price she had paid. He explained to her that she had bought this bicycle from Germany for that price and showed her the invoice. "She didn't like it. She went to file a complaint at the Gestapo saying that I spoke ill of Hitler. Gestapo came to arrest me, they took me and they wanted me to sign a statement saying that I had said this and that about Hitler. I refused, I was arrested, got a good beating, and my parents managed to get me released, with money, through the Judenrat (Jewish Committee)".

Like other Jews, Leon was forced to work as a slave in German factories, at first in a steel mill and then in a brick, ceramic factory. "The Germans took us, during the day we marched in line a few kilometers, to work, and after work we went back to the ghetto to sleep. In the morning, during the day, we received a soup, a piece of bread."

In the spring of 1941, a ghetto was established in Ostrowiec. One of the most striking visions for Leon was when one day, marching to work, crossing the main ghetto square (formerly Jewish), he saw houses with broken windows, doors wide open, looted, without a soul, and books, entire libraries, prayer books, chandeliers and traditional Jewish objects, all thrown in the middle of the street. He thought: "the end has come; no Jew will survive".

There had been a first deportation, and there was news that there would be others. A group of Jews had tried to join the Polish partisans, being summarily executed, as soon as they deposited the weapons they had brought - which made this option impossible. What to do?

The Germans recruited Poles to work in Germany in various areas with some remuneration. Leon and his friends, in possession of Polish non-Jewish identity cards, managed to enroll as volunteer workers and travel as Poles to work in Germany in early 1942. He stayed there until the end of the war, in Gissen, working as gardener in a vegetable plantation, where he also worked as a mechanic, driver and builder.

Leon survived the bombing of the city by the Allies, and after the war, he went to work for some time as an officer in the U.N.R.R.A. (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), the body responsible for repatriating the foreigners spread across Germany to their countries of origin. After numerous unsuccessful attempts, he managed to communicate with family members in Brazil, and finally got documents to emigrate to Brazil - which he did via Paris and Genoa, on a cargo ship adapted for passengers, Alm. Alexandrino. He arrived on December 10, 1946, a date celebrated annually with great enthusiasm. He found Brazil a paradise.

In 1947 he joined his older brother, Bernardo Herzog, owner of a chemical industry, B. Herzog S/A. Since what he knew to do was related to bicycles and motorcycles, Leon ended up setting up a department to sell bicycles and motorcycle parts, within B. Herzog itself. In 1950, while still within the company, Leon built the Gulliver bicycle factory, one of the first in Brazil, and in 1955, he started producing the Gullivette motorized bicycle, using a French Lavalette engine. All Gullivette parts,

with the exception of the engine, were produced at the factory in Rio. Leon personally projected and designed all parts of the moped, making use of several parts that were already produced for the assembly of the bicycles. In late 1957, Leon dissolved the partnership with his brother Bernardo, closing the Gulliver and Gullivette factory, and founded his own company L. Herzog S/A, which initially imported Victoria and Jawa motorcycles.

In 1960 the first Brazilian motorcycle, the Leonette, was born, using a 2-speed Jawa engine. The manufacturing and stamping of the frames and the main parts of the first Leonette model, was made with used molds bought abroad, adapted to work in the presses of an old bucket factory, bought by Leon exclusively for this purpose. Only the engine was imported, and electric parts and tires were purchased from domestic suppliers. Initially, 100 to 120 units were produced per month, in a factory with an area of 1,200 m² and 50 workers, marking the beginning of the era of the Brazilian motorcycle.

In addition to the Leonettes, Leon also manufactured ride and cargo bicycles, from the Cacique and Roadster brands. From the end of 1967, Leonette started to use a more powerful and more modern engine, with 3 gears and foot control, as are all motorcycles nowadays.

The Leonette was one of the most coveted articles in the 60s and early 70s. Even the Military Police used the Leonette. It was sold throughout Brazil, with technical assistance in practically all capitals of the country and in several large cities. In 1970, a Japanese motorcycle manufacturer proposed a joint venture to Leon Herzog: to produce a Brazilian motorcycle, using Leonette's existing manufacturing facilities, sales and service network, but using Japanese engines instead of Jawa. Leon refused, since the name on the frame would no longer be "Leonette". 1971 was Leonette's last year of production.

At the time, L. HERZOG was one of the largest suppliers of steel for construction in Brazil (in order to produce the spokes of the wheel rims of the bicycles and motorcycles the company needed to buy coils of wire), which led Leon to a new chapter in his life: the creation in 1972 of ARMAFER. It processed the steel used in the buildings (which was sold by L. Herzog S.A) supplying it ready to receive the concrete. Armafer was hugely successful, as a result of Leon's creative and innovative thinking.

Leon Herzog was also an emeritus golfer, winning about 150 cups, and exercising with distinction for several years the role of "golf captain" at Teresópolis Golfe Club. In addition to fighting his whole life against anti-Semitism, he was a tireless defender of the right of ethnic minorities to have access to golf. In his memory, the Leon Herzog golf cup was created.