

What do we know about the period between the World War I and the World War II? We know what was going on at the highest level, what changed in politics and economy of the USA and the world. But actually we don't know what happened with common people, common citizens of the USA, who worked hard, who hadn't money for living, who lived in scrutiny. This research is aimed to find out the peculiarities of life of one common person, who struggled for his living in this period of time in the USA. This is an interview for showing this person's experiences in the era from WWI through WWII.

At first, we shall introduce our interviewee. His name is Jacob Feldman. He was born in the USA on December 20, 1917 in New York City. He was the fifth child in the family of Menashe and Hava Feldman. His parents emigrated from Russia, who escaped from there after the Jewish pogrom in Chisinau in 1903. His father, Menashe Shmuel Feldman, was a carpenter; he founded the carpentry firm in New York, making a good and stable business. Hava was a housewife, having seven children.

During the World War I, the family was more or less save in New York. Menashe wasn't taken to the army, when the USA was involved in the war. After the war the business was more successful than during the war, because his production was not exported to Europe. Menashe opened several carpentry firms in New York. During the period of prosperity Menashe helped his father in business. Meanwhile, Jacob went to school. During the period of prosperity in economics Jacob helped his father in business. But during the economic crisis Menashe, not as many businessmen, who became bankrupted, managed to survive, but only one carpentry firm stayed. Having some earnings and desire to study in 1935 Jacob entered Columbia University and studied Law there.

When he finished his studies, World War II had already started, but the USA wasn't involved in it. Jacob was taken to the army in 1941, when the USA entered the war. During 1941-1942 Jacob served at the Philippines, where he was injured. In 1943 he returned to army and was involved in several Italian operations and in 1944 he participated in Normandy landings. After that Jacob was fighting in Germany, being in the American troop of the western Allies, which met Soviet soldiers on the River Elbe on April 25, 1945.

After the war Jacob returned to New York and got married to Sarah Shekhter. He didn't continue his father's business, who died in 1949 from the heart attack, giving the chance to his elder brother Samuel, he became a lawyer in the *Ballantine, Bushby, Palmer & Wood*. In 1952 Jacob Feldman opened his own little Law firm. Jacob has 3 children: Annie, Elijah and Amanda and 5 grandchildren. He still lives with his wife in New York, in Cedarhurst, Long Island. Now he is 93 and his wife is 86.

After this short general biography and highlights of life, we can go further to the history of the Jacob Feldman life between WWI and WWII itself. Jacob was very little, when the WWI ended. Grand scale and protracted nature of the First World War led to the unprecedented militarization of the industrial states of the economy. This has had an influence on the economic development of all major industrialized nations between the two world wars: increased government regulation and economic planning, the formation of the military-industrial complexes, accelerating the development of national economic infrastructure (power systems, a network of paved roads, etc.), increase the share of production of defense and dual purpose. In 1921 the period of American prosperity started. It was a period of economic recovery in the U.S., particularly after the First World War, the short-term period of economic recovery in the U.S. after World War I. The era of prosperity is most often connected with unhealthy and precarious prosperity. Postwar America was a

leader in economic growth. Thereby further it strengthened its leading position in the world. By the end of 20's America was producing almost as many industrial products, as the entire rest of the world. They were, in fact, years of growth. The average worker has increased his salary by 25%. The unemployment rate did not exceed 5%, and in some periods of 3%. The consumer credit need boosted. In the 20-ties at the period of prosperity, the price level was absolutely stable. The pace of economic development of the USA was the highest in the world.[1] At this time the business of Feldman was going fast and successful. Jacob's life was very good, because his father's business was growing as all the companies in the USA. We may consider the *Feldman carpentry* to be the big business. Jacob's father benefited much from this growth in his business. He was producing wooden articles and also he was expanding his business all over New-York City. Menashe Feldman opened his second firm in 1924 and the third one in 1925. After all, till the end of 1928 there were 6 subsidiaries of *Feldman carpentry*. At that time all people lived well as for the post-war period. That's why Menashe felt some kind of danger and decided to buy real estate and furnish it as he had a big family. Meanwhile, Jacob went to a prestigious school in Brooklyn, which cost money, and the Feldman could afford it.

In 1929 the most severe outbreak of the global economic crisis, which lasted until mid-1933, completely shook the whole system of capitalism. The industrial production during the crisis in the U.S. declined by 46%, in the UK by 24%, Germany 41%, France by 32%. Stock prices of industrial companies in the U.S. fell by 87% in the UK by 48%, Germany 64% France 60%. Unemployment has reached colossal proportions. According to official statistics, in 1933 in 32 capitalist countries, there were 30 million unemployed, including those in the U.S. 14 million world economic crisis of 1929-33 showed that the contradiction between social production and private form of appropriation of the results of production has reached such a pitch, when the capitalist economy can no longer function normally. This circumstance required the intervention in the economy, the use of methods of public exposure to natural processes in a capitalist economy in order to avoid the turmoil that has accelerated the development of monopoly capitalism into state-monopoly capitalism.[2] People were left without work; farmers, little commercial workers and the representatives of the middle class were as poor as a churchmouse. Menashe Feldman decided to leave only one office, but stay alive any way. He felt the responsibility for his family, he didn't want to ask for work and stand in strikes. Of course, he had to fire the majority of his workers, but using the work of his family: wife and children. Jacob was also helping his father. The strikes of workers took place in every city and town, the biggest were in Washington DC and Chicago, but they also occurred in New York. Jacob, being a 12-years-old boy, went to see people, who were asking for help, because their families were hungry and they hadn't got money to survive. Some people had money in the banks. As a result of the crisis over 5 thousand banks have gone bankrupt. Millions of Americans have lost all their savings. The Feldman were not involved in the making money with the help of banks. Of course, they lost money on closing 5 subsidiaries and decreasing the level of production because of the absence of demand. Feldman decided to make the prices lower for people, but it hardly worked. The first year of crisis was the hardest one, but Menashe had some personal savings and real estate. But in 1930 *Feldman carpentry* gave a turn because of low prices and the necessity of people to buy furniture in New York, even if it was simple and the cheapest one. The receipt of Menashe Feldman's success was the previously earned savings, his luck and idea to use his family as the workers of their family business. As Feldman was not importing goods from Europe, his business was more or less stable, because those, who were importing something, were going down because of *The Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act* signed by the President in June 17, 1930. This law raised the 40 percent duties on more than 20,000 imported goods.[3]

In the presidential election in 1932 the Democratic Party won, it was headed by Franklin D. Roosevelt. To exit from the crisis in 1933 there was launched a new course of Roosevelt, called *New Deal*, the various measures aimed at regulating the economy. Some of them, according to modern ideas, have helped to eliminate the causes of the Great Depression, some were socially oriented, helping the most affected survival, and other measures had exacerbated the situation. Almost immediately after taking office in March 1933, Roosevelt had to deal with the third wave of bank runs, on which the new President reacted to the closure of banks for a week and preparing for this time of the deposit guarantee program.[4] But the business of the Feldman wasn't influenced by the *New Deal*, except from the little rise in demand for the wooden production. Meanwhile, Jacob entered University in 1935, the time, when the economic situation was becoming better, but still it was unhealthy. It means that his family business remained afloat and was more or less fruitful for that hard time. And only in 1939 the U.S. economy has coped with the consequences of the crisis of 1937, but the WWII changed everything in the life of US citizens and the family of Feldman. After finishing his studies, Jacob went to army, where he served in American troops all around the world.

This interview is oriented basically on the economic state of the country in this period of time through the prism of Jacob Feldman's memories.

The first question is:

- Jacob, you were a toddler, when there was the World War I. But what did your parents say about the times of the war?

Well, my parents didn't feel uncomfortable about the war, because we were not in the epicenter of the actions. New York as the economic center of the USA and later of the all world was out of the war in its sense. We lived in the conditions, which were almost the same as before the war. Maybe they were worse then I say, because I don't know, but my mum said that everything was normal in father's business, which for our family was everything. There were already 5 children in our family, and if mother said that our conditions were normal, so I bet they were normal. My mum told me that she was very afraid that my father would be taken to serve in the war. But then we got to know that the army took the men from 21 till 31 years old.[5] My father at those times was already 34. So he was not obliged to serve. This helped us to survive during the WWI, because if my father went to the army, who would earn money?

- But what actually was the financial state of your father's business?

The financial state was apt to stay on the level before the war. If my father could export materials or produce weapons, he would become a millionaire. But since he was a carpenter and had a carpentry firm, he produced only wooden things.

- Jacob, what do you know about the economical development of the USA after the war?

You know, I studied Law, but I'm interested in the economy of the USA, especially of that time. So, I can tell you a lot. The World War I stimulated the economic development of the United States of America. They were in those years in an unusually favorable position. Military actions didn't completely affect the American continent, and therefore the country has not experienced massive destruction of productive forces, which every day for four years occurred in Europe. The U.S. army took part in the hostilities in the summer of 1918, although officially the United States entered the war in April 1917, therefore loss of the U.S. armed forces in comparison with the multimillion-

dollar losses of the other belligerent powers were small: about 50 thousand people dead and 230 thousand wounded. Another important result of the war was a change in the international financial status of the U.S.: the States have become the main creditor of the European states, while New York has become an international financial center. As the result, the USA captured the world's major markets and sources of raw materials and established their dominance in the Western world. [6]

- Yes, I see that you know the course of the history, but what happened in your family?

As I told you, my father's business was not suffering much. Then in 1920 the economic growth of the military first post-war years was replaced by the economic crisis. The crisis of production in industry had interwoven with the profound and devastating agrarian crisis.

- And what about the period of American prosperity?

Yes, after that crisis, which lasted till 1923, we felt that carpentry was going to type a turn. That's why, my father Menashe Feldman opened his second firm in 1924 and the third one in 1925. After all, till the end of 1928 there were 6 subsidiaries of *Feldman carpentry* around the Big Apple. The level of our life became higher: we changed the house and all furniture. Our big family needed bigger house, which we bought in 1924. And the money for my study was earned during this period of time. I helped my father as a seller in one of the subsidiaries, and I saw it on my own eyes.

- And what was the situation in 1929?

Yes, I remember, I was 12 years old. The Great Depression started like a bolt in the middle of the sky. Giant destructive power of the crisis manifested in the sharp drop in industrial production. The most severe decline of the output was observed in the heavy industries. Destruction and bankruptcy of industrial, commercial and financial enterprises and firms have reached unprecedented proportions. *Feldman's carpentry* remained afloat, it was our fortune. Of course, we were to close 5 firms, but we survived and we were not hungry during these times, and we had no idea that our father could be unemployed, as many people in the States and in New York. We heard about the demonstrations, which occur in Chicago and Washington D.C. As a result of the crisis over 5 thousand banks have gone bankrupt. Millions of Americans have lost all their savings. For 3 years, industrial production decreased by two times, the volume of foreign trade has tripled.[7] The wages were lower in two times. By the spring of 1933, there were 17 million unemployed. I remember, that my father had to reduce the wages, and then he fired 2 from 5 his workers, involving our family to work. My mum was trying to help during these times, she was a bookkeeper. And even after that my mum continued to work for *Feldman's carpentry*.

- Did the situation changed in 1932, when the new elections occurred?

In the presidential election in 1932 the Democratic Party won, it was headed by Franklin D. Roosevelt. He offered to the country a series of liberal reforms, known as the *New Deal*. Reforms of the new administration have covered all the sectors of the economy: industry, agriculture, financial and banking systems, as well as social and labor relations. Regulatory role of government in the period of the new course in the most severe form manifested itself in social policy. There remained the most acute problem of unemployment. With the aim of helping the unemployed there has been a federal administration for emergency aid.

In April 1933 operational system of public works had started. There have been set up the forest camps for unemployed young people aged 18-25 years, where young people were held for 6 months

on ensuring full payment of 30 dollars per month, 25 of which one was obliged to send to his family. My elder brother David was already 19 and as it wasn't the right time to study, so he accepted the proposition of the country. He spent there half a year and even met his future wife Aviva.

Carrying out the reform of the New Deal, the Roosevelt administration hoped to upgrade the country's economy and make it free of such shocks and crises. However, these goals were not achieved fully. Only in 1939 the U.S. economy has coped with the consequences of the crisis of 1937, but before the World War II the country has not managed to reach the pre-crisis level of production. Reform of the New Deal had been important for the development of both U.S. and world economy. They have demonstrated the role of government regulation in the capitalist economy, and showed that the flexible and moderate regulations of the economy are vital. Since the New Deal the state intervention in economic life has become an integral part of the market mechanism of the United States. The most important outcome of reforms was that they marked a major shift in social development.

- So what is your personal point of view about the whole period of after-war economic state of the US?

I think that over the years of the World War II the national income has doubled, more than in two times industrial production increased. Supplies of raw materials, food and military equipment to the allies, which were publicly funded, promoted the renewal of fixed capital. The war accelerated the process of intensification of agriculture: mechanization and chemicalization of production was stimulated by high demand for American food, which allowed farmers to dramatically increase their revenues. Now I understand that the United States has successfully used the events in Europe for further enrichment. They acted as the main supplier of war materials, food and raw materials to the countries, involved in the war. Giant funds at the disposal of corporations have provided major new investments in the U.S. economy. Commenced on this basis, industrial growth further increased the share of the United States in world industrial production. Thus, an important outcome of the U.S. was further increases their economic power, strengthening the position in the global economy, given them the position of the most powerful country in the world.

- Jacob, my next question is about your experience in the World War II.

Well, that's obvious that the citizens of the country are to protect their country. I was young and just after the Law school, the man of 24 years old, who was shocked of the Pearl Harbor. The Japans attacked it on December 7, 1941[8], in the six days after my birthday. And in a week I was mobilized to the US Army. But actually at that time I would be a volunteer, if they didn't allow me to enter the forces. I saw my friends dieing, I participated in many operations, during one of which I was injured in my antibrachium. It was a long process to cure it, it took almost 3 months. Then I received the vacation home for 1 month, and after that I returned to the army again.

- But what was your feeling, when you participated in the Elbe Day in 1945 and met the Soviet troops?

Oh, it was fascinating. It was the feeling that we made something, which will end the war. But you now that my parents are from Russia, but they didn't speak Russian at all, they spoke Yiddish. But I saw people, who struggled for their country, and I could be in their troop, but not in American one. We hadn't any common language, but it was amazing to see the Allies.

- During the period you were in the army, what was your family doing?

My father and mother kept their *Feldman's carpentry*, actually 3 offices, my elder three brothers David, Samuel and Daniel were also fighting in the American troops, and my sisters Rivka and Leah stayed with my parents, while my third sister Neshama went as a volunteering nurse to the hospital in Belgium. The business in New York was going well enough for earning money, and my sisters had the opportunity to study. When I came home for a month after my injury, I also helped in our family business. I saw that the carpentry was necessary for people even during the war. As the economic crisis stopped before the war, my father could open 2 subsidiaries. This was all because the war didn't occupy the territory of the United States and the country could live and develop in the economy.