

A.Szymonowicz

The Craftsmen's *Ha'Chalutz*

The Craftsmen's *Ha'Chalutz* grassroots pioneering movement was founded in Wilno in 1933, at the initiative of Zionist activist Abraham Katz.

The Częstochowa branch of the Craftsmen's *Ha'Chalutz* was established in July 1934. It proved itself with its involved and intense work, and became one of the most respected and important branches of the countrywide Polish Craftsmen's *Ha'Chalutz* organisation.

At the beginning, when the Craftsmen's *Ha'Chalutz* was founded, a certain antagonism was felt on the part of the General Craftsmen's Organisation, which perceived the Craftsmen's *Ha'Chalutz* as a rival organisation. But, over time, once they had become convinced that the Craftsmen's *Ha'Chalutz* only engaged in cultural and Zionist work, sentiments subsided and, of the nearly 200 members, almost half were members of both organisations. Amongst the members of the Craftsmen's *Ha'Chalutz* were a row of Guild Elders, as well as prominent members of the Craftsmen's Union, They conducted intensive Zionist-pioneering work amongst the broader craftsmen's circles.

It was very pleasing to see how, every evening, after a hard day's work, craftsmen members with their wives streamed to their pioneering organisation at *Aleja 10*.

There, they would learn Hebrew, hear discourses on history, Zionism and general Jewish problems, [and] received their tasks in working for the Land of Israel funds. With love and devotion, the members carried out every Jewish and Zionist communal task which was laid upon them.

Thanks to the strong, pioneering discipline that pervaded the branch, this organisation occupied a significant position in the city's communal life.

The organisation endeavoured to ensure that not only were the members themselves prepared, spiritually and professionally, for the emigration to the Land of Israel, but also that their wives should be fit for the *Aliyah* also and that it should be able to assist them in their first steps in the new country. They also saw to it, in the context of the perspectives of the immigration, that the members' children should study in Hebrew and study in Zionist educational institutions.

In acknowledgement of the Częstochowa organisation's significance, members Szajnfeld and Jakow Lewkowicz were chosen for the Chief Committee of the Craftsmen's *Ha'Chalutz* Central in Warsaw, as representatives from Częstochowa.

The names of the members, who stood at the head of this organisation and aided its development, should be mentioned: Szajnfeld, Jakow Lewkowicz, Abram Gotlib, Mojsze Goldberg and Wilinger. Among other Zionist activists, who actively contributed with their Zionist experience and gave the tone and the moral aid, were the renowned activists Dr Brom and Dr Mering.

By the start of 1936, the Częstochowa organisation was already receiving, in every quota, one or two certificates for those members who had distinguished themselves in their work, and who were worthy and ready for *Aliyah*. In this manner, thanks to this organisation, the following members emigrated to the Land of Israel:

- 1) Abram Gotlib, Guild Elder of the Masters in Metalwork in Częstochowa – a fine professional, and a specialist in the metal branch. He [now] works as foreman of this

specialist work in one of the largest factories in the country, which did a great deal during the War for the war effort.

- 2) Mojsze Goldberg, Guild Elder of the Master Bakers; he founded a cooperative bakery [called] "*Ha'Oved*" [The Worker], [and] now has his own bakery in Ramat Yitzchak¹.
- 3) Wolf Landsman, Master Locksmith; a former instructor at the Crafts School in Częstochowa, he [now] owns his own locksmithing and technical workshop in Jerusalem.
- 4) Hercberg, a cobbler by trade; after extensive efforts, he achieved his own little shoe factory in the country.
- 5) Buchman, a construction worker in Bnei Brak.
- 6) Laski, carpenter's workshop in Haifa².
- 7) Szneur, upholstery workshop in Haifa, and other male and female members.

Nuchem Szljach, a baker, managed to make it to the Land of Israel on one of the last ships before the War.

Besides these, the Craftsmen's *Ha'Chalutz* also procured certificates for members who could come up with £250, as well as "recommendations".

All told, the number of actual craftsmen from Częstochowa who came to the country is a small one – but, when we take into account that several people came over with each single certificate, we may state with certainty that, over the course of the Częstochowa Craftsmen's *Ha'Chalutz* organisation's brief existence, several dozen people avoided the fate that so tragically found the entire Częstochowa Jewry.

In mid-1939, the Craftsmen's *Ha'Chalutz* movement was confronted with the possibilities of sending a larger number of members to the Land of Israel. The cruel War tore the life of this young pioneering movement asunder, just as it smothered the effervescent and roaring life of Polish Jewry as a whole.

¹ [TN: Neighbourhood in Ramat Gan.]

² [TN: As also with the subsequent individual, the author does not specify whether he owned the workshop or only worked there.]