

The Agricultural Farm and *Kibbutz* in Częstochowa

In March 1941, the proposal arose to return to the agricultural farm in Częstochowa which had been owned by the Movement before the War. Szmul is sent by the leadership on a mission to Radom, Częstochowa and Żarki to examine the conditions and possibilities.

From the beginning of the German occupation, the farm was under the supervision of the German authorities. POWs, various prisoners (and later Soviet POWs) worked there. Częstochowa was under the jurisdiction of the District Governor in Radom. In Radom, we found a way to Dr Salbe, who headed the local ŻTOS [Jewish Social Welfare Society]. We had hoped to obtain from him the license to return to the farm, but this did not succeed. The farm was in the hands of the military authorities, who did not want to give up the work of the prisoners, who laboured arduously without payment, while the workers in the various labour camps, in those days, still received a certain wage, albeit the barest minimal one.

After a while, Józef again went to Radom and Częstochowa, and even to Kraków. All was to no avail - we could not return to the farm in Częstochowa. During his stay in Żarki, however, a new proposal surfaced - near the town, which also had a beautiful cell of *Shomrim* [Jewish Boy Scouts] numbering about fifty boys and girls, was the estate of a Jew, Praszker by name, which was supervised by the Germans, like all Jewish land. Thanks to contacts with the local authorities, a permit was obtained in the name of the Jewish Council in Żarki to cultivate the land on the estate.

There were about twenty-two *mórg** of land on the estate. Eleven *mórg* was cultivated land with two orchards. The rest comprised a grove, a meadow, etc. The abandonment was very great, for no one had tended or cultivated the land since the day the Germans had arrived. A license was obtained to purchase a horse, a cow and farm implements. Large sums had to be immediately invested in the farm and, for days and weeks, Józef ran from Warsaw to Radom, Częstochowa and Kraków to procure them. Mr Bloch who, during the War, was active in the ŻTOS, assisted us in this, but also could not achieve much. Mr Borensztajn, the representative of the Joint, did not approve of the matter and neither did other institutions. Despite the difficulties, we finally set about the first works which carried out by the members from Żarki, who also organised an aid fund in the *shtetl* for the benefit of the farm. With the arrival of spring, the question arose of transferring the *Kibbutz Ma'apilim* from Warsaw to the farm.

Meanwhile, the German-Soviet war breaks out. Already, by early June, endless lines of different types of vehicles pass through Warsaw heading eastwards, starting with automobiles and ending with heavy tanks. About seven million German soldiers are stationed between the Wisła and Bug [Rivers], awaiting orders, meanwhile eating everything that can be obtained in the villages. Groceries are running out in the town markets. Hunger intensifies even more, especially in the ghetto.

On the day that the [German-Soviet] war breaks out, the *kibbutz* gathers for a meeting. It is chaired by Mordche. By decision of the leadership, we must stop working at the German work points. This decision is a difficult one, [as it] means blocking the last source of food. Someone attempts to prove that this step is worthless, as no Jew will follow in our footsteps and pass a death sentence upon himself and his family. Nevertheless, the decision is made.

* Polish *mórg* – four and a half dunams [TN: According to this, about 0.45 of a hectare; usually a *mórg* is closer to 0.56].

We anticipate news from the front. The first message comes, [then] a second. We do not wish to believe it, but the bitter reality dispels the illusions. In the *kibbutz*, all the members are very depressed, as [are the people] in the city, although on the street the interest is smaller - everyone is busy over their heads acquiring the dark bread. With the retreat of the Red Army and the withdrawal of the front, the prices of foodstuffs fall a little.

During these days, the first reports of the horrific massacre of Jews in the newly-occupied territories start reaching the GG. The few, who managed to flee and made it back to the GG, tell stories of atrocities in Białystok, Lwów and other cities. News also reaches us from Nowogródek, where members of our movement barricaded themselves in their cell, refusing to surrender to the Germans and all perished when the house was burnt down with flamethrowers. Later, comes news of the first passive resistance in Wilno, when the Jews refused to go out for "deportation" outside the city and, in their hundreds, were shot on the outskirts of the city.

After a few months, news arrives from the Soviet Union itself - from Minsk and other cities. In all these localities, thousands and tens of thousands of Jews were murdered as soon as the Germans entered. They shot at the civilian population and killed mercilessly. The Jews in Warsaw would sigh heavily at hearing all this. The Warsaw ghetto, by comparison, resembled a real paradise.

The Germans were hardly seen inside the ghetto. At all the ghetto entrances, large notices hung proclaiming epidemics and forbidding the German soldier to enter the ghetto without a special permit.

In July, due to the state of events at the front, which scattered the remaining hopes for the arrival of the Soviets, the leadership returned to the plan of transferring the *Kibbutz Ma'apilim* from Warsaw to the farm in Żarki. Józef and Cwi Brandes from Żarki obtain permits to travel from Warsaw to Częstochowa (due to an "illness"), with which [different] people travel back and forth and thus four members are transferred every week. The transfer was fraught with constant checks and dangers everywhere. Nevertheless, by the end of September, the whole *kibbutz* had already moved to the farm.

Then, the situation in Częstochowa and the surrounding towns was infinitely better than in the Warsaw Ghetto. Here, it was still possible to obtain food products. The Warsaw Jews fell upon the food like beasts of prey, devouring copious amounts of porridge and potatoes, to the great astonishment of the local members, who could not imagine how great was the famine in Warsaw. Soon, everyone gained new strength and the mood also improved. Like madmen, we sang, shouted and ran across the fields, gardens and woods. The freedom of movement was intoxicating.

As soon as we arrive, we start digging up the potatoes which were sown in the spring. Some seventy [cubic] metres were gathered, of which we left about twelve metres for sowing. We also harvest vegetables from the garden and fruits. Grain had not been sown before but, in the autumn, we decided to plough the fields and prepare them for sowing. Józef makes efforts to procure the money to purchase a horse and a plough. With winter, all the work in the field and in the garden ceases.

At the beginning of winter, Józef arrives with a new proposal from the leadership - the establishment of a new point in Częstochowa, in the city. The boys had chances of finding employment at the large Raków ironworks. The Częstochowa ŻTOS also promised certain aid. Over the course of two months, we moved most of the members to Częstochowa. Only a few were left on the farm to guard the animals and land.

The economic situation at the new point (at ul. Joselewicza 1) was very difficult. The lads in Raków received a pre-War salary, whose real value was nothing. The girls, who worked in the municipal nurseries, also earned very little. There were weeks when the hunger was even greater than in Warsaw, despite the fact that the situation of the Jews in the city was not bad. The city was located near the Reich's border and the Jews engaged in trade and smuggling and made a good living. We did not wish to "trade" and the question of our future existence was at its sharpest. It was only thanks to Józef's efforts and strong stance that we continued our existence and even began wider activity amongst the youth and the local *Shomrim* cell. On the other hand, the economic situation of *Kibbutz Galon*, which remained in Warsaw after the departure of *Ma'apilim*, improved. Most of the members found different jobs and they maintained the entire *kibbutz*.