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The History of “*Ha’Mizrachi*” in Częstochowa

The Origins of “*HaMizrachi*”

“*HaMizrachi*” was founded as an organisation of Zionist-religious Jews, aspiring to the revival of the Hebrew people in the land of their forefathers. On its banner was written “*Creating a safe refuge for the People of Israel in the Land of Israel in accordance with Torah and tradition*”.

The “*HaMizrachi*” movement actually existed before the First World War, but its organisational strength was weak. In the days of the Russian government, which also ruled in Congress Poland in those days, it was forbidden to assemble in numbers or to hold gatherings, even in prayer-houses and synagogues in general and to preach the Zionist idea in particular. For every such operation, it was necessary to seek a blind to hide the true yearned-for cause from “evil eye”. Nonetheless, there were then also “preachers” who endangered themselves and, in their sermons in the study-halls, they would also introduce the Torah topic of the precept to settle the Land of Israel. [They] animated the audience with their words. Stories of true miracles and wonders were told of these individuals who did their deeds in secret. They had a difficult struggle, not only with the government, but also with the opponents of *Hibbat Zion*^{*}, who were mainly the zealous Chassidic circles, who saw in Zionism a sort of “forcing the End [of Days]” and a denial of the belief in the Messiah. But, nevertheless, these persecutions did not prevent the foundation of “*Ha’Mizrachi*” unions in Warsaw and in other cities in Poland and the affiliation of the Rabbis - the prodigies Reb Shmuel Mohilever, Reb Yitzchok Yaakov Reines, etc..

“*Ha’Mizrachi*” Following the Occupation of Poland

In the days of German occupation of Poland, during the First World War, it also became possible to carry out Zionistic work in public, to establish unions and to hold conferences and assemblies.

In the winter of 5676 [1915-16], the “*Mizrachi*” organisation in Warsaw was re-established. Its instructors began visiting cities in Poland. They helped to establish branches in different cities and towns.

The Origins of “*Ha’Mizrachi*” in Częstochowa

A “*Ha’Mizrachi*” organisation was also established in Częstochowa. Among its first founders were great figures - Reb Józef Szymon Koblenz, who was called “The *Maggid*” [itinerant preacher], Reb Szmul Goldsztajn, Reb Józef Blechsztajn, Reb Abram Henoach Finkelsztajn, Reb Chaim Weksler and a few others whose names I’ve forgotten.

These public figures immediately began far-reaching activities to attract religious Jews to the movement. However, this was no easy feat because, as is known, many of the Chassidim-zealots waged

^{*} [Translator’s note: “*Hibbat Zion*” [Love of Zion] refers to a variety of organisations in Eastern Europe at the end of the 19th century which are now considered the forerunners and foundation-builders of modern Zionism.]

a fierce war against "*Ha'Mizrachi*" and its objectives. The struggle was hard, but still they succeeded in bringing the best of the city's bourgeoisie close to *Mizrachi*.

After many important persons joined, among them the Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Nachum Asz, the first assembly was held in the month of Iyyar 5677 [April-May 1917], with participation of Mr. J. L. Szczarański, the National Secretary of "*Ha'Mizrachi*" in Warsaw. The first council was also then elected, comprising J. Sz. Koblenz, Sz. Goldsztajn, A. H. Finkelsztajn, I. Plocker, I. M. Grinfeld, N. Turner and Ch. Weksler.

"*Ha'Mizrachi's*" Activities in Częstochowa

The "*Mizrachi*" organisation rented a large complex at ul. Ogrodowa 14, which also served as prayer-house for "*Mizrachi*" members. It was a venue for Talmud and Hebrew lessons and lectures delivered by the great Rabbis of "*Ha'Mizrachi*". Reb Józef Sz. Koblenz also preached almost every week and inspired the audience, as was his divine wont and Reb Mojsze Halter would give a *Chumash* [Pentateuch; weekly *parsha*] lesson every Friday night. The audience truly "licked their fingers" with his rational and rich interpretations. Reb Mojsze Halter, who had visited the Land of Israel, upon returning to Poland, conducted propaganda in which he stressed that every Jew who is not able to settle in the Land of Israel must visit there at least once in his lifetime and see the land being built with his own eyes.

At the general assembly, which was held in 5678 [1917-18], new members were elected and added to the new council. They were A. Warszawski, I. M. Zilberberg, Ch. C. Kon, Sz. Prawer, M. Sudowicz, Tz. Berliner and J. Cygler.

In 5679 [1918-19], the "*Nachliel*" [God's Bequest] union was founded through "*HaMizrachi*", the goal of which was to establish an estate in the Land of Israel.

The Visit of "*Ha'Mizrachi*" President Mr. Sz. Ch. Farbsztejn and Rabbi Isaac Nissenbaum

The visit of "*Ha'Mizrachi*" {resident Mr. Sz. Ch. Farbsztejn and Rabbi Isaac Nissenbaum from Warsaw, in Tamuz 5680 [Jun.-Jul. 1920], was a great event in our city. They were welcomed at the train station by the pioneers working on the farm, with bunches of flowers in their hands, and by representatives of "*Ha'Mizrachi*" and the General Zionists. The guests in our city spent the entire day of their visit in meetings, assemblies and lectures.

In the evening, a large public assembly was held at the New Synagogue, with the participation of the city's important figures and community leaders, with the local Rabbi at the head. Afterwards, the guests also participated in a farewell soiree that "*Ha'Shomer*" held for thirteen of its members who were leaving, that same night, to the Land of Israel, as well as in a party which "*Ha'Mizrachi*" held for them. Between conferences, the guests, accompanied by Professor Majer Bałaban, also visited the agricultural farm.

The guests' visit to our city strengthened all the city's Zionist groups and endeared the idea of "*Ha'Mizrachi*" to the local residents.

Joy at the [British] Mandate's Approval for the Land of Israel

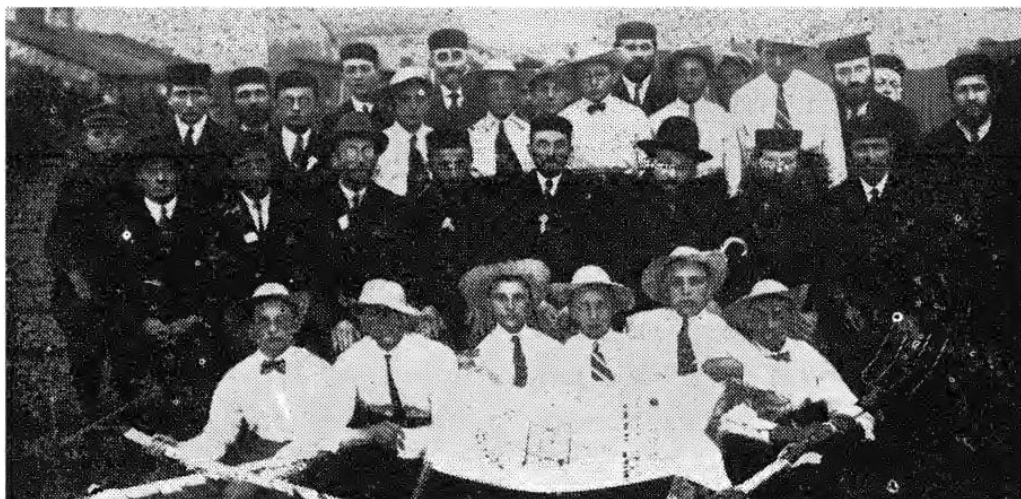
News of the Mandate's approval, by the League of Nations in 5682 [June 1922], was received in our city with joy and, with great enthusiasm, various celebratory assemblies were held. In some of the synagogues, the "*Hallel*"* was said on [the following] *Shabbes*. Also, various celebratory gatherings were held and speakers emphasised the importance of this historic event.

On *Shabbes "Chazon"* [Saturday prior to the 9th of Av], a joint assembly of "*Ha'Mizrachi*" and the Zionists was held at the synagogue. M. Halter, N. Gerichter and D. Goldberg (Achiyahu) explained to the audience the great importance of the Mandate's approval and called for major colossal activity for building the Land of Israel. A wonderful celebration was also held also "*Tzeirei Ha'Mizrachi*" in which representatives of all the Zionist groups in our city participated. The orchestra played hymns of praise, accompanied by a choir of singers. All sang and danced until midnight. The celebration made an intense impression on all those present.

"*Ha'Mizrachi's*" Influence on Public Life

"*Ha'Mizrachi*", in Częstochowa, raised the Zionist-religious flag high. [It] concentrated the *crème de la crème* of the city's religious Jewry. Great Torah scholars and men of exalted virtues brought their fierce love for Zion to orthodox circles in all their strata - merchants, artisans, industrialists and independent professionals. "*Ha'Mizrachi's*" representatives were active in all the city's institutions - in the community, the City Council, charitable organisations and in all areas of Zionist and social activity.

(The oppressive enemy also put an end to the magnificent life of "*Ha'Mizrachi*"!)



Opening ceremony at the agricultural farm of Ha'Chalutz Ha'Mizrachi in Iyyar 5684 [May 1924]
First row (sitting from right to left): Wajcman, J. Kac, Jakob Berman, Yehuda Barkai, Mojsze Tiberg, N. Klajner
Second row (sitting from right to left): Jakob Ickowicz, Józef Blechsztajn, Rabbi Brot of Lipno (Sejm mbr.), Jakob Leslau, Sz. Z. Shragai, Leib Haberfeld, Mordka J. Bencelowicz, Dov Goldberg (Achiyahu)
Among the standing: the teacher Hirsz, A. Proch, J. Goldrajch, Ch. Z. Rozen, A. Hofman, J. Barkai, Ch. Fajnsztadt (the last five with the pioneers' cadets' uniforms), J. Lewenhof, M. Borzykowski and the boy M. Szpilberg

* [Translator's note: The "*Hallel*" (Praise) is a thanksgiving prayer recited on holidays.]