

Z. K.

The Trumpeldor Youth Alliance (*Betar*) in Częstochowa

The 1929 [Arab] riots [in Palestine] shocked the youth of Częstochowa. The antisemitic tradition in our city had always been a shield against illusions of assimilation on the one hand, and against the promises of the Socialist movements on the other. In 1929, the nationalist life of Częstochowa Jewry was in decline. Although the Zionist Union did operate, much of the youth did not feel fulfilled through their activities. The news that came from the Land of Israel astounded the Jews and the youth, in particular suffered. A lack of action and a feeling of powerlessness created a fierce desire for activity and liberation.

Against this background, a small youth group was formed, headed by Perec Lasker, a student at the Hebrew high school. It operated within the framework of the *Betar* movement. Only after a few weeks, when another group was added, work began with full vigour. The main activities were carried out under the management of Józef Gliksman (Gil-Am), Mojsze Zalcer, Zvi Krak and Jakob Kolin.

The human configuration of *Betar*-Częstochowa was very typical to the entire movement. The student youth combined with the working youth extraordinarily well. The secular youth respected the religious youth and a favourable amalgamation for cooperation, with understanding, was created.

Also, in the following ten years, *Betar's* activity continued in full harmony with all the youth factions. At the beginning, the meetings were held at the Zionist movement's club but, when the framework widened, in 1930, *Betar* moved to a club of its own (on on Aleja Wolności). The main activities were concentrated in two areas - cultural and sports-defence. Cultural activities, during all those years, from the day *Betar* was founded and until the Second World War, took the form of intensive study of knowledge of the Land [of Israel], the Hebrew language, demography, history of the Jewish people and Zionism and, above all, the ideology of *Betar*, in all its facets.

Over the course of the years, a rich library in three languages was also established, directed by Pinkus Wajnszok. A mimeographed newsletter was also issued. A drama group produced plays over a number of years. As an extension of the broad cultural activities, organisational activities also held an important place. In the early 1930's, *Betar* excelled in its activities for *Keren Kayemeth* and, throughout all the years, vigorous activities were conducted for the *Tel-Chai* fund. Other undertakings should be mentioned, including the signing of multitudes of Jews of the petition regarding the opening of the gates to the Land of Israel. Cells were organised in the vicinity too – in Mstów, under leadership of Józef Szydłowski (Shilo) - in Kłobuck, led by Wajchman - in Raków, led by Zvi Chaim Win. A cell was also established in the town Krzepice etc. With the expansion of Nazism, systematic boycott operations were conducted against the import of goods and films from Germany.

Defensive sport started out in the form of movement, with stick-fighting. However, over the course of time, it developed to such an extent, that in *Betar* there were P.S.W [?] military training groups (similar to *Gadna* [Israeli youth battalions]) and the "Barak Joselewicz" legion. The *Betar* [trainees] knew how to use guns well. At first, individuals fit for this purpose were sent to instructors' courses, directed by Jeremiasz Halpern (among the first graduates was Abram Józefowicz – Yosfi, one of the first pilots in the Land of Israel).

Also, district training courses for instructors were held in Zurek, [and] courses for sergeants and summer camps, of a military character, in the Beskidy and Pradła mountains. Groups and individuals were sent for training to Kłosow, Wodzisław, Kozienice and to the military-agricultural school in Bodzentyn. The routine activities were sometimes enlivened by an event capable of invigorating the youth for a long period. Among these events should be mentioned Ze'ev Jabotinsky's two visits and the visits of Dr Ze'ev [Wolfgang von] Weisl and Menachem Begin.

In 1932, the Revisionist movement in the city won the most votes for the Zionist Congress. In a decisive manner, this was a result of the activity of *Betar* youth in Częstochowa.

The dedication of the flag, which was celebrated with great pomp in 1933, left a deep impression not only on the local *Betar*, which by then already numbered about 300 members, but also on the entire city, and became one of the greatest events for the Jews of Częstochowa in the pre-Second World War years. Community leaders, the Chief Rabbi, the representatives of all the Zionist parties and the representatives of the government and army took part in the ceremony. The youth's enthusiasm, on the one hand, and the increase in antisemitism in Poland on the other, invigorated the adults and the elderly to also organise under Revisionism. The *Ha'Tzohar* movement was thus formed, initially headed by Eliaz Ickowicz and, later, under the energetic leadership of Szmul Nemirowski.



*The inauguration of the Betar cell's flag (in 1933)
– carrying the flag is the commander Mojsze Zalcer*

During this period, *Betar* had in its club on ulica Kościuszki at the former foundry. This was a large area with industrial complexes that were spread over various blocks of buildings, enclosed within walls and buildings. Inside it were many lots of varying topography, which enabled the development of defensive sport uninterrupted. Systematic activities and large-scale public assemblies were conducted there.

Regarding antisemitism in the city, an event in which *Betar* was involved should be mentioned. In 1934, on *Lag B'Omer* [3rd May], all Zionist youth movements in Częstochowa met at the village of Jaskrów. Returning to the city that evening, they were attacked by marauders. *Betar* and "*Brit Ha'Chaya!*" immediately went into action and provided the rest of the groups with cover and thus casualties were prevented. But, amongst the members of *Betar* and "*Brit Ha'Chaya!*", there were a few wounded. The majority of our days were grey, filled with difficult, monotonous everyday labour. People who are no longer alive, and some who are living in Israel and abroad, distinguished themselves in these tasks.

Years passed and major shifts occurred in *Betar's* activities. The gates to the Land [of Israel] were locked. *Aliyah* commenced under the motto "*Af-al-pi*" [Nevertheless]. The first from our city to emigrate was Naftali Potaszewicz (Hadari). The harsh conditions of illegal *Aliyah* did not frighten the youth. The *Aliyah*, organised by *Betar*, enabled any Jew, regardless of ideology, to emigrate to the Land of Israel and, thus, dozens of Częstochowa youngsters were saved from the Holocaust. At the head of the *Aliyah* operations stood Józef Cymerman. Nearing 1939, the *Aliyah* intensified.

(With the outbreak of the War, *Betar* went underground and, there too, its members distinguished themselves. Zvi Potaszewicz and Pinkus Samsonowicz fell as heroes (see: *Clandestine Operations*). Many perished, but many others managed to arrive, after much wandering, in the Land of Israel. Thus ended *Betar's* activity in Częstochowa!)