

Chaim Landau

“Ha’Shomer Ha’Tzair” in Częstochowa

In the public of Częstochowa’s Jews, *“Ha’Shomer Ha’Tzair”* held a prominent position as the first Jewish youth movement.

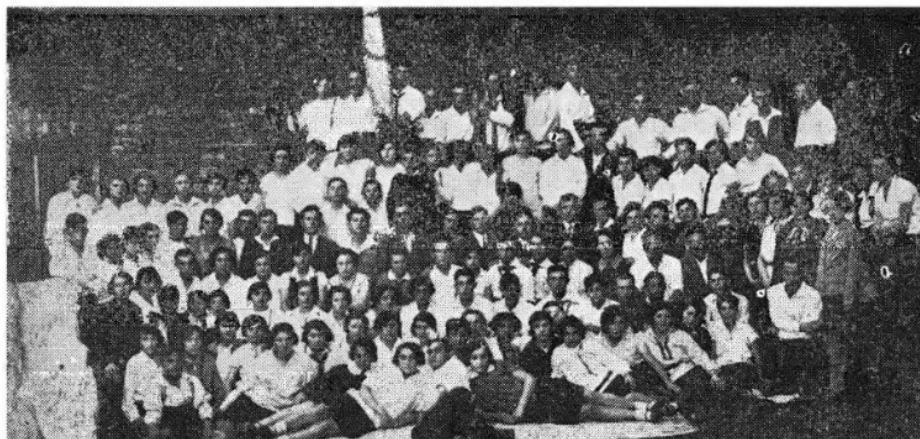
At the beginning of the First World War, the Jewish youth movement arose in several large cities in Poland. Influenced by movements abroad, Jewish youth began to unite in scouting groups which, over the course of time, developed and also crystallised ideologically.

Such groups and troops also arose in Częstochowa. Their members were high school students, workers and commercial employees. In the first years, the movement had a marked general Zionist character and was very warmly received within Zionist circles. In Częstochowa, it found its patron and guardian in the renowned public figure Henryk Markusfeld, who put spacious premises and a large part of his house on ulica Kościuszki Street (in the Aleja Wolności part) at their disposal. In those years, a large part of the city’s Jewish youth belonged to this scouting union.

In 1917, the first conference of Jewish scouting organisations in Poland was held in Częstochowa. Representatives of scouting unions from Warsaw, Łódź, Piotrków, Będzin and other cities gathered at the club of the Sport and Exercise Association (on ulica Ogrodowa) and decided to hold a nationwide conference and to establish a general union under the name *“Ha’Shomer Ha’Tzair”*.

Częstochowa not only entered the web of the Jewish Youth movement as one of its first cells, but also as the location of the first assembly, at which this movement’s organisational foundations were laid.

In the years between the two World Wars, the standing of the *“Ha’Shomer Ha’Tzair”* movement was very important in the city. Members stood out everywhere and it was also possible to recognise them by their distinct scouting attire. Every year, on *Lag B’Omer*, *“Ha’Shomer Ha’Tzair”* paraded on the city streets, marching in lines under its banners, with its band of flutes and drums marching at the front. A multitude of Jews awaited the parade in the evening, to see the “guards” returning from their annual outing in Błeszno, where they spent the holiday, with talks and games, at the scouts’ camp they had built.



“Ha’Shomer Ha’Tzair’s” Lag B’Omer celebration in 1928

From time to time, "*Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*" would hold public balls or its drama group would appear before the community.

All these were external displays were a kind of side-effect of the vigorous life that was conducted daily at the "cell" (that is what the guards called their union's clubhouse). The cell was always as busy as a bee-hive. Youth, between the ages of 13 and 20 gathered there, in training groups for scouting or sports exercises. Some sat and discussed communal and national problems or studied something. An important educational work was conducted, both in the physical and spiritual areas. Here, the character of the young Jewish generation was forged - the generation of builders of the Land of Israel and Ghetto Fighters. Here, the youth's world views were established and, here, its path in life came into being.

"*Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*" is what created the prototype of the Jewish youngster, with a Zionist and social conscience, to whom no spiritual creation was alien, who was not indifferent to society's problems and who had to be active. This type, even if he abandoned the path of "*Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*", retained distinct character traits which placed him in the front lines of action and fighting wherever he may be.

Over the course of the years, "*Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*" crystallised and set itself real and defined goals - the education of a young Jewish generation, who physically fulfils the vision of the rising of the People of Israel in its land, the Zionist and Socialist ideals, in a *kibbutz* in the Land of Israel. Indeed, since the first years of the cell's existence in Częstochowa, its members and graduates flowed to the Land [of Israel] and the *kibbutz*.

In Israel, there are many graduates of the cell in our city. They are loyal and dedicated members in *kibbutzim* Beit Alfa, Mishmar HaEmek, Ein HaHoresh, Ein Shemer, Gan Shmuel, Mesilot, Nir David, Negba, Ein HaShofet, Yad Mordechai, Gilon, Ein HaMifratz and others. This long chain continued from 1920 until the *Aliyah* of the last survivors, following the Holocaust.

Besides intensive educational activity inside the walls of the cell, "*Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*" members also participated in extensive communal projects.

The cell in Częstochowa excelled in its activities for "*Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael*". For years, it held the first place in the collection of funds. [We] should mention the name of Szmul Horowicz z"l, who devotedly managed the K.K.L work on behalf of the cell and continued doing so until the last moment, even in the ghetto.

The cell was also active in the "*Tarbut*" [Culture] movement. In it, members were in a Hebrew and Land-of-Israel atmosphere and, here, the sound of the Hebrew language was prominently heard. In all of "*Tarbut's*" projects, "*Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*" took a very active part.

"*Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*" held a special position in "*Ha'Chalutz*".

In 1929, the "mature", from the age of 18 and up, joined as members in "*Ha'Chalutz*", thus reviving the "*Ha'Chalutz*" branch in Częstochowa. The guards headed the activity, as was the case regarding the "*League for Working the Land of Israel*".

There also was cooperation with "TOZ" – the [Jewish] Health Care Society, which found, in the "guards", loyal friends, because "*Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*" members knew how to appreciate the value

of a healthy and strong body. The “guards” carried out fundraisers for the Society’s projects and “TOZ” provided them with certain aid in organising their “summer colonies” [camps]

Incidentally, within “*Ha’Shomer Ha’Tzair*”, there was the tradition that, every summer, its members would go out to summer-camps, both in nearby villages and also in the further away mountains. This short period of fun together, for 3-4 weeks in the bosom of nature, with excursions and the creation of special experiences, made a powerful impression and was of great value.

The “guards” participation was also noticeable in the professional unions, to which the working members belonged. In some of the unions (needle, metal), they were the most active.

The first cell was, as mentioned, at Markusfeld’s house. After his death, it was lodged at different locations in the city. For many years, it was across the Warta River (in Zawodzie). From there, it moved to ulica Dąbrowskiego, next to the army barracks and, after that, to ulica Focha. The locations were distant from crowded areas and thus enabled unmolested activity in the yard or in the large square. However, being far from the Jewish streets and in a Gentile area, the “guards” were often embroiled in quarrels and brawls with the “*shkotzim*”^{*}. They were beaten up and also retaliated well and emerged with dignity.

But, as antisemitism intensified in Poland, it became too dangerous and the cell was forced to relocate to the city centre, to the crowded Jewish area. The cell then moved to one of the buildings in the New Marketplace [Nowy Rynek], where there was also a large yard.

Although, in the first years, the majority of the cell’s members were secondary school students, with the crystallisation of its pioneering character, the proletarian element in it prevailed. The [number of] high school students diminished and [that of] apprentices and workers increased. However, the intellectual level of the cell’s members was not lowered. Parallel to the usual movement activities, educational training was conducted. In the evenings, members sat and studied different academic subjects, in order to broaden their horizons and establish their world view.

As mentioned, the Częstochowa cell was one of the main cells, the foundation cells, of Poland. Cell members participated in the movement’s national and world conferences and were active in its institutions. The Kielce-Zagłębie Regional Centre was also based in Częstochowa, to which were affiliated dozens of cells from Sosnowiec to Radom. Regional meetings and conferences were also held here from time to time.

We will mention the names of a few members active in the cell and the movement - Mojsze Szajewicz (now Dr M. Ishai, in Tel-Aviv), Dawid Nowak (Chadashi), W. Wołach (both died in Israel), Ze’ev Horowicz, Lea, Efrajm and Jadzia Braun (all these are in Mishmar Ha’Emek), Mania Birencwajg, Awigdor Celnik, Oded Blum, Welwele Burman, Jeremiasz Gitler (died in the ghetto), Wolek Fajglowicz (now Binyamin Fagi), Jakob Braun (both in Gan Shmuel), Szymon Wajntraub (Beit Alfa), Chaim Landau (Mesilot), Mojsze Klarman z’l (“Clarus” - killed in the War of Independence – defending his *kibbutz*, Yad Mordechai) and Szoszana Ajchenwol-Kelerman (Yad Mordechai), Berl Gwircman (among the activists in the resistance movement in the ghetto; now Dov Ben-Yaakov, member of Ein HaHoresh [*kibbutz*]).

In 1928, the horticultural farm passed from the hands of the Jewish community to the authority of the world “*Ha’Shomer Ha’Tzair*” movement. From then on, Częstochowa became a sort of centre for the general “guards” movement. The farm became a training ground, in which guards from different

* [Translator’s note: Literally “disgusting insect”, the term “*sheiget*” (Pl. “*shkotzim*”) is a derogatory appellation for a particularly depraved Gentile.]

localities in Poland and Galicia were concentrated. The farm became a central location for the cell as well. Here, the “guards” from Częstochowa met with their colleagues from the other regions of Poland. The “guards” from the regions near the border, from Volhynia and Lithuania, influenced the “guards” from Częstochowa, increasing their sense of belonging to a larger guards’ family.



Group of “HaShomer HaTzair” members (among them, the lawyer M. Ishai – now in Israel)

From 1932 onwards, the [scope of] the training broadened and exceeded the farm’s boundaries. Trainees infiltrated diverse workplaces in the city, in workshops and factories. The group members became active and took part in the city’s political and social life.

The group attained recognition in wide circles, which saw in “Ha’Shomer Ha’Tzair” a small-scale realisation of a *kibbutz* in the Land of Israel. Visitors from different circles, including non-Zionist ones, were thrilled to see the new young Jewish type.

The “guards” remained at the farm until the outbreak of the Second World War. They left it in September 1939, when they set out on the road of wanderings. Only a few were able to arrive in the Land of Israel.

(Even in Jewish Częstochowa’s last years, in the tragic years of the Holocaust and Heroism, the cell continued its activity. It kindled, within the Jewish youth in the ghetto, the belief in the vision and did not allow its members to despair. It tempered their character and prepared them for resistance and rebellion. Graduates of the cell partook actively in the resistance and rebellion both within the walls of the ghetto and as partisans in the forests. Many of them fell and a few made it to the Land [of Israel] and the *kibbutz*.)

Some of the cell’s graduates were in training groups outside Częstochowa when the War broke out. They experienced the hardships of the War throughout the Soviet Union, but nevertheless remained loyal to their movement. After the War, some arrived in the Land [of Israel] and the *kibbutz* (in Nir David and others).

In the period between the end of the War and their coming to the Land [of Israel], members were active in survivor circles and in organising the “*Bricha*” and “*Ha'pala*”^{*} and distinguished themselves in this activity).

^{*} [Translator's note: *Bricha* (escape) and *Ha'pala* (ascension) refer to the organisation of escape routes from Europe for Holocaust survivors and their illegal immigration to Palestine.]