



Young Jews, who were found, are taken out of a bunker

The Last Chapter in the Life of Cwi Brandes

When I returned home from Nuremberg two months after the outbreak of the War, I found all the [*Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*] members, including Cwi, preparing to move to Wilno. But two letters arrived from there, which instructed them to stay put in order to tend to "the family" - to organise training and to keep the Movement going. Cwi stayed put.

Afterwards, he travelled to Warsaw to seek the counsel of the Movement's leadership. He met no one and returned empty-handed. The Movement had been left without leadership, as everyone had fled eastwards. A fortnight later, once more, they travelled to Warsaw and, this time, they met with Josef [Kaplan], Tosia [Altman] and Mordechaj [Anielewicz]. It was decided to reorganise the Movement. Intensified activity ensued. In the winter of 1941, many new cells arose. Newspapers were published. A trilingual periodical then appeared in Warsaw, which was spread throughout the Movement. We received it and passed it on to Zagłębie, which was across the border. Cwi was involved in everything. He organised gatherings in private homes and saw to the transport of materials, etc.

Tosia came to us for the first time in the winter of 1939. She arrived completely frozen. When, on the way, they asked her where she was going, she replied, "To Cwi Brandes, to engage in contraband". Any other answer would have cast suspicion on her. She was bringing the news that people would be able to make *Aliyah* more quickly from Poland than from Wilno. She had attempted to cross over into Zagłębie, but had failed. Cwi went in her place and organised the activity there.

Once Josef arrived, we began tending to the establishment of the farm in Częstochowa. Josef and Cwi came to the farm, but were driven away from it. Poles were not allowed there either.

In 1940, a training [farm] was set up in Pniewy, near Warsaw, and Cwi moved there to be an instructor. And right from the start, differences of opinion arose between Cwi and Josef. Josef maintained that training [centres] needed to be established at any price. Cwi thought differently. He argued that they should not work for a landowner under such poor living conditions. His opinion prevailed and, a few weeks later, it was liquidated. They would have done so earlier but, due to the hope that the Soviets would come, which reigned at the time, they wished to remain on the land, thinking that the Soviets would give the soil to those who worked it.

In 1940, the Movement's first council [meeting] took place. Discussion revolved around the Soviet-German pact. Cwi vigorously defended the USSR's stance.

The farm next to Żarki was set up. The Joint was not willing to assist us, so Cwi brought [the] project before supporters, established a patronage - and the farm became a reality. The farm, which existed for two years, did much to reinforce the Movement.

With us, members on missions found a stopping place [and] received aid. On their way to the border, they stayed at our farm and Cwi assisted them with the border crossing. He already had his own contacts who, for large sums of money, smuggled the people across. For a certain time, the farm became the centre of the Movement. Josef, Mira¹, Mordechaj and others stayed there. We worked there freely and it seemed that we might just be able to hold out there until the War was

¹ [TN: Most likely Miriam Hajnsdorf.]

over. Cwi used to say, "After all, they won't *shoot* us..."² Somehow we would overcome the difficult times - we, together with all the Polish Jewry. In July 1942, the first deportation from Warsaw took place. We thought that, already then, the defence [force³] would act - that is what Josef had written. But this was not possible, because there were no implements and all the Jews were of a different opinion - they believed that, with the first deportation, the peril had passed. An operation to rescue the members from Warsaw therefore ensued. For this, a great deal of money was necessary. We sold much of the farm's equipment and transferred thousands to Warsaw - thousands which saved the lives of dozens. Josef fell during this operation.

In Żarki, Cwi came up with the idea of defence. A plan was even worked out, according to which we were going to take control of the gendarmerie, set the *shtetl* on fire, disconnect the telephones, etc. But, in our town of 3,200 Jews, there was a risk that even 100 people would not come forth to [take part] in the operation - as everyone was seized by a frenzy to escape. There were also no weapons and, in the end, we were forced to pull back.

Two days before the deportation, we sat all night with Tosia, Mordechaj [and] Aryje [Wilner], working out the details of [our] plans. Cwi was to cross into Zagłębie. Tosia, Aryje and Mordechaj would return to Warsaw. Mordechaj said that he would organise the defence force and he kept his word. Sometime afterwards, we sat in the cemetery with W.⁴, who had arrived from Warsaw and, from him, we heard about the copy of the secret document that had fallen into their hands, which summarised the extermination of the Warsaw Jewry. It stated that part of the [Nazi] Party had opposed the killing of the Warsaw Jews on the grounds that there was a risk the Poles would join the rebelling Jews. This opinion, however, was proven to be wrong - for not only did the Poles not resist, but they even assisted also.

It could be that had the resistance come immediately upon the first deportation, the Poles would have joined in and, perhaps, they would have called off the execution of the deportation.

Once Cwi arrived in Będzin, we began to organise the operation against the *Judenräte*.

Mostly unsuccessful attacks were launched on Jewish policemen, which only resulted in many of our comrades being arrested. On a daily basis, hundreds of letters were sent to Germany, reporting on the Germans' atrocities in Poland⁵ and calling on them to protest against these deeds. Proclamations were issued, in Polish, against the Germans, etc. They also began making preparations for defence. If it were not for Cwi, they would not even have considered it, because all the other movements opted for the path of rescuing [instead of fighting] and they only joined in as a result of his tenacious campaign. He found one comrade, named Majer, who was an expert in making bombs and other explosives. In this case, too, Cwi planned the operation in minute detail - but it was never realised, as the deportation came unexpectedly and the members were forced to go down into bunkers without any preparations.⁶

Aron Brandes

² [TN: In Yiddish in the original.]

³ [TN: Viz. the ŻOB, which was still being organised.]

⁴ [TN: Szlomo Waga; see above, p.171.]

⁵ [TN: The author explains in his article "In the Bunkers" (PINKES BĘDZIN, p.364), that the letters were sent due to the fact that inside the Reich nothing was known regarding the extermination of the Jews.]

⁶ [TN: Cwi Brandes was shot to death by the Germans in August 1943, attempting to flee the liquidation of the Będzin-Sosnowiec Ghetto; see there, p.365.]