

How Has Cwi Fallen?



I do not know why, but every time I think of him, I see before me a specific figure which appeared frequently on the covers of our periodical - a man with an raised-up fist. Do you remember that cover?

I do not know why the two images merge in my mind. Perhaps it is due to the thick, sinewy and muscular arms which he had. Or maybe it is for his rugged features, which were as if chiselled in rock - in granite - stern, sharp and simple features. His tangled, angry-looking eyebrows, which had grown into a single one, as it were, protruded from his face - a testament to his vigour and willpower.

His stride was mighty, his steps heavy but sure. His feet stuck firmly to the ground, as if trying to plant themselves in it.

Cwi Brandes

He took life as it came. He never deceived himself or was disappointed. He knew no depression or hesitation. With intelligence and knowledge - with clear-headedness - he perceived the world and people. He knew what he wanted and where he was headed. But only infrequently did he have outbursts of rage.

“I am always aware of the motives and reasons which bring a person to those particular deeds and words - and that is why my anger is rare.”

For these things, he was held in very high esteem - and also loved. He had a pet-name at the *kibbutz* [viz. training commune]. I remember his arrival at the farm in Zagłębie. There was a shortage of working hands at the time.

In the morning, he took up a hoe and went out with all the others to dig up potatoes. He worked just as much as the other members, despite the fact that he was [also] sent to another job in the region.

He conquered everyone’s heart. The simple folk in the *kibbutz* followed him around, in particular pouring their hearts out to him about acts of injustice and wrongdoing. He dedicated time to each individual and showed understanding. He gained their trust. They knew when he spoke about work, life [and] the commune, that these were not just empty sounds. They knew that he had years of arduous labour in training communes behind him and that he was a stalwart believer in communal life.

He did not care for words spoken in order to make an impression. A sentence, coming from his mouth, was laden with content and knowledge. He was an expert in international political issues, the Workers Movement and the USSR. He appraised situations insightfully, with a sense of reality, and it was not his custom to build on sand.

We were hot-headed and, more than once, he had to cool our enthusiasm. We were impatient. We demanded action - if only to encourage our spirits. But he said, “We mustn’t [act] too soon - we will perish”.

And at the same time, he was forced to fight against the [political] parties’ committee members, with their sober realism and extreme circumspection. He faced a difficult task, even at the

Ha'Chalutz council meetings. The majority leaned towards eschewing defence - but *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* was the odd one out and it was impossible to ignore Cwi's steadfast position. His stance had the weight to tip the scales. They tried buying him off, sending him to a detention camp for foreign citizens - he refused. He did not let himself be enticed. Once Cwi said, "It must be done", it was hard and also improper to oppose his words - but, in effect, little was done to support his operation.

He took many endeavours upon himself - the acquisition of material, working at the workshop, meeting with the instructors on the ground, the newspaper, the flyers, the discussions with Behm¹, testing the grenades, etc. And, indeed, he often got up in the dead of night - at four in the morning - and went out to who knows where. He sometimes spent entire nights off somewhere and returned to his home in the morning.

He spent long hours into the night by the radio, which was set up in our locality. He knew no tiredness. He would sit up in the bunker, listening for Allied stations - and the Soviet ones in particular. The next day, he would come to tell us the news, to which everyone listened with great attention. We awaited his arrival impatiently. When Cwi came home, he brought a bit of recovery and exuberance with him. We loved him.

But he began visiting us less and less. The work that was laid upon his shoulders steadily increased. He was the soul of the resistance and the Pioneering Movement in Zagłębie. He always took the hardest missions upon himself. "I'll kill Moniek² - I'll go [and do it myself]", he would say.

Then hard days came. When it emerged that the groups, which had been sent to the partisans, had fallen into the hands of the Gestapo, he wished to take his own life. "I sent them to their deaths - I killed them! And him also - Dawid - the dearest of my friends. I no longer wish to live."

They told him, "We need you here! Nothing will get done here without you - you need to stay [alive]". In the end, they convinced him. "Just so you know", he said to me. "If I thought, for a moment, that I would live on to enjoy myself - I would kill myself. But I'm sure that I'll fall."

Such was the conviction emanating from his words, that I was startled. It was a kind of death wish. A strange fate - all those of our comrades, who spoke continually of death, [ended up] falling. He, too, fell and his dream was unfulfilled.

Once, he shared a fantasy of his out loud. "We'll build a plane and fly to the Land [of Israel]. I'll arrive [there] and say, 'Why are you still sitting with your hands clasped? Why are you still sowing and rejoicing in what you reap? Why do you continue building your settlements, as if nothing had happened in the world?' But I wouldn't stay there with them. I'd return to you, carrying a load of bombs, grenades and machine-guns. Then we'd start the work!"

His dreams did not come true. He fell, because he refused to [passively] await his death sentence, alongside everybody else. He refused to allow the enemy to determine his fate, his life - for he was braver than any of us all and wished to determine his own life and death.

Chajka Klinger

(From a Diary in the Ghetto; Sifriat Poalim)

¹ [TN: Most likely reference to Władek Behm (aka Böhm or Boehm), the right-hand man of Mojsze Merin, leader of the Sosnowiec Ghetto. Not to be confused with the eminent Dr Adolf Böhm, as some sources have suggested, who was dead by then, having perished in Austria in 1941.]

² [TN: "Moniek" was Mojsze Merin's nickname.]