

THE BEGINNING OF "*BEITAR*"

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translated from the Yiddish by Carole Turkeltaub Borowitz

The youth movement *HaShachar* ["The Dawn"] was founded in Kutno on the 24th of April 1923, after it had first received instruction from Stanisławów, from an organization called by the name of "The Union of Scouts called after Josef Trumpeldor".

The number of members in the movement from the town was small. They used to gather together at our home. Among the activists remembered from that time were members Moshe Goldwasser (of blessed memory), the two Rapke brothers (of blessed memory), the Wajchselfisz brothers, and the writer of these lines. Also, as the main



Leaders of the Union of Soldiers

director for the group was based in Stanisławów [now in Ukraine], we were by way of a link with the leader of the Warsaw region group, member Goldberg (Har Zahav), standing in contact with the head commander Albert Bibering in Stanisławów. From there I received instructions and commands in the Polish language, in a telegram. In one circular the "Ten Commandments of *Beitar*"¹ were printed,

based on the principles of scouting in national Jewish education, with the aim of realizing the dream of a Jewish state within the historical borders of *Eretz Israel*.

The first meetings were held in the *Am HaSefer* school. The idea had constantly grown larger with an input from all quarters. It did not take long before it became one of the strongest organizations in the town.

At the end of 1927 the first national conference of *Beitar* and *HaShachar* was held in Warsaw, with the participation of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, at which the unification of both organizations and the emergence of *Beitar* was proclaimed. In Kutno this gave an impetus to a new determination and activities.

Then Zvi Szczsig was appointed leader of the Kutno troop, which was divided into small groups with a leader in charge of each one. In the town, a *Beitar* training farm was set up.

When A. Propes was appointed the representative of *Beitar* in Poland, the movement took off. In the year 1929 the movement held a training course in Klesów [now in Ukraine]. The same year the Kutno *Beitar* held a very successful summer camp, not far from Włocławek.

In the organization there were areas where leaders from the *Beitar* troop found themselves in special circumstances. When member M. Zandberg came from the training camp in Vilna, he had to change the course of the troop which had been altered by member Elbaum, who had managed to introduce his military training together with similar Polish organizations. This military training left a deep impression on the youth.

At that time, I was learning at the *Beitar* leaders' school in Warsaw. But the blessed work of the Kutno *Beitar* was erased by the tainted German hand which destroyed the entire Jewish life in the town.

¹ TN: Stands for Brit [covenant] of Josef Trumpeldor; a Revisionist Zionist youth movement founded in 1923 in Latvia.