

ORGANIZATION "BRITH TRUMPELDOR" IN KUTNO

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In the mid-1920s, a nationalist-minded youth could also be found in Kutno, close to the heart of the world-renowned revisionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky. The youth interested in the ideas of the *Beitar* organization and its first founders in our city were:

Abraham Goldsztajn, Zvi Landau, Zvi Kruczek, Aharon Klar, Moshe Goldwasser, Yaakov Zajdenwar. The latter was a board member of the evening classes at the *Poalei Agudat Israel*. This was a great success. Shortly after its inception, *Beitar* counted about 30 members. Comrade Goldsztajn was at the head of the founders' headquarters. Aaron Klar, Zvi Kruczek and Landau actively collaborated with him.

In fact, it must be said that the genesis of *Beitar* in Kutno was not easy. On the contrary, the "Jewish army" was ridiculed step by step, and the uniforms and exercises were mocked. But we did not pay attention – and continued with the work.

Although the former students of the *Poalei Agudat Israel* had behind them social work experience, the activity of *Beitar* has grown in scope thanks to the new, strong force, that joined the movement in 1927 – Zvi Szczig. The organization was divided into groups of 10 to 12 years, 14-12, 14--16 and three older groups. The meetings of the administration were held every Saturday at the home of Zvi Kruczek. The appeal (by order in the *nest*) was conducted once a week (Shabbat) behind the *bajeszki* [?], where people learned to march, listened to the commands and decisions of the headquarters and completed the appropriate exercises.

After an application to the Zionist Organization in town, we were assigned a room in Rabinowicz's house. Engineer Biberig was appointed commander. A *Beitarist* training was held in the village of Stanisława.

The girls were particularly active. From them emerged the full of temperament and energetic Hinde Szpajer. In general, the organization has grown and embraced workers, students, employees. Even in the assimilated circles, the *Beitar* gained a foothold.

Our first participation in the elections to the Zionist Congress brought a great deal of excitement and enthusiasm to the entire campaign and gave *Beitar* 40 votes. At the *Beitar* National Conference, held in Warsaw

in 1928, Kutno was represented by four delegates: Abraham Goldsztajn, Zvi Szczig, Aharon Klar and Yaakov Zajdenwar.



Beitar branch – 1930

As the work progressed, the board of directors of the Hebrew Gymnasium in Kutno was approached, who agreed to allocate us some rooms in the evenings. In 1930, a cross-conference was held, which gave impetus to the establishment of branches of *Beitar* in the surroundings province. Kutno provided the instructors and first organizers.

It would be a mistake to assume that *Beitar's* main activity consisted of military exercises. Obviously, the cultural-educational and enlightening activity was so extensive! In special courses and circles, the trainees were taught Jewish history, Zionism, Hebrew and Jewish literature, about Jewish personalities and historical figures, problems of *Eretz-Israel*. The new forces that joined *Beitar* in 1930 were helped by: Moshe Wigdorowicz, Zvi Nordenberg and the gymnasium students Felix Tajchner, Mordechai and Yehoshua Zandberg (studied in Kalisz), Salek Walter, Miriam Tyber, Beile Metal.

Entry into the public school ("*Powszechna*") began thanks to Chaim Zajdenwar, who became friends with school principal Klapper, an assimilated Jew who liked the *Beitar* idea. His brother even joined the movement.

Due to the growth of the organization, the work was divided among the headquarters in the following way: Commander – Zvi Szczig, who also dealt with organization and cultural issues; Abraham Goldsztajn – with military work. He was sent to a central military course in Zielonka, which was led by Yeremyahu Halperin from *Eretz Israel*.

Beitar especially cherished the anniversaries of the deaths of Trumpeldor and Herzl, organizing commemorative sections with an appropriate program. Every Friday night, lectures and open debates were held in the premises, sometimes with the participation of representatives of opposing parties, who came to discuss and hear. The "Living Newspaper" every Saturday, prepared by our own colleagues, was a great success. It



Gwircman z"l – In a coffin, after drowning

also had a dramatic circle of its own that prepared a new show almost every three months. It also made attempts to publish its own (hectographed) newspaper.

Belonging to *Beitar* meant emigrating to the Land of Israel. In order to achieve this, it was necessary to first complete the training. In Kutno itself, the Brewda brothers created a training center, where 55 colleagues from the city and surrounding area prepared for a productive working-class life in Israel. The first of *Beitar*'s who were sent for training (in 1930): Goldsztajn, Kaluszinski and others. At the training ground in Iwacewice, Kutno *Beitar* lost one of his loyal friends, Pesach Gwircman z"l, who drowned while bathing. Although 10 members had already completed the training, none of them received the required *aliyah* certificate.

The *Beitar*ists in Kutno were not active only within their movement. Their participation in all Zionist meetings and general actions was well-known in the city.

Even during the by-elections, when the main candidate was Yitzhak Grinbaum, an opponent of the revisionists, the *Beitar*ists actively supported the General Zionist list. The same goes for the community and city council elections.

In 1931, the *HaZahar* (Revisionist Party) was formed in Kutno. The growing up and older *Beitar*ists obviously needed their organizational framework. Among the General Zionists were members Kapłan, Arbuz Motl, Walter, Lidor, Chaim Zajdenwar, and Skosowski's sisters, who were active in WIZO. The *HaZahar* and *Beitar* got new premises and the work expanded greatly.

Elections to the 18th Zionist Congress were approaching. Hundreds of delegates from the area came to the *Beitar* cross-conference, which took place in the Maccabi Hall. Dr. Szechtman from the national headquarters participated.

In the year 1933, the leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky came to Kutno. His performance in urban theater attracted thousands of people indoors and outdoors. Hundreds of *Beitar*ists from the area came to see their leader. The march of the *Beitar* to the memorial service at the school, the official participation of representatives of the Polish government and the Jewish community, as well as the fact that the police kept order during Jabotinsky's visit to the city, greatly affected the movement's perception. The Christian population, as well as officers of the Polish army, watched in amazement the march and proud attitude of the uniformed Jewish youth.

After the congressional election, the *HaZahar* received 50 percent of the vote, at a time when was starting a strong campaign against the movement after the assassination of Dr. Chaim Arlosoroff.

The premises were too small to accommodate the high-growth movement. We rented a large, comfortable room on Podrzeczna Street. There was also a change in the headquarters due to the fact that Zvi Szczig left Kutno. In the new headquarters were elected: Moshe Wigdorowicz, Felek Tajchner, Mordechai Zandberg, Abraham Goldsztajn, Yaakov Zajdenwar.

The *pushkes*¹ of the Tel Hai Foundation have occupied a prominent place in hundreds of Kutner Jewish homes. In addition, there was a *flower day* once a year. The work for the Tel Hai Foundation was led by Yaakov Zajdenwar, Andrzej Welcman and Moshe Kaufman.

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Most of the *Beitar*ists of Kutno, dear Jewish youth who were imbued with the Zionist ideal, were not privileged to realize their dream of working and protecting the Jewish land. They shared the tragic fate of Polish Jewry. And those who did manage to come here – before the war and after it, remained loyal to the movement, serving the people in the Escape, the underground and in the IDF.

¹ TN: from Polish "puszka", a little container kept at home for charity.