

## N. TIGER – HIS WAY AND LIFE

Nathan Tiger was born in 1901 in the part of a new era of secular Judaism – that period of upheaval and impulse that shocked and shattered the frozen order of life of the masses and gave a huge impetus to the search for new ways, way of life and new content. A member of a devout and traditional family, which stemmed from the cracks of the new time. His older brother Moshe-Chaim



was already in the ranks of the warrior camp for a fairer world and also for secular-modern Jewish culture. There is no doubt that this had a considerable effect on the renunciation and abandonment of Nathan, who in those days was a *yeshiva* student, studying Torah.

Kutno, his hometown, is also feverishly undergoing a process of plundering values, the old being pushed by the new, the social polarization beginning and exacerbated. Among the other parties organized in the city, the Zionist-Socialist movement, the *Poalei Zion* party, led by a man of extraordinary intellect, a man of passion and devotion, stood out in particular – N. Tiger. For a relatively short time he managed to gather around the party flag most of the city's youth and intelligence. In traditional costume – a long hood and a Jewish hat – he visited the towns in the vicinity of Kutno, such as Gostynin, Krośniewice, Koło, etc., and lectured there on

current literary and political issues. He also acquired there, thanks to his tumultuous temperament, his deep thought and the power of persuasion, his own, that of his friends and fellow travelers and that of the movement.

His favorite subjects in the field of literature in those years were: Ch. N. Bialik, Sh. Asz and H. Lajwik. In particular, he devoted his time to explaining the works of art of his great compatriot – Shalom Asz, whom he admired as one of the greatest in world literature. Many of the types and characters in Sh. Asz's works were familiar to Tiger – one might say – personal acquaintance, who indeed were from his surroundings in Kutno, the city where they developed and grew up.

In the early 1920s, when he managed to educate cadres for the party and left the party in his city in loyal hands, he moved to Warsaw for central action. There he coordinated with a few other members the political-party action, edited and wrote in the movement press in his name and some fictitious names like N. Taram, N. ben I. Meir (named after his devout father Itsche Meir).

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When I immigrated to Israel in 1950, I met with him after a long separation of two decades. We sat for many hours and I told him about all the atrocities of the Holocaust that I had witnessed up close, and he asked me in pain about our friends and mutual relatives who perished in the Holocaust and those whose fate had improved and survived.

With Tiger's death, the socialist Zionist movement lost a loyal and unflinching fighter. With respect and admiration, we bow our heads in his memory. For us, the former Kutno people, he will forever remain the symbol of the great idealist, a warrior and proudly a flag bearer for a liberated world.

Pity the lost...

## N. MOSZKOWICZ

### The Discourse Man

N. Tiger, a thoughtful and educated man, a gifted orator, with intelligence and intellectual ability, – was among the most prominent activists of the Zionist Socialist camp and the *Poalei Zion*, the Zionist Socialist party in Poland.

A native of Kutno, a member of a very devout family of Gur chassidim. A *yeshiva* student with a sharp mind and considered a prodigy – Tiger was caught up in the Zionist idea and left to God his father's hopes that he was destined to be a rabbi and one of the great in Israel. Still wearing a capote, Jewish hat and long sidelocks, he joined, as the representant of one of his townspeople, the Zionist Youth Association, founded in Kutno in 1914, as the "Little *Bnei-Zion* Association" and soon became the spiritual leader of the youth in his city and surrounding cities.

His public activity in Poland in 1920-1930, until his immigration to Israel in 1932, was multifaceted, rich in

action and full of struggles over working conditions and difficult life: teacher and educator in schools influenced by the party (Tel-Hai, *SchulCult*<sup>1</sup>), Tiger lectured on political and literary issues, went on missions for the party in various territories, was secretary of the party and editor of its press. But most of Tiger's power was in the conceptual debate. He was the discourse man in the sublime and broad sense of the term.

In those days, discourse was a heavy weapon in public struggles. The public was awake and attentive to the word in discourse and in writing. In the Jewish street, there was a fierce struggle between the Zionist idea and the opponents of Zionism of all kinds. In particular, the struggle was intensifying between the pioneering, Zionist-Socialist camp on the one hand, and the influential "*Bund*" and the communist movement, which had deep roots among Jewish youth on the other. These were not quiet debates in chambers, but heated and exciting debates in referendums, in election wars, in conventions, on the street, in every city and town, in every Jewish home. And there was a valuable weight for a catchy word that clarifies the problem, crushes the opponent, increases the faith among the followers of Zionism and raises doubts and hesitations among the undecided public and even in the opposition camp.

N. Tiger treated the argument as a weapon that needed to be refined, renewed from time to time, sharpened, used effectively and aimed at the opponent's weak spot. Imbued with a belief in the righteousness of our way, equipped with the tenets of socialism and socialist Zionism, familiar with current issues in the life of the masses and knowing the psychology of the various strata of the people – Tiger would stretch his hips and leap into battle with all his turbulent temperament. He was among the most sought-after speakers, especially in the election war; He knew how to deal with the best orators of rival parties; his appearance at rallies always aroused interest, tension, in the rival camp, increased confidence among party members who would proclaim: "*Der tiger iz gekumen!*," that is, "Beware – the tiger has come!"

"It is better for a farmer to be a reactionary than for an employee to be a revolutionary" – that is, a farmer in *Eretz Israel*, even when he is not a revolutionary, is better off than a Diaspora Jew who claims to be a revolutionary. This catchphrase of Tiger would reveal to the listener all the anomalies in our social structure in the Diaspora and highlight the ridiculous situation of the *Bund* and Jewish communism, speaking on behalf of the Jewish proletariat, on behalf of the revolutionaries and accusing the Zionist-Socialist camp of reactionary action in Israel.

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N. Tiger was also among the main leaders and explainers inside the camp. It was a period of ideological formation and partisan organization, the party within the Zionist movement, in relation to the homegrown Zionism of factions and unions in the Diaspora and in Israel, of laying the foundations for policy and currents within the

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<sup>1</sup> TN: Association of Schools and Culture

Israel camp: determining the party's ways in "today's work"; in the towns and communities, in school building, in the question of languages, in taking a stand on the basic problems, and the current problems within the labor movement and world socialism and about what is happening in the state of Poland in those days.

N. Tiger was an acute opponent in some problems. He was a man of principles. He did not stand the blurring of concepts. He was meticulous about the accuracy of the wording, claiming that negligence in the platform and wordings accepted in our movement and in the movement of workers in the world – may allow to deviate from the path. And although he sometimes erred in his assessments and approach to various problems, he always felt in his words an inner truth and deep self-thought and much came from him, in the ideological formation of the party in Poland.

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When he immigrated to Israel, *his voice fell silent*. True, he would attend conventions, conferences; at times he enlisted in various activities – but whoever knew Tiger "from those days", his tumultuous temperament, his public awakening and the scope of his activity – noticed that *he was no longer the same man*. Prominent among the party activists who immigrated from Poland, his place in public life in the country was not noticeable, he did not know and the others did not know how to use his talents, knowledge and intellectual ability and public experience in the reality of life in the country.

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Out of ideological integrity and loyalty, N. Tiger was among the few party leaders in Poland who joined a kibbutz. It was not easy for him to adapt to the kibbutz lifestyle. Keeping to himself, a loner, the kibbutz also failed to find use for his ability and generate public activity in it, but he was aware of the kibbutz's problems until its last day.

He devoted most of his years in the country to teaching. He had extensive and in-depth knowledge of the social sciences, history and literature. He served as a teacher in high schools and in later years as a teacher in training – in "*Oranim*", in the Teacher Training Seminary in Haifa and in the IDF Seminar. He was accepted as a teacher with an original, independent approach and many enjoyed his lectures. However, he did not always find satisfaction in this area either. It seemed to him that the degree of listening and the ability of the listeners to absorb were not at all commensurate with the great efforts he made to impart information to his students.

A man rich in spirit, hard-working and who had a hard life, a loyalist of the labor movement and the kibbutz, passed away.

## A. BERDICZEWSKI

### In a single camp

I did not meet closely with Nathan Tiger while he was in Kutno. We each lived in our own world. He, a rising force in the local life of two parties. I – completely

involved in the life of the pioneering youth movement. But, together with everyone, I knew and appreciated his talents. There was a good popular speaker, a sharp polemicist, a tribune. More than once in conversations with my father – who was at the center of Zionist activity in the town – we appreciated Tiger's great talents.

He then took off for national activity and his voice was among the popular voices in Polish cities and towns. Tiger specialized mainly in arguing with the *Bund*. And here in Israel, when I met him years later, when I found out about his membership in the kibbutz, I was very happy. In the vibrant Jewish town of Kutno, there was a place for everyone – for all currents and shades – even the most contrasting. And we were as if everyone was proud of the spiritual diversity in the life of our town. But, after the Holocaust – when the town was gone and we were so few --- the modest but first line – the pioneering line is infinitely more important. And for that I was glad that we were finally in a single camp.

In fragmented conversations I have had in recent years with Tiger, I have heard quite a few disappointments from the current situation and also quite a few longings for a loyal labor movement and a socialist warrior – here in our country.

Despite the uniqueness of Tiger's path in life – these disappointments and longings are not the property of the individual – which has gone from us, they are an integral part of the hopes of our generation.

Y. RIFTIN