

THE MARTYRDOM OF ZIONIST YOUTH

HECHALUTZ IN NAZI-OCCUPIED POLAND

The following account of the attempts made to maintain the Hechalutz movement in Nazi-occupied Poland up to the date of the Russo-German war has been taken from the Palestine press, which recently published interesting material on this subject from a correspondent who left Warsaw about the middle of last year. Although no reliable news of the position has been made available since Hitler's invasion of Russia, it may safely be concluded from the martyrdom of Zionist youth in Poland described in this article, that the heroic spirit dominating the Hechalutz movement some months ago remains undaunted even at the present time.

ZIONIST life, says the writer, is concentrated mainly on relief activity. It is difficult to speak of regular Zionist work in an atmosphere of dire distress, where every Zionist is burdened with inhuman personal and family troubles. But thanks to the enterprise of the Chalutz there are occasional efforts at cultural activity. There exists a National Cultural Committee which arranges lectures from time to time, and the eight hundredth anniversary of the death of Jehudah Halevi was observed in Warsaw at a special meeting. There was also some talk of a shekel campaign.

As for the Chalutz movement, there was, in actual fact, no interruption of its activity at any time. Even when no public body ventured to think of any communal activity the Chalutz was determined to continue. The efforts of the movement during the first year of the war were devoted to the following: (1) Contacts with members; (2) The continuation of the Kibbutzim (*In Poland the term Kibbutz denoted a group of Chalutzim who hired themselves out collectively for different skilled and unskilled jobs.—Translator*); (3) The establishment of new enterprises; (4) Endeavours to emigrate.

The maintenance of the Hachsharah Kibbutz in Lodz, where the Ghetto first came into being, cost a terrific struggle. How could they give up this gigantic enterprise in which so much energy had been invested? When the Ghetto was established in Lodz a group of Chaverot who could have stayed out of it deliberately entered it so as to be able to keep alive the spirit of Hechalutz. Their determination has indeed borne fruit, and the Hachsharah Kibbutz exists in the Lodz Ghetto.

The Kibbutz of Bendin remained intact. This was largely due to the comparatively better position of the Jews of the Zaglebie district, where the administration was relatively more convenient. The Hechalutz laundry was functioning, and there was talk of the establishment of a

Hechalutz Kibbutz in Sosnowiec. A chalutz farm has been established near this town. There is no Ghetto in Bendin, and this helps a great deal.

During the first winter of the war attempts were made to maintain the Kibbutz of Kelce. This did not succeed because the authorities requisitioned the Chalutz quarters.

The Grochow Farm.

THE pride of the Chalutz movement in Poland is the Grochow Farm. Grochow, which is near Warsaw, was famous for having trained hundreds of chalutzim now in Palestine. Its re-establishment is the most daring effort of Zionist youth in Poland in these dark days. The farm was first destroyed during the hostilities. As soon as it was possible, Hechalutz began approaching various institutions to help in the reconstruction. The first job was to persuade the Zionists, who were pessimistic, and tried to curb the enthusiasm of the chalutzim with "logical" arguments, but the strong will of the chalutzim to return and re-establish the ruins prevailed. The legal ownership was in the hands of the Kehillah which is now ruled by mediocre people, and there were many difficulties.

The story of Grochow has raised the prestige of Hechalutz tenfold in the eyes of the Jewish public. Even non-Zionists became attached to the Chalutz movement because of the daring Grochow effort. Czarnikoff, the head of the Kehilla, attended the "dedication of the new stables ceremony," and said in his speech that he felt "as if he had been released from the slavery of Egypt, which is the Kehilla-building in Warsaw, and brought into Palestine—which is Grochow." As a mark of appreciation the Kehilla presented Grochow with two cows. Even the Nazi authorities admire the Grochow Jews who work with devotion on their farm. Some show distinct friendship and help in the re-establishment of the inventory.

The greatest crisis in the life of Grochow took place when the Ghetto was decreed. On the first day of the Ghetto the chaverim were assembled and brought by special transport to the Ghetto. Only the official director of the farm remained. The chaverim did not wait for permits to return. Their concern over the property of the farm induced them to come back by stealth, though they placed their lives in danger by slipping away to the farm. After some time permission was given by the authorities for the chalutzim to work in Grochow during certain hours of the day on condition that they lived in the Ghetto. This was obviously impossible for farmers who have to be on the spot at all hours. Another application was made and they were finally permitted to stay in Grochow permanently. They are not allowed however to come out of Grochow into the wide world.

The danger threatening Grochow, though, is by no means past, continues the writer. The first step towards its destruction was taken by the authorities when they appointed a Nazi commissar, who lives permanently on the farm. The chaverim are now mere workers, and seem to be regarded as a Labour Corps. Despite everything no one has left, and everyone is determined to cling to the acquired position.

THE Kibbutz in Warsaw has passed through various vicissitudes. The girls are doing domestic service under hard conditions. A number of chaverim are working in the post office at loading parcels, in the police and in other institutions. They have established on a small scale, tailoring, shoe-making and hairdressing establishments. Where the Nazi authorities are the employers, the chaverim find difficulty in making ends meet. The price of a kilo of bread is 4 zloty and the wages for a day's work are 3 zloty and 20 groszy, of which one has to spend 70 groszy on tram fare!

Many chalutzim go out to work for seasonal agricultural employment. During the harvest season many hire themselves out to the land-owners and farmers. They go out in groups so as to maintain the chalutz character of their work.

Cultural Activity.

THE Warsaw branch of Hechalutz has established a choir conducted by Professor P., and also a dramatic studio led by J. B., a Hebrew writer. Its first appearance took place at a concert organised in a big soup kitchen. The programme consisted of biblical tableaux, folk-songs, recitations, a children's choir, etc. Chalutzim also went out to teach the children's circles which take the place of the schools. These little circles are being trained in the spirit of Palestine. From time to time Chalutz publications appear dealing with various aspects of the movement. They take the place of books, which are unobtainable.

Various efforts were made by chalutzim to get out of the country with a view to reaching Palestine. These, however, were not successful.

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