

## Youth Movements

Jewish youth organizations that came into being in Europe between the two world wars. These movements had different motivations, whether religious, social, cultural, or political. Some were Communist or Socialist, others were Zionist, and some movements were both Zionist and Socialist. Others were not associated with any political movement or ideology. However, as the Nazis began persecuting Jews throughout Europe, members of all the Jewish youth movements took a leading role in resisting the Nazis and assisting their fellow Jews.

In Eastern Europe, many of the youth movements were Zionist in nature. Among the first youth movements in Eastern Europe was *Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir*, which combined both Zionism and radical Socialism in its ideology. The *Dror* movement was similar to *Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir*, but its members came from poorer circles. The *Gordonia* movement promoted a more moderate Zionist-Socialist platform, while the *Ha-No'ar ha-Tsiyyoni* and *Akiva* youth movements encouraged Zionism and Hebrew culture. The *Betar* group was actually the youth wing of the Zionist Revisionist political movement, and thus had specific political goals in mind.

Many of the Zionist movements, except *Betar*, were connected to specific *kibbutz* (collective settlement) movements in Palestine, and part of their ideologies was to send members off to settle in Palestine. Thus, many of the movements' members participated in agricultural training programs in preparation for immigration. The connection between members of youth movements was very strong, as was their belief that what they were preparing for was very worthwhile and important. This attitude was probably one of the great reasons why during the war youth movement members, despite their age, took a leading role in resisting the Nazis.

Right before World War II broke out in the fall of 1939, some 100,000 young Jews were involved in the various youth movements. Despite the fact that the Nazis outlawed Jewish youth movements and their activities early on, the movements continued on in secret. After Germany invaded Poland, signaling the beginning of the war, many youth movement leaders fled the cities of

western and central Poland for Soviet-held eastern Poland, hoping to make it from there to Palestine. Soon, however, some of the youth movements decided to send some of their senior members back to German-occupied territory to help their fellow young people trapped by the Nazis, and reorganize them for a viable existence as secret, underground organizations. Some such leaders who returned home in 1940 were Yitzhak (Antek) Zuckerman of the *Dror-he-Halutz* movement and Mordecai Anielewicz of the *Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir* movement.

The youth movements active in the various Ghettos of Poland embarked upon serious activities, such as organizing study courses, seminars, ideological workshops, and other such programming. They were also in charge of publishing the underground newspapers, and in Warsaw, the youth movements set up a courier network to keep in contact with other ghettos.

Unlike many of the older, more established Jewish communal leaders, who felt that "this too shall pass," the leaders of the youth movements saw the future with surprising clarity. They were convinced that they had no real chance of survival under the Nazis, and that their only chance was armed resistance, even until the death of their last man. Thus, after the "final solution" was put into effect, the youth movements began organizing themselves for resistance against the Nazis. In the Warsaw, Vilna, and other ghettos, youth movements established militias to carry out uprisings within the ghettos. In other ghettos, such as in Kovno, the young resisters made plans to escape to the forests and join the Partisans. In France, Jewish youth movements were involved in armed resistance (see also Jewish Army, France) and in rescue activities (see also French Jewish Scouts). In Budapest, Hungary, youth movement members saved thousands of their fellow Jews mostly by handing out forged identity documents. (see also Resistance, Jewish.)