

Ferenc Leicht With A Zionist Group In Austria



This picture was taken in Steyr in 1948, when I on the way to Israel, my Zionist comrades and I walked through the towns where we stayed and agitated the youth to join us. I am in the middle of the column, in light coat and a cap, with my rolled up blanket across my shoulder.

At the beginning of 1946 a young man called Frici Lusztig (he is now the director of the Saped Hungarian Museum in Israel) came to Nagykanizsa. This Frici Lusztig was the organizer of a leftist Zionist movement, who called together all the Jews he could in Nagykanizsa and explained that not those were the Zionists who wore a badge, but those who were willing to risk their lives so that the Jewish state would be built. And he explained that if someone was Jewish and felt Jewish should take part in this and help. This was like an irradiation for me, and right there and then I joined one of the youth Zionist organizations of social democrat character called Habonim Dror

Then I went to Pest for 6 weeks' training, to a seminar. The Zionist movement was still legal at that time, we were in a Jewish villa, its owner had been killed. We lived there, too, there was about 40 of us, 20 boys on bunk beds in one room. There were girls there, too, they were equal with us, moreover they were often the cleverer, they were often the bosses. On the 29th November the UNO voted that they would divide Palestine in two, and the Jewish state would be established there. As soon as the Jewish state was voted the fights started in Israel. And then boys and girls of my age volunteered immediately, we wanted to go to fight, and in that fall, at the beginning of the fall 1947 we enlisted to the Haganah and waited to leave. At the end of January or beginning of February 1948, we went to Austria. The entire company, about the 40 of us.

They took us to Vienna where a vacated school was the refugee camp. We were there for 6 weeks. Then the drillmasters of the Israeli elite army arrived, and they started to train us for armless, as

they say man against man fight. After 6 weeks they took the entire company to a place, where a former Lager was already full with volunteer Jewish young people, who had been gathered to one place from all kinds of movements from all Europe. And there they continued the drilling, but in bigger formation.

We had retraining there for 2 or 3 months, then we went from there to Italy on foot through the Brenner Pass, in big snow, with smuggler leaders. And before we had left Austria we went to I don't know how many refugee camps with the blue and white flag and recruited the young Jewish kids to come and defend the country. There were some who came, and some who didn't, but we did grow in number in the meantime.