

Bernard Knezo Schönbrun With The Michalovce Maccabi Hatzair



This photograph, taken in 1937 or 1938, shows the members of the Maccabi Hatzair youth organization in Michalovce, which I led. In the photo I'm the seventh from the left. You see, in 1938 there was an All-Sokol Slet (Rally) taking place in Prague, and they also invited us, Jewish youth, to prepare for it. I don't remember them all any more, but for example the girl standing first on the right was named Weissova. She was an exceptionally smart girl. The third one standing from the left is Agi Bleyova. Agi survived the war and then emigrated to Israel. Standing on my right is Karol Hex, and squatting on my left is Samuel Trenk. Trenk had an interesting fate. During the war he and Simon Schwarz had themselves sealed up in a coal wagon, and thus got through Austria all the way to Switzerland. My political evolution took the following course. When I came to Michalovce, I began to be friends with Emil Fürst. Gradually it began taking 'the left side of the road'. The entire Fürst family was oriented towards the left. Emil and I went through Hashomer Hatzair together. We also took courses. I remember that during the year 1937-38 I was on one such course in Levoca. Jozko Weiser, the 'wisest Jew in Slovakia' at the time, according to my opinion, lectured for us. As far as sports are concerned, I learned and improved in them in school, for one. We had an excellent gym teacher, Professor Stranaja, the founder of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sports and Comenius University in Bratislava. Then in the FAK soccer club in Michalovce, and then finally in Maccabi, where we left-oriented students met up with 'class-related' apprentices. Together with them we rented a room, a workshop, where during the day they repaired cars. In the evening we'd come there, sweep the auto repair shop, and then exercised. We for example bought some old parallel bars from the school, our first equipment. As I excelled at sports, they elected me as their leader. It was this sports leadership position. There were about 10, 15 of us boys. Some boys from so-called better families used to go exercise at Betar. These boys underestimated us a bit, which followed from our social standing. Betar was right-wing. We called them the Fascists. They exercised with clubs and were basically preparing to fight in Palestine. No, we said. In Israel, where we were preparing to go, it's going to be necessary to convince the Arab laborers that we're class

comrades. So that the Arab laborers wouldn't work for lower wages, but would ask for the same as Jewish ones. As a poorer student, I overall belonged to leftist-oriented youth. When I was older, we used to have class or school dances. We also had dances for the Jewish holiday of Purim. Unfortunately, I had to rent a suit for these dances. At the age of 16, I already measured 180 cm and weighed 80 kilograms. I'm saying this because I was physically more mature than others of my age, and thus the rented suits were necessarily shorter. The sleeves were short, so I pulled my arms in so it wouldn't show. Basically my height and weight made itself felt in sports. As a poor boy I tried to excel in something. I even became a Maccabi leader for Jewish boys of my age. Some of us high school students used to go to the parties along with boys that were apprenticing as tradesmen. Despite my being a high school student, socially I was closer to those apprentices. The fact that we used to organize Purim dances also brought us together. We'd rent the Golden Bull Hotel and that's where we'd dance. To this day I remember some of the songs that we used to sing there.