

Feliks Nieznanowski With Jewish Youth In Dzierzoniow



This is me, Feliks Nieznanowski, with Jewish youth in Dzierzoniow. It was taken shortly after the war, in the 1940s.

I was in Dzierzoniow in 1946-1947. I found myself in the center of things. There were so many kibbutzim, various ones, of various hues! And I had come as a leftist, from the Soviet Union. So I ask them, 'Which organization am I supposed to join?' 'The ZWM!' they tell me. Alright, let it be the ZWM. And the Jews were quarreling about who was to be in charge of distributing the things that are arriving, because through Gdansk there were arriving loads of stuff from the Joint: bales of fabrics, machines, products, food, all for the Jewish survivors. Really great amounts of stuff. And, typically for the Jews, they started quarreling who was to be in charge of all that. And each party wanted to be important. Finally, a decision was made – I have no family, I'm young, I will be the storeman. Because half of all that stuff had already found its way to the market. They were already dealing, doing gesheft, business. And so shipments were arriving – there's matzah, there's canned fish, there's kosher food. Loads and loads of stuff. You made lists and in the cooperatives, the factories, there were distributing the stuff according to those lists. But there were always some smooth operators who tried to get the stuff that wasn't theirs.

And someone told me, 'There's one man you can trust, and his name is Szpryngier. He is a German who saved the synagogue and the Jewish cemetery here, he was here throughout the war. He's the only man you can trust. Okay, Szpryngier or no Szpryngier, I had to deal with all kinds of people in the Ural. I introduced myself. I gathered all the Jewry – for in the meantime I had become an anti-Semite – and told them so, 'All the keys that you have, put them on the table! I brought locksmiths, all the locks have been replaced, and only me and Szpryngier have keys to them now, no one else is allowed to enter the storerooms.'

And then it started! 'What, he wants to introduce his rule here!?' They started tossing around, shouting. Started accusing my brother that he discriminates in favor of the Zionists. That, though

he's a communist, he still shows favor to the kibbutzniks. A brawl started. It was the time of the so called rightwing-nationalist deviation. I was powerless. With such a crowd of people I had no power to control all that. I asked some of the younger ones to the side and tell them, 'Listen, I don't want you to be policemen, but please, keep a watchful eye. If you see someone selling chocolate on the market - where does he have it from? Or canned food?' Everyone knew it was a tactic to frighten. And they grumble, 'Look, such a young lad and such a zealot.' And bargaining began, like today - who is to have control over all that aid? Let's do a rotating presidency, first the Poalei Zion, then the Bund, then the religious organization. Ideology was mainly just a cover. I knew the kibbutzim needed to provide for the people, they had taken them under their roof, had to feed them, nourish them. It wasn't important for me whether someone was from this or that kibbutz - what was important was that they have enough food to feed their people. A major tussle started and then I said, 'Enough! I can no longer stand it here.'