



COMMUNIST ANTISEMITISM – 1968 MARCH EVENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION _____	4
2. OUTLINE OF POLISH-JEWISH RELATIONS IN THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC _____	7
3. THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE EXTERMINATION OF THE JEWISH POPULATION _____	11
4. NEW OCCUPATION – POLAND AS A SATELLITE STATE OF THE USSR _____	14
5. AT THE SOURCE OF MARCH 1968: “GOMUŁKA’S THAW” – THE END OF THE PARTY’S UNITY AND DISAPPOINTED HOPES FOR CHANGE _____	17
6. AT THE SOURCE OF MARCH 1968: STUDENTS’ “COMMANDOES” AND MOCZAR’S “PARTISANS” _____	20
7. AT THE SOURCE OF MARCH 1968: SIX-DAY WAR AND THE “FIFTH COLUMN” _____	22
8. “1968 MARCH EVENTS”: “DZIADY” AND THE “ANTI-ZIONIST CAMPAIGN” _____	25
9. “1968 MARCH EVENTS”: PURGE IN THE POLISH ARMY _____	30
10. “1968 MARCH EVENTS”: EMIGRATION _____	33
11. “1968 MARCH EVENTS”: INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT _____	35
12. SUMMARY _____	37

March 1968 is one of the most painful dates in the history of Polish-Jewish relations. Exactly 50 years ago, the communist authorities of the then Polish state forced nearly 20,000 Jews and Poles of Jewish ancestry to emigrate. On the list of those who left Poland, we find many eminent scholars, doctors, writers, painters, philosophers, but also politicians of that time. The campaign of hatred was a methodically and cynically planned internal game of the communist party. Despite the great efforts of the authorities, public support for the anti-Semitic witch-hunt was miserable. Unfortunately, the responsibility for those events is still being assigned to the entire Polish nation.

The crisis was triggered by student protests in Warsaw, Gdańsk, Wrocław, Poznań and Kraków in defence of Adam Mickiewicz's drama "Dziady" that had been banned by censorship. The strikes were brutally suppressed by government forces. The crisis in March 1968 became a pretext for the authorities to execute the previously planned so-called "anti-Zionist campaign". The main architects of this anti-Semitic campaign and provocation were none other than the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party Central Committee, Władysław Gomułka, Minister of Internal Affairs, General Mieczysław Moczar, Minister of National Defence, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, and a long list of communist journalists strongly associated with the authorities and special services.

Contemporary historiography has its disposal quite an extensive set of literature based on hard facts and materials of the Polish communist party from this period, however, the 1968 March events are often falsely presented as yet another evidence for the anti-Semitic Polish element.

We see the lack of good English monographs on the events of the Polish March, hence on the occasion of the anniversary, our abridged version of the accidents from exactly half a century ago. In another Poland, in a different geopolitical situation, and most importantly, in a society deprived of the freedom of speech and the right to vote.



1. INTRODUCTION

The political solstice, one of the turning points in the history of the Polish People's Republic, usually referred to collectively as "the March events" of 1968, was undoubtedly an extremely complex and multifaceted development. This in turn significantly impacts its perception and – out of all the so-called "Polish months" – makes March, paradoxically, the least well-known, but the most recognisable. Unfortunately, due to the individual and out of context views on selected aspects of those events, March's image is often distorted and sometimes even mendacious. One of such aspects that evokes the greatest emotions to this day, is the so-called "anti-Zionist campaign", which set the tone for the authorities' March propaganda.

There are many indications that the campaign was the result of the Israeli victory in the Six-Day War, and the deliberately exaggerated signals about the clearly pro-Israeli sentiments of some Jewish circles in Poland served as a pretext for internal faction purges within the party apparatus of the Polish United Workers' Party – PZPR. A characteristic feature of this campaign was the fact that although it was openly based on anti-Semitic resentments of parts of the lower social strata, its "anti-Zionist" dimension was not limited to only attacking Jewish circles. The victims of this hate campaign of sorts, which had been steadily escalating for several years, and whose apogee took place in March 1968, were both Jews and Poles of Jewish descent as well as people who had no connections with Jews or Israel whatsoever¹. The alleged "Zionism" was used so instrumentally by its initiators that combining elements so wickedly contradictory, often led to considerable confusion among obedient doers and caused bizarre situations, when it was impossible to determine exactly who and why was under attack².

Researchers dealing with this issue point to the visible similarities in character of the "anti-Zionist campaign" and "rightist-nationalist deviations" within the Polish United Workers' Party at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s. In both cases, a *de facto* marginal phenomenon served only as a pretext for a widespread purge, with the intent to terrorise the party apparatus by artificially creating a secretive enemy that was to be detected and annihilated. It is impossible not to refer such a *modus operandi* to the behavioural patterns during Stalin's "Great Terror", when, for example, the absence of any Trotskyist sympathies was no guarantee of security in the face of the campaign against Trotskyism. Similarly, in March 1968, an opportunity was taken advantage of to deal with all sorts of "Marxist revisionists", "literary politicians" or "classic reactionaries" inspired unawares or not by

¹ D. Stola, *Antyżydowski nurt Marca 1968 (Anti-Jewish trend of March 1968) [in:] Oblicza Marca 1968 (Images of March 1968)*, K. Rosicki and S. Stepień, Warsaw 2004, p. 67.

² The case of the Interpress director Jerzy Solecki serves here as a great example. As part of the struggle against "Zionism", he contributed to the exclusion from the party of six journalists, including one with no connection to Jews, only culpable of defending his colleagues. Asked later by one of the journalists how he actually understood "Zionism", he replied he had no time to check the details in an encyclopaedia and, according to him, a "Zionist" was a person whose parents were Jews. In a letter to Władysław Gomułka dated April 7th, 1968, the secretary of the Central Committee Artur Starewicz drew attention to the problem of the almost universal disability to distinguish the terms "Jew" and "Zionist" by both non-party and party masses and even the party apparatus.

INTRODUCTION

a sinister “Zionist-Jew”. Generally speaking, for the purposes of an objective evaluation, one should look on the Polish March primarily through the prism of events that took place in October 1956 and the then conflict between the two centres of influence in the party – the “Natolin faction” and the “Puławian faction”. It will then turn out then that during the anti-Semitic campaign, unleashed in 1968 by the circles around General Moczar that came out victorious out of that clash, proceeding towards the next struggle for influence against the former “Puławian Group”, exactly the same measures were used as the “Natolinians” had used before. However, they did it in a much better prepared and thought-out way, which ultimately ensured their success. It was, therefore, a kind of “play-off” in the intra-party confrontation that General Moczar's “Partisans” undertook in the name of similar goals as their opponents, but on a much larger scale and with a definitely better result.

The rudimentary question about the effects of the “anti-Zionist campaign” on Polish society remains unanswered. Personal experiences concerning the attitudes of individual Poles during the memorable March are largely divided and, apart from the allegations of “uncouth agreement between the authorities and the rest of society”, *id est*, Poles’ active involvement in the anti-Semitic campaign, opinions about their abstinence and calm are also quite commonplace³. In general, both a clear and firm support for the actions of the authorities as well as demonstrating opposition to the anti-Jewish campaign were rather rare. The majority of the society kept silent about this issue, and the assessment of said silence is extremely risky, or perhaps simply impossible. On the one hand, it can be interpreted as an expression of silent approval, yet on the other, as a form of passive resistance, a refusal to become actively involved in the campaign, despite pressure or incentive from the party’s high members themselves⁴. The very evolution of the campaign, initially “anti-Zionist” that later turned into an almost overtly anti-Semitic, can in the light of passivity of society also be interpreted as a desperate act, trying at all costs to spark anti-Semitic moods among the populace, the existence of which the initiators were certain, whereas turned out in the end to be clearly overestimated.

Certainly, this does not entitle the “anti-Zionist campaign” initiated by Władysław Gomułka to be used in the formulation of theses or narratives that inscribe the “March events” into a phenomenon of universal Polish anti-Semitism or collective responsibility of Poles, because it would lead in a straight line to making the picture of the whole issue shallow or even false. March, as a relatively still fresh event and still in the memory of the victims of the brutal purge, often serves a prism used to evaluate the entire centuries-old and complex history of Polish-Jewish relations. Thus, its negative overtone affects their image, distorts them, and involuntarily leads to a perception of the almost 1,000-year-old relationship between Poles and Jews as a constant conflict. From here a simplistic path leads to motivating this conflict precisely with commonplace Polish anti-Semitism and to creating of a narrative based on it, in which negative events are deliberately exaggerated to justify such a thesis.

³ J. Eisler, *Szok marcowy (Shock of March) [in:] Midrasz (Midrash), no 3 (11) 1998, p. 389.*

⁴ D. Stoła, *op. cit.*, s. 71.

INTRODUCTION

Therefore, before we go into a detailed discussion of the “March accidents”, it is necessary to present the appropriate context of those events. Also, in relation to the whole of Polish-Jewish relations during the first half of the 20th century, from the moment Poland regained its independence in 1918.



2. OUTLINE OF POLISH-JEWISH RELATIONS IN THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC

In the times of the Second Polish Republic, the problem of anti-Semitism of some of the right-wing circles of the time was promoted to the forefront of Polish-Jewish relations. This phenomenon, no doubt real and existing, has been exaggerated to absurd proportions. Which severely impacts the public debate to this day. It allows some circles to put up a sign of equality between right-wing governments and the rebirth in Poland of “fascism”⁵ or even Nazism. In fact, anti-Semitism in the Second Polish Republic had never been an element of official state policy. The notorious examples of anti-Semitic attacks, ghettos at universities, rarely had a racial, rather economic-cultural, basis. The Polish-Jewish relations in the interwar period, extremely rich, complex, and fascinating, can hardly be reduced only to the level of struggle against anti-Semitism.

However, the issue of any discussion on the specificity of mutual relations should be started with setting order to concepts and an explanation how to understand the terms “Jew” and “Pole of Jewish ancestry”. This extremely complex issue, in which it is difficult to make a definite and final distinction, seems to be best summarised by Professor Krystyna Kersten, who ostentatiously left the Polish United Workers’ Party in protest against the “anti-Zionist campaign” of 1968. She wrote: “When I say *Poles*, according to my philosophy, I mean all those who consider themselves Polish, that is, those whose grandparents belonged to the Polish community, as well as those whose ancestors and sometimes living relatives, or even they themselves in the past were Jews (analogously: Ukrainians, Belarussians, Germans, Slovaks, etc.). (...) The same can be said about Jews – Jews are those who consider themselves to be Jews. On one condition: that there will be a reservation that these two areas of belonging and ties do not have to be separate, on the contrary, they can overlap partially. The alternative present in our thinking, Pole or Jewish, is contradictory to reality, and – shall we add – to the humanistic moral order (...)”⁶.

Nevertheless, in the ethnic relations in the times of the Second Polish Republic before the Second World War, such a distinction existed, which may be indicated by the existence of a large group of Jewish community that did not succumb to the process of assimilation, creating a kind of parallel society, lovingly cultivating its cultural and religious separateness.

According to the last “Small Statistical Yearbook” published before the war in 1931, the total population of Poland amounted to 31.9 million people, whereas Judaism as faith was declared by 3.1 million people. It is estimated that together with Polonised Christians, who only had Jewish ancestors, the Jewish community totalled approximately 3.5 million, which constituted about 10% of the total population of the Republic of Poland. Out of this

⁵ Statement of Marek Edelman for daily paper *Trybuna*, published in a communique by the Polish Press Agency PAP on May 19th, 2006.

⁶ K. Kersten, *Rok 1968: motyw żydowski (The Year 1968: the Jewish motive)*, [in:] *Res Publica 1988*, no 5, pp. 58-59.

OUTLINE OF POLISH-JEWISH RELATIONS IN THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC

group, over 2.7 million people, 8.6% of all citizens, considered Hebrew as their mother tongue, in reality – Yiddish⁷. It was not a naturally homogeneous group. Analysing Polish-Jewish relations in the context of March 1968, Professor Jerzy Eisler in his work *Polish Year 1968*, presents the characteristics of the pre-war Jewish community in the Second Polish Republic, dividing it into three groups. The first one was urban and rural poverty. Traders, hawkers, and artisans, living in their own separate and hermetic clusters. They differed from Poles not only by their denomination or customs, but also by their appearance and even by the fact that a significant percentage of this group did not even know Polish at all⁸. It should be emphasised that their isolation towards the rest of society was not at all dictated by mythical Polish anti-Semitism, but was a voluntary decision resulting from a chosen lifestyle, formed on the basis of historical experience⁹. This is confirmed, among others, by Władysław Bartoszewski, who described the situation of the Jewish population in pre-war Warsaw this way: “In Warsaw, there were many thousands of Jews in free professions: attorneys, doctors, engineers, writers, actors, and those more conservative were maybe 300,000, most of them lived in their own community, in a kind of ghetto. In this district, no Jew – an owner of a tenement house – would rent a flat to a Christian, no matter Pole, German or Czech. In the sense of isolation, they [the Jews – annotation by author] built their ghetto themselves¹⁰.”

In the second group, Jerzy Eisler classifies the wealthy Jewish bourgeoisie – industrialists, bankers, financiers or merchants, generally Orthodox Jews, who follow the principles of religion and tradition, but who do not differ in their attire or the way they are from Christians at their social level. Whereas the third group were people loosely treating their Jewish ancestry, mostly belonging to the intelligentsia, that is doctors, lawyers, journalists, and writers, that is representatives of free professions mentioned by Bartoszewski. Often, not knowing Hebrew or Yiddish anymore, despite the declared Mosaic faith, they were actually atheists or agnostics¹¹.

However, even in the third and last group, which seemed the most assimilated, there was a noticeable distance to the Christian community, and mutual relations were not always as close as it may seem today. This was partly due to the already mentioned Polish anti-Semitism, represented mainly by the nationalist *Endecja* (National Democracy), and later also a part of the Sanation, mainly from the Camp of National Unity – the so-called OZON, and parts of the Catholic clergy. However, it had above all, as has already said, economic background¹², at whose source lay the overpopulation of rural areas, at the same time high natural Jewish population, concentration of small trade in the hands of Jews and their exceptionally numerous representation in free professions, reaching in some cases, e.g. among doctors or advocates the level of 35-50%, and in the Eastern Borderlands

⁷ *Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 1938 (Small Statistical Yearbook 1938)*, Warsaw 1938, pp. 26-27.

⁸ J. Eisler, *Polski Rok 1968 (Polish Year 1968)*, Warsaw 2006, p. 91.

⁹ K. Burnetko, *Getto: od azylu do Zagłady (Ghetto: from haven to Holocaust)*, [in:] *Historia Żydów: trzy tysiąclecia samotności (History of Jews: Three Millennia of Solitude)*, Special edition of *Polityka*, No 1/2008, p. 47.

¹⁰ W. Bartoszewski, *Warto być przyzwoitym (It's worth being decent)*, Paris 1986, p. 25.

¹¹ J. Eisler, *op. cit.*, s. 91.

¹² I.C. Pogonowski, *Jews In Poland. A documentary history*, New York 1998, p. 300.

OUTLINE OF POLISH-JEWISH RELATIONS IN THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC

exceeding even 70%. This ultimately led to the introduction of many discriminatory laws against the Jewish community, such as the ban on ritual slaughter, the adoption of certain rules restricting the recruitment of students of Jewish origin (the so-called *numerus clausus*) on certain Polish universities, or provisions excluding Jews from the ranks of organisations such as the Union of Polish Physicians or the Association of Lawyers.

In the realities of the severe economic crisis of the 1930s, which caused a drastic deterioration in the standard of living, especially in the countryside, radicalization and deepening mutual antagonisms were inevitable, especially when nationalist and Zionist propagandas exaggerated the problem. This eventually led to dozens of cases of pogroms and riots, sometimes provoked by the Jewish side, reacting to numerous hostile pickets or repeated announcements of economic boycotts¹³. Nevertheless, this does not change the fact that the victims of similar incidents were mostly Jews. Only in the years 1935-1937 in Poland, as a result of pogroms and individual attacks, 97 Jews were killed and 500 more were wounded. Therefore, the problem of anti-Semitism was very real and was additionally heightened by the numerous myths in Polish society associated with the image of the Jewish minority. One of them was the so-called Judeo-Communism or “Żydokomuna”, and therefore the conviction of communist sympathies common among Jews. It resulted from the experience of the attitudes of part of the Jewish population in the face of the Polish-Bolshevik war, as well as from the Jewish origin of some of the leading figures of the Soviet party apparatus. However, in spite of the fact that in the structures of the pre-war Communist Party of Poland, the percentage of Jewish people amounted approximately 22-26%, which was confirmed by the communists themselves¹⁴, it should be remembered that the party itself did not associate more than 20,000 activists. Hence it is difficult to talk about a mass phenomenon of communist sympathy.

However, it should be noted that despite the evident anti-Semitic propaganda of part of the national camp, economic boycotts or discriminatory provisions passed in the final period of the Second Republic, the Jewish minority was not subjected to systemic repression and the possibilities of political and cultural activities were not limited in any way. The mid-1930s in Poland were a thriving time for Jewish literature, often written in Yiddish (literary manifestos by Roman Brandstaetter, Maurycy Szymel, the beginning of Uri-Cewi Grinberg’s work, Izaak Singer’s writing debut, the works of Mordechaj Gebirtig), and political life. Suffice it to say that on the eve of World War II, there were

¹³ *The so-called Pogrom in Przytyk near Radom can be an example of such activities. It took place on March 9th, 1936, when in the face of the growing atmosphere of tension and mutual aggression, a group of about 20 young Jews under the command of the Polish Army non-commissioned officer of the reserve, Icek Frydman, created a self-defence division, equipped with illegally acquired firearms. During the annual fair, there was first a fight between the National Party agitator calling for a boycott and a Jewish trader which quickly turned into regular riot. A branch of the Jewish self-defence armed with revolvers took part in them, as a result of which one of the Polish peasants, Stanisław Wieśniak, was shot. It became a catalyst for the pogrom of the Jewish population in the town, during which dozens of Jewish houses, shops and craft workshops were demolished. Following the pogrom, two people died – the marriage of Chaja and Jozek Minkowski, and 24 more were wounded. By: Piotr Gontarczyk Pogrom? Zajścia polsko-żydowskie w Przytyku 9 marca 1936 r. Mity, fakty, dokumenty (Pogrom? Polish-Jewish incidents in Przytyk, March 9, 1936. Myths, facts, documents), Pruszków 2000.*

¹⁴ A. Werblan, *Przyczynki do genezy konfliktu (Origin of the conflict)*, [in:] *Miesięcznik Lubelski* no 6 1968, p. 66.

OUTLINE OF POLISH-JEWISH RELATIONS IN THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC

15 Jewish theatres active in Poland and about 160 newspapers and magazines were published in a total of nearly 790,000 copies. The Jewish minority also had representatives in both houses of parliament. Therefore, formulating radical opinions on the indirect co-responsibility of the entire Polish nation for the deaths of 3 million Jews due to the pre-war anti-Semitism of nationalists¹⁵ not only has no broader justification in historical facts, but should also be treated as distorting the image of pre-war Polish-Jewish relations. No Polish political group in the interwar period, even the most extreme, ever postulated solving the problem of the Jewish minority through physical elimination. Only theses about the possibility of deportation were formulated, including to Palestine, which, incidentally, was in a sense coincident with the political programme of some Zionist parties¹⁶.

¹⁵ Interview with Alina Cota Ph.D. of the Jewish Historical Institute in the online edition of *Rzeczpospolita* from May 25th, 2009 <http://www.rp.pl/artykul/310528-Polacy-jako-narod--nie-zdali-egzaminu-.html> (accessed on February 18th, 2018)

¹⁶ An example of such a group may be Histadrut – Zionist Organization in Poland with its leading figure of Emil Sommerstein, a member of, among others, The Administrative Committee of the World Jewish Congress, whose overriding goal was the creation of an independent Jewish state in Palestine.



3. THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE EXTERMINATION OF THE JEWISH POPULATION

The tragic years of 1939-1945 significantly contributed to the deepening of the distance that existed between the Polish and Jewish communities during the Second Polish Republic. This resulted primarily from – contrary to appearances – different experiences that became their share during both German and Soviet occupation, and lack of mutual understanding of the specifics of these experiences.

There is no doubt that German policy towards conquered Polish areas, included in the assumptions of the so-called *Generalplan Ost* was criminal. However, it differed in the degree of its oppressiveness in relation to individual nations that lived in pre-war Poland. Poles, Ukrainians and finally Jews, were all treated by the occupation authorities. The issue of the last of those three beginning in 1942 was to be finally resolved (*Endlösung* in German) through massive physical annihilation in concentration and extermination camps. It meant that a person who, in the light of German legislation and its fairly flexible interpretation, was considered a Jew and could not count on help in hiding or forging false documents, in practice had little chance of surviving the occupation. At the same time, the chances of a Pole surviving unless he was actively involved in underground activity and were lucky to avoid elements of the blind (round-ups, pacification actions, accidental arrests) or organised terror (actions aimed at specific social groups such as *Intelligenzaktion*, *Außerordentliche Befriedungsaktion* – *AB* etc.) were incomparably larger. In terms of the occupational severity, it is impossible to compare Poland to countries of Western Europe, where it had an almost mild or – as in the case of, for example, Denmark – symbolic dimension. This also referred to the question of possible help or hiding Jews. Poland is the only state under the German occupation in which it was punished with death penalty, often extended to the whole family or even the village involved in such an action. This was partly due to the fact that it was in occupied Poland, for logistic reasons and the fact that the largest Jewish community in Europe existed here, the majority of the German extermination machines in the form of concentration and death camps were established. Nevertheless, both the Polish Underground State and the government in exile were actively involved in providing help to the Jewish population. It is estimated that in the hiding of Jews from 100,000¹⁷ up to one million Poles¹⁸ were involved. Such great discrepancies result from the specifics of hiding, for example, fugitives from the ghetto, where one hiding person relied on from a few to a dozen or so people cooperating on his or her behalf.

The situation was quite different in the area of the Soviet occupation, where in the years 1939-1941, despite the adoption of a class, not a racial criterium of terror, they also began

¹⁷ At this level, this number is specified, among others, by a researcher of this topic Gunnar Paulsson.

¹⁸ On the other hand, a researcher of the history of Holocaust Hans G. Furth speaks about a number this big.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE EXTERMINATION OF THE JEWISH POPULATION

to depolonise the former Eastern Borderlands, often accompanied by physical elimination of the Polish elites. New Soviet orders to overthrow the previous, often unfavourable to Jews, ownership and social relations, and even the appearance of units of the Red Army in the second half of September 1939, were received with sympathy, and sometimes even enthusiasm by a part of this community, especially from the lower strata of urban and rural poor as well as communist youth. Also, the percentage of Jews in the new administration structures was undoubtedly noticeable, although contrary to popular opinion, the Jewish populace at each level of new authorities was represented below its share in the total population. Nevertheless, it seems that Jews adapted better to the new socio-political system under the Soviets, and often just filled in the gaps after the Poles removed from their positions¹⁹. All this preserved the stereotype in Polish society, based additionally on earlier myths about Judeo-Communism, about the mass phenomenon of collaboration of the Jewish population. This had its tragic consequences especially in the period after June 22nd, 1941, when the hitherto area of Soviet occupation found itself under German jurisdiction, and with it a mass extermination campaign of Jews began. Sometimes with the help of their Polish neighbours, who were thus avenging themselves for actual or only contrived harm.

Ultimately, the balance of victims of the Second World War on Polish soil shaped at a similar level for both Jews and Poles. It is estimated that in the years 1939-1945 about 6 million Polish citizens were killed, of whom about 3 million were representatives of the Jewish minority. However, these data are highly imprecise, and their more accurate description is made more difficult by the fact that the first post-war “Statistical Yearbook” presenting the census for February 14th, 1946, did not take into account the denominational criterion, which would allow the number of such people to be compared with pre-war data. Moreover, post-war migrations of the Jewish population to and from Poland further complicated the attempts to specify the number of victims²⁰. However, based on the data of the Central Committee of Polish Jews, one can estimate the number of the Jewish population which was in the country in mid-1946. It was approximately 220-240 thousand people, of which more than half were Polish Jews who spent the war in the Soviet Union and in organised transports were resettled within the new post-war Polish borders²¹.

Despite the comparable in terms of the number of victims of the war tragedy that ended in 1945, Polish and Jewish attitudes in the face of a hecatomb that swept through Polish lands became the cause of misunderstandings and mutual accusations, which, as already mentioned, deepened the distance between the two communities from before the war. In the process, the most important were the harmful stereotypes – on the one hand, accusing the Jews of mass collaboration with one of the occupiers, on the other hand, accusing the Poles of passivity, and sometimes even a common participation

¹⁹ M. Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Żydzi w zaborze sowieckim: Stosunki polsko-żydowskie na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II RP pod okupacją sowiecką (1939-1941)* (*Poles and Jews in the Soviet partition: Polish-Jewish relations in the north-eastern territories of the Second Polish Republic under the Soviet occupation 1939-1941*), Warsaw 2001, p. 228.

²⁰ J. Eisler, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

²¹ *Ibidem*, s. 93.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE EXTERMINATION OF THE JEWISH POPULATION

in the extermination of Jews organised by the Germans. This is particularly interesting, because both phenomena – Jewish cooperation with Soviet authorities against Poles and the participation of Poles in the practice of *szmalcownictwo*, or betraying and denouncing Jews to the Germans, certainly existed, but it is impossible to define them as absolutely dominant attitudes²². In spite of this, they have been cynically exaggerated and used to create a false narrative about the tragic past, which has repeatedly proven to be a factor that internally bonds both nations. It was also a convenient explanation for our own, darker episodes from that inhuman period, somehow absolving us of our sins. Since Poles cooperated extensively with Germans during the extermination of Jews, then action against them, for instance, together with the Soviet security apparatus, does not seem in any way inappropriate, and can even be treated as a glorious struggle against an anti-Semitic ally of Hitler. Similarly, the cases of murdering Jews by units of the Polish independence underground as “communist agents” can also be explained by their “mass collaboration” or being the “natural base” of a new totalitarian system.

It is difficult not to get the impression that the contemporary existence of such convenient stereotypes significantly hampers the achievement of agreement between Poland and Israel on historical issues, especially on the tragic period of the Second World War.

²² *Mirosław Tryczek Ph.D. assesses the number of Poles actively involved in the extermination of Jews within the range from 50 to 500 thousand.*



4. NEW OCCUPATION – POLAND AS A SATELLITE STATE OF THE USSR

The first post-war years are also the time of a great wave of Jewish emigration from Poland. The reasons for emigrating were different. Many Jews simply could not start a new life in a place so terribly marked by the torment of their kin. The decisions of the others were influenced by theft or destruction of their property as a result of hostilities or often its appropriation by Poles, convinced of the death of their current owners. Not without significance were also the relatively well-organised activity of offices enabling Jews to go to Palestine and the deepening distance between the Polish and Jewish communities, which was also influenced by personal, sometimes very painful experiences. These were additionally reinforced by the wave of anti-Semitic excesses that swept through Poland in 1946, with the most tragic in consequences – the so-called Kielce Pogrom – in particular.

The issue of incidents in Kielce on July 4th, 1946, despite the investigation of the Institute of National Remembrance conducted until 2004, and despite a whole range of research and scientific publications has not yet been fully explained. Nevertheless, killing 37 Jews and wounding another 35 under the influence of an unconfirmed rumour about them kidnapping an eight-year-old boy in order to carry out ritual murder on him, echoed both in Poland and in the world, greatly contributing to the wave of Jewish emigration. However, the political context (on June 30th, the so-called People's Referendum was held in Poland, the results of which were rigged in order to obtain social legitimacy by the communist Polish Workers' Party PPR) and the at least incomprehensible behaviour of local officers of the Citizens' Militia and the Security Office who first contributed to the dissemination of the rumour and later, in the face of the gathering crowd, they refused to protect the Jews²³, as well as the activities of the army troops and the Internal Security Corps who de facto initiated the pogrom²⁴, gave rise to the assumption of provocative character of the whole incident. Its aim was to divert attention from the rigged referendum on the one hand (the results were to be officially announced on July 12th), and on the other hand, to blame the underground independence movement for the pogrom and its embarrassment in the eyes of the global public opinion.

Regardless of the actual inspiration, the Kielce Pogrom of July 1946 for many Jews was the final argument for making the decision on emigration. It is estimated that by the end of 1946, up to 175,000 went to the American occupation zones in Germany and Austria, as well as to Italy²⁵.

²³ J.T. Gross, *Strach. Antysemityzm w Polsce tuż po wojnie. Historia moralnej zapaści (Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland shortly after the war: the history of a moral fall)*, Kraków 2008, p. 143.

²⁴ As an eyewitness of the events, as well as one of his victims, deputy chairman of the Jewish Committee, Chil Alpert in a book by David Shtokfish *About Our House Which Was Devastated* published in 1981, mentions that after the soldiers arrived they first started firing at the site of the building in which the boy had been allegedly imprisoned and then after entering the house, disarming the Jews and carrying out the search, they started shooting at the people inside, which became the beginning of the pogrom.

²⁵ M. Chęciński, *Poland. Communism. Nationalism. Anti-Semitism*, New York 1982, pp. 7, 11, 13-14.

The next impulse for emigration was the creation in May 1948 in Palestine of an independent State of Israel. Until the authorities forbade Jews to travel to Israel in 1951, the Jewish community in Poland decreased to approximately 80,000 people²⁶. Many of those who decided to stay, did so for political reasons, in other words, actively or passively supported the imposition of the communist regime on Poland, which contributed to an even greater consolidation of the pre-war stereotype of a “Judeo-Communist”. This was influenced primarily by the proportionately high number of people of Jewish descent in managerial positions at the Ministry of Public Security, one of the basic tools of communist terror in the Stalinist period. Such names as Antoni Alster, Leon Andrzejewski, Jakub Berman, Julia Brystygirowa, Józef Czaplicki, Anatol Fejgin, Adam Humer, Mieczysław Mietkowski, Roman Romkowski, Józef Różański, Józef Świetlik and Konrad Świetlik had become notorious in the times of greatest lawlessness and terror in Poland in 1944-1954²⁷. However, the conviction of the “over-Jew-ing of the security service” did not only take place because of the presence of representatives of this minority in the oppression apparatus headquarters. As the work of Professor Krzysztof Szwagrzyk, who researched personnel files of the officers of the Ministry of Public Security from the rank of the chief up, indicates, 167 positions out of 450 were taken by people of Jewish origin. Bearing in mind that the Jewish minority in post-war Poland accounted for less than 1% of the population, it represented a 37% share in the leadership of the Ministry of Public Security²⁸. Another source of the strong vitality of the “Judeo-Communism” myth could also be the personal experiences of the repressed and their families in contact with the management of the field structures of the security apparatus. There, out of 161 bosses and deputy heads of Voivodship Public Security Offices / Provincial Public Security Offices, 22 were of Jewish origin. As it results from the conducted research, taking into account other high positions in the security apparatus structures at the voivodship level, the highest percentage of Jews was represented by VPSOs in Szczecin and Wrocław (18.7%), and the lowest in Zielona Góra (3.5%). Whereas, on a national scale it amounted to around 7%²⁹.

It is also worth adding that the conviction that the repression apparatus was almost completely dominated by Jews was also due to the natural tendency in such cases to define reality in terms of “us” and “them” – and thus subconsciously exaggerating the role that “the foreigners”, the Jews, played in the terror. This is a dangerous phenomenon, because it can lead to a relativisation of reality and the involuntary diminishing of the participation in the apparatus of repression of people who have no Jewish roots, such as Lt. Col. Józef Dusza or Major Jerzy Kaskiewicz. Another extremely important issue that significantly affects the image of the whole problem is also the fact that most representatives of the communist repression apparatus did not attach much

²⁶ J. Eisler, *op. cit.*, s. 97.

²⁷ A. Paczkowski, *Żydzi w UB: próba weryfikacji stereotypu [w:] Komunizm. Ideologia – system – ludzie (Jews in the Security Office: an attempt to verify the stereotype [in:] Communism. Ideology - system – people)*, edited by T. Szarota, Warszawa 2001, s. 190-204.

²⁸ *Obsada personalna aparatu bezpieczeństwa w Polsce 1944-1989, t.1: Obsada personalna UB 1944-1956 (Personnel of the security apparatus in Poland 1944-1989, vol. 1: Personnel staff UB 1944-1956)*, edited by K. Szwagrzyk, Warszawa 2005, s. 63-64.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

importance to their origin, feeling primarily ideological communists-internationalists. It seems that this is well illustrated by the statement of General Mieczysław Moczar (born Nikolaï Demko), incidentally a later icon of the nationalist trend in Polish United Workers' Party, made at the meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the PPR on August 28, 1948: "The Soviet Union is not only our ally, it is a saying for the nation. For us, partisans, the Soviet Union is our homeland, and I cannot define our borders today, today they are behind Berlin, and tomorrow in Gibraltar³⁰."

The next wave of Jewish emigration from Poland was triggered by the events preceding and following the so-called "October thaw" and Władysław Gomułka's return to power. It was bound to some extent with limited systemic liberalisation, but not to the extent that it was shown by the rhetoric of some of the Polish United Workers' Party coteries, which built its overall narrative about emigration based on the Jews' fear of the responsibility for the crimes of Stalinist times. There were many more reasons and they were much more complex, and the argument about the fleeing Jews-Stalinists, as proven, would also return on the occasion of March 1968. Finally, in the years 1956-1960, about 48 thousand people of Jewish origin emigrated from Poland³¹, although to be precise, it must be pointed out that although there were also those responsible for repressions, afraid of possible consequences after the political change, it was by no means the majority. A certain number of people involved in the operations of the Stalinist terror machine were in fact effectively removed from the army or the justice system, including some at the request of the so-called "thaw-time" Mazur Committee³². However, most of them avoided any responsibility except being relegated from their current functions, continuing their careers in the journalistic, literary or cultural environment.

³⁰ *Gomułka i inni, Dokumenty z archiwum KC 1948-1982 (Gomułka and others. Documents from the Central Committee archives 1948-1982, edited by J. Andrzejewski, London 1987, p. 36.*

³¹ *K. Lesiakowski, Emigracja osób pochodzenia żydowskiego z Polski w latach 1968-1969 [w:] Dzieje Najnowsze (Emigration of people of Jewish origin from Poland in 1968-1969 [in:] Modern History) no 2 1993, p. 119.*

³² *The name stems from the name Marian Mazur – the deputy and acting Prosecutor General of the Polish People's Republic in the period 1956-1961.*



5. AT THE SOURCE OF MARCH 1968: “GOMUŁKA’S THAW” – THE END OF THE PARTY’S UNITY AND DISAPPOINTED HOPES FOR CHANGE

The period of “October 1956” or “Gomułka’s thaw”, which had its roots in the rejection of Stalin’s cult of personality by his successor Nikita Khrushchev in the notorious “secret report” at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, was indeed related to the remodelling of the power system in particular parties of the communist USSR satellite states, including Poland. For the leadership of the Polish United Workers’ Party, this meant, above all, the creation of two behind-the-scenes (factional activity in the party was forbidden) and hostile towards each other inner party groups. The light on the character of this division is cast by an unusual essay written in a vivid, emotional essayist language by Witold Jedlicki “*Chamy i Żydy*” (“Boors and Jews”), published in Paris on the pages of the Polish-émigré literary-political magazine “*Kultura*” (Parisian “Culture”) in 1962, which caused an unusual commotion both in the émigré and national circles. It is considered one of the most colourful and accurate analyses of the Polish October and the division line in the bosom of the Party, though naturally not lacking in certain aspects. Jedlicki, an assistant to Professor Stanisław Ossowski at the Faculty of Sociology at the University of Warsaw, an employee of the Polish Academy of Sciences and a member of the board of the Club Crooked Circle (*Klub Krzywe Koło*) – a freethinkers’ discussion club operating in Warsaw in 1955-1962 – emigrated to Israel in 1962. In his opinion, the division in the Polish United Workers’ Party leadership during the political crisis of 1956 looked as follows: the first group consisted of people gathered around the current exact centre of power, which until 1956 was a triumvirate – Bolesław Bierut, Hilary Minc and Jakub Berman. Those were, among others, Jerzy Albrecht, Antoni Alster, Piotr Jaroszewicz, Helena Jaworska, Wincenty Kraśko, Władysław Matwin, Jerzy Morawski, Jerzy Putrament, Mieczysław Rakowski, Edward Gierek and Janusz Zarzycki. They could count on the sympathies of former activists of the Polish Socialist Party in the Central Committee of the PUWP, first and foremost, of the Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz, Oskar Lange, Adam Rapacki and Andrzej Werblan. This group, composed mostly of young intellectuals, and was commonly referred to as the “Puławians” or “Puławian faction” (whose name stems from the complex of modernist tenement houses in Puławska Street in Warsaw, where some of its members lived), was naturally interested primarily in maintaining the *status quo* – its position in the leadership – in the face of inevitable changes resulting from the thaw initiated by Khrushchev at the 20th Congress. To this end, it took on an extremely reformative stance, postulating a far-reaching liberalisation of the existing system, and in the context of settlements with the Stalinist era, several of its representatives submitted public self-criticism to the press. It also definitely cut itself off from the most discredited and hated officers of the Stalinist regime, such as Jakub Berman, who in May 1957 was even removed from the PUWP. All this was to give

AT THE SOURCE OF MARCH 1968: “GOMUŁKA’S THAW” – THE END OF THE PARTY’S UNITY AND DISAPPOINTED HOPES FOR CHANGE

the impression of creating a new and fresh reforming trend in the Party, ready to meet the expectations of the society³³.

The other group that opposed the “Puławians” were young members of the Central Committee, rebellious against the existing centre of power and ready to bring order in Poland in accordance with the policy adopted by Khrushchev. Zenon Nowak became their informal leader, and besides him, the top leadership also included Stanisław Brodziński, Władysław Kruczek, Jan Trusz, Bolesław Rumiński and Stanisław Łapot. Owing to their readiness to cooperate extensively with Moscow, they gained the support of some of the older members of the Political Bureau, including Aleksander Zawadzki, Konstanty Rokossowski, Stefan Matuszewski and Hilary Chełchowski. This informal faction, consisting essentially of members of blue-collar and peasant origin, almost entirely of Polish ancestry with a strong anti-intellectual attitude, was dubbed “Natolinians”, from the place of their meetings in a government palace in Warsaw’s Natolin. They did advocate for systemic reforms, however, not too radical in their nature in order not to weaken the overly strong power by – harmful in their views – tendencies of democratisation.

A perfect picture of the relations between those two camps can be the terminology found in Jedlicki’s essay that was used on the backstage to describe each other. The “Puławians” were referred to by the “Natolinians” as “Jews” while the “Puławians” referred to the “Natolinians” as “Boors”³⁴.

It seemed that in the confrontation of these factions, the “Puławians”, discredited and deprived of the support of their Soviet comrades who almost openly sympathised with the “Natolinians”, were completely without a chance. The “Natolinians” came to the very same conclusion, not only clearly disregarding their opponent, but above all the public opinion and its moods. Their attempt to arouse the anti-Semitic mood in the society and create a picture of Jews (which were not lacking in the rival camp) guilty of Stalinist crimes turned out to be completely misplaced in the realities of expectations for reforms and democratisation of the system. Those, in turn, were promised by the “Puławian faction” which, in addition, launched a massive attack on its opponents with the intent to present them in the eyes of the public as hard-liners and incompetent anti-Semites fully dependent on the Soviets. This goal was successfully realised, and if this was not enough, the “Puławians” also began cooperating with Władysław Gomułka, whom the “Natolinians” attempted to use against them earlier. It basically settled the result of the whole political game in autumn 1956 and put an end to the ambitions of taking over the power by the “Natolinians”. Gomułka, who was almost equally far away from both coteries, having decided to add his name to the “Puławians” became the *ipso facto* personification of their promises of liberalisation and democratisation of the system, which immediately gave him a powerful mandate of social trust. But one ought to consider this fact a great irony, as Gomułka himself never intended to carry out similar reforms.

³³ W. Jedlicki, *Chamy i Żydzi (Boors and Jews)*, [in:] *Kultura (Culture)*, no 12/1962, Paris 1962, pp. 3-41.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

AT THE SOURCE OF MARCH 1968: “GOMUŁKA’S THAW” – THE END OF THE PARTY’S UNITY AND DISAPPOINTED HOPES FOR CHANGE

On the contrary: by following Khrushchev’s guidelines, he proceeded to liquidate those pieces of freedom that the public was able to win in the fight following the crisis within the Party structures. This was connected with the fact that Moscow granted him greater freedom in internal politics, which was then reflected in the dismissal of the Soviet so-called “advisers” numerously employed on sensitive offices or the restoration of party control over the apparatus of repression. Nevertheless, the goal remained unambiguous – stifling of civil liberties.

One could even go as far as to say that these disappointed public hopes for a systemic liberalisation in October 1956 came forth with all their power just under twelve years later, in March 1968, gaining strength along with an expressive attempt to take the floor by the younger generation of communists. It is also worth noting that the attempt to instrumentally play on anti-Semitic moods, taken advantage of by the “Natolinians”, and so cunningly “reversed” against them by the ultimately victorious “Puławians”, very often prevented the proper assessment of many actual Stalinist criminals or swindlers. Using the protective shield of the campaign to oppose manifestations of anti-Semitism, which was initiated in society by intellectuals and journalists who were friends with the “Puławian faction”, they avoided responsibility for their actions, discrediting accusations as part of an anti-Semitic campaign³⁵. The image of the highest power apparatus that emerges from Jedlicki’s essay is shocking mainly in relation to the extremely instrumental use of not only possible anti-Semitic sentiments, but also sentiments opposing anti-Semitism. Both phenomena, created more or less effectively by party coteries, are in his opinion only tools for manipulating the society, having nothing to do with the real character of contemporary Polish-Jewish relations³⁶. He even goes on to say that the support for Jewish emigration after 1956, expressed by the “Puławians”, was motivated mainly by the need to avoid similar anti-Semitic attacks in the future, which were considered a sensitive point of the whole political circle³⁷. As was shown by events of the next “Polish month” after October 1956, these fears were fully justified.

³⁵ *An example of a case that has been dismissed due to anti-Semitic overtones may be the loud kidnapping and murder of Bohdan, the son of Bolesław Piasecki, the leader of the “Pax” Association. As the main motif of this crime, revenge was indicated for the pre-war activity of Piasecki, co-founder of the National Radical Camp and the leader of the National-Radical Movement “Falanga”, which proclaimed anti-communist and anti-Semitic views. The crime was to be carried out by two Security Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs officers of Jewish descent who then fled to Israel.*

³⁶ *Ibidem.*

³⁷ *Ibidem.*



6. AT THE SOURCE OF MARCH 1968: STUDENTS' "COMMANDOES" AND MOCZAR'S "PARTISANS"

The policy of departing from the reforms and freedoms won in October 1956, consistently implemented by Władysław Gomułka, quickly led to growing public discontent and disappointment, increased by the deteriorating economic situation of the Polish People's Republic in the early 1960s. Retoughening of censorship, liquidation of many independent initiatives, intensification of political repressions, and the struggle against the Catholic Church in the face of the approaching jubilee of the thousandth anniversary of the Baptism of Poland, made intelligentsia, whose support Gomułka owed a huge credit of social trust, began to contest the situation in the country. The direct cause of the open objection to the Party's policy was limiting the expenditure on culture and science, which was symbolised by a radical reduction in the allocation of paper for printing books and magazines. This resulted in the creation of a protest letter addressed to Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz in March 1964, called the "Letter of 34" – whose name stems from the number of persons signed under it. An open criticism of the Polish United Workers' Party activities in the sphere of culture and the condemnation of press censorship met with lively interest and reactions in the West. Support for the signatories of the letter was expressed by the scientific and journalistic communities in the United Kingdom, Italy, or France, which in turn served the communist authorities as a pretext to bring charges of initiating a hostile campaign to denigrate the Polish People's Republic and to deliberately use lies³⁸. This led to further intensification of repressions, to which the intellectual circles in the PZPR itself answered with yet another clash. In March 1965, Karol Modzelewski and Jacek Kuroń, who had been removed from the party earlier, wrote "An open letter to the Party", in which they formulated a number of charges against the central political bureaucracy, which not only appropriated the means of production or state institutions, but also exploited the working class to perpetuate the monopoly of its power³⁹. Their arrest as well as the relegation of Leszek Kołakowski – the chairman of the Department of Modern Philosophy at the University of Warsaw, from the Party in October 1966, led to turmoil amongst party intellectuals, many of whom openly defended the repressed, or even handed in their party membership cards. The situation was also inflamed by an informal group of rebellious students centred around Adam Michnik, Jan Gross, Teresa Bogucka and Jakub Karpiński, who unexpectedly and spontaneously appeared at lectures or anniversary sessions organised at the University of Warsaw, asked the lecturers uncomfortable questions or directed the discussion in the "*nieprawomyślny*" (unlawful, biased, at that time politically incorrect) direction. This specific manner of their operations contributed to giving them the title of "commandoes" and also ensured considerable popularity in the student circle.

³⁸ J. Kuciel-Frydryszak, Antoni Słonimski i „List 34” (Antoni Słonimski and “Letter of 34”) [in:] *Biuletyn IPN „Pamięć.pl”* (Institute of National Remembrance Bulletin “Pamięć.pl” – “Memory.pl”), no 1/2012, pp. 38-41.

³⁹ A. Friszke, *Anatomia buntu. Kuroń, Modzelewski i komandosi* (The anatomy of mutiny. Kuroń, Modzelewski and the commandoes), Kraków 2011, pp. 132-176.

AT THE SOURCE OF MARCH 1968: STUDENTS' "COMMANDOES" AND MOCZAR'S "PARTISANS"

Slowly, it was becoming ever clearer that the increasingly escalating conflict must finally find an outlet, and the haughtiness of Gomułka himself and his acolytes, who did not allow any criticism and did not want to hear about the discussion on the political course, could lead to another solstice.

The internal tensions within the Polish United Workers' Party were an object of vital interest to a part of Gomułka's political base, centred around the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, General Mieczysław Moczar, and the Deputy Minister of National Defence, General Grzegorz Korczyński. This group, formed from the mid-1960s and the spiritual heir of the "Natolinians", officially supported Gomułka's anti-intellectual line, although on the backstage people would say he could be replaced by someone younger and more energetic. Nevertheless, like the erstwhile "Natolinians", they were driven by the desire to strip the older generation of activists off their positions, often using chauvinist and anti-Semitic rhetoric⁴⁰. Due to the fact that its leading figures belonged to force ministries, they became their natural base of supporters, among them were all *apparatchiks* and lower and mid-level officials, often with a partisan past in the ranks of the People's Guards and People's Army during the war. For this reason, they were not spoken of any other way than "Partisans".

What distinguished the "Partisans" from the "Natolinians" was above all their attitude towards the Soviet Union. While the latter saw the manifestation of their strength in support offered by Moscow, the Moczar and Korczyński's "Partisans" presented a certain distance towards the homeland of the global proletariat, manifested in a contemptuous attitude to all party members who came to Poland with the Red Army, while they, acting as guerrillas or in conspiracy, spent the war on the frontlines. With the strong support coming from the Ministry of the Internal Affairs and from the army, this unofficial faction also prepared for the expected political solstice, wishing to take advantage of it in order to expand its influence primarily at the expense of the former "Puławians". To this end, they also intended to yet again refer to mainly anti-Semitic sentiments.

⁴⁰ Ł. Dwilewicz, J. Majewski, *Dekady. 1965-1974 (Decades. 1965-1974)*, Warsaw 2006, pp. 274-275.



7. AT THE SOURCE OF MARCH 1968: SIX-DAY WAR AND THE “FIFTH COLUMN”

For the upcoming battle for political influence with their opponents, the “Partisans” had been preparing themselves very carefully, laying the ground for the later “anti-Zionist” campaign. The Jewish community in Poland, in the mid-1960s, totalling no more than 30,000 people⁴¹, found itself under close surveillance from the Ministry of Internal Affairs scrutinising for possible “influences of international Zionist headquarters”⁴². Students also found themselves in the sphere of interest, among others, those attending the University of Warsaw, where ministerial forces tried to recognise the prevailing social arrangements and complete embarrassing materials, especially on the issue of the students’ ancestry. Letters were scanned for politically incorrect wording or even the slightest manifestation of disloyalty towards the state. Particular attention was paid to Jewish organisations and centres operating in Poland, such as The Jewish Social-Cultural Association in Poland or the “Babel” Youth Club operating in Warsaw. Their activities later served as alleged proof of “propagating chauvinism and Jewish nationalism” and attempts to “instil Zionist attitudes in youth”⁴³.

A proper goldmine of materials on the subject of alleged Jewish chauvinism and nationalism was the Six-Day War that took place in June 1967 between Israel and allied Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq. The Israeli army won a staggering victory in this conflict, despite the support which the Eastern bloc granted to the Arab states. This led to serious political consequences – the Soviet Union, and in its wake, almost all satellite states except Romania broke diplomatic relations with Israel, and the whole socialist bloc became overwhelmed with an atmosphere of paranoia, tracking and stigmatising real or imaginary allies of hard Israeli politics. This tendency was unmistakably interpreted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, meticulously picking up and collecting politically incorrect comments from the Jewish community. They were elaborated on in such a way as to give a false impression of alleged universality, depicting them as the mood of the vast majority of Jews living in Poland. For this purpose, they would not even shun manipulation or provocation, using it eagerly to attack their rivals and political opponents of the “Partisans”. For example, Colonel Stanisław Nadzin, former commandant of the Special Directorate of the Second General Staff (military intelligence) and later long-term editor-in-chief of the “Polish Soldier” magazine, was removed from the party and the army after he took part in the closing ceremony of sports journalists’ awards. The party was held on the day of the Six-Day War ended, which in the Security Service’s opinion could only be interpreted as a booze-up on the occasion of the Israeli victory⁴⁴. Sometimes even less was enough to become a Zionist in the eyes of the security apparatus. The military film director Adolf

⁴¹ J. Eisler, *op. cit.* p. 101.

⁴² *Ibidem.*

⁴³ B. Hillebrandt, *Marzec 1968. Geneza i przebieg wypadków (March 1968. Genesis and course of events)*, Warsaw 1983, p. 57.

⁴⁴ J. Eisler, *op. cit.* p. 105.

AT THE SOURCE OF MARCH 1968: SIX-DAY WAR AND THE “FIFTH COLUMN”

Forbert met the same fate as Nadzin, only as a consequence of a denunciation that he was smiling with satisfaction on the day of the end of the conflict in the Middle East⁴⁵. Considering the past of both men who served in Berling’s army in the political and educational division, one can hazard a guess that their “offenses” were just a pretext to deal with the so-called “*shinels*” (“overcoats”), as the “Partisan” circles contemptuously defined the communists who came to Poland together with the Red Army.

All the “evidence” gathered this way by the Ministry of Internal Affairs was brought to the attention of the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party, informing in an alarmistic fashion that the Jewish community *en masse* and ostentatiously demonstrated their support for Israel in its conflict with the Arab states, and also went on to openly criticise the Soviet Union and authorities of the Polish People’s Republic for the position taken in this matter. Most probably, the appropriately exaggerated reports of the Ministry of the Internal Affairs became the basis for Władysław Gomułka’s famous speech at the Congress of Trade Unions on June 19th, 1967, in which he uttered the memorable words about the Jewish population in the context of the “fifth column”. Although ultimately, the controversial fragment, the wording of which was apparently not consulted with the Political Bureau, was removed under the influence of external pressures and replaced in the printed version with a speech about “Polish citizens of Jewish nationality faithfully serving the country”, it did cause great confusion. Many lower and mid-level party members, not necessarily of Jewish origin, felt obliged to protest against such harsh and unjust rhetoric, which in turn was diligently reported by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, thus expanding its collection of gathered materials. Similarly, absenteeism or even not sufficiently enthusiastic participation in party and workers’ meetings organised abundantly in June 1967, during which the “Israeli aggressors” were condemned, were enough to qualify as a “Zionist” or even a “Jew”.

The anti-Semitic campaign within the Polish United Workers’ Party also gradually intensified, going far beyond the issue of possible support for Israel in the war with the Arab states. Another impulse for its intensification was given by Mieczysław Moczar himself, when during a speech at an academy on the occasion of the anniversary of the creation of the Citizens’ Militia and the Security Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, he point-blank and bluntly accused the Israeli army of behaving against Arabs just as Nazis did against the Poles and the Jews during the Second World War. He also accused the Israeli authorities of acting against other nations as an ally of German revisionists⁴⁶. The idea of Israel’s cooperation with the Federal Republic of Germany was quickly picked up by his subordinates in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and thanks to a series of books by Tadeusz Walichnowski, perpetuated as a dogma of subsequent March propaganda. what is particularly noteworthy is the ease with which the image of deeply secretive Zionists was transformed, who so far only contested Poland’s position on the Middle

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ *Speech by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Major General Mieczysław Moczar delivered at the Central Academy on the occasion of the 23rd anniversary of the establishment of the Citizens’ Militia and the Security Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Warsaw on October 7th, 1967, Warsaw 1967, p.6.*

AT THE SOURCE OF MARCH 1968: SIX-DAY WAR AND THE “FIFTH COLUMN”

Eastern conflict, into those who consciously or not, cooperated with the West German government on falsification of history, and perhaps even plotted on the vital issue of the Polish western border. From the point of view of manipulative techniques, this was an extraordinary activity. Having as base materials so flimsy, to create an image of the enemy that really interacts with the imagination, based on the still resounding stereotypes. This may also indicate the high level of advancement of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the creation of manipulative propaganda campaigns, which is not surprising, given that the “Zionists” were not the first on the list of the enemies the Ministry had to deal with.

The autumn of 1967 brought the first results in the form of resignation from the exposed positions of people with whom Mieczysław Moczar, above all, but also Władysław Gomułka shared old grudges. The former “Puławian”, Leon Kasman resigned from the function of the editor-in-chief of the party’s main press body “*Trybuna Ludu*” (“The People’s Tribune”) and so did his deputy Wiktor Borowski (the father of the later Speaker of the Sejm Marek Borowski). Kasman was still appointed as the vice-president of the National Bank of Poland, but eventually in 1968 at the height of the “anti-Zionist” campaign he retired. Another member of the former “Puławian faction” General Janusz Zarzycki resigned from the post of the president of the Warsaw National Council, but the biggest success of this stage of the “Partisans” action must be the appointment of one of Moczar’s close acolytes – the then First Secretary of the PUWP Provincial Committee in Gdańsk, Jan Ptasiński for the position of the Polish ambassador in Moscow⁴⁷.

The initiated in this way action, although it brought some spectacular successes on the personnel front, did not affect in any way the increase in the number of people of Jewish origin emigrating from Poland, which for a long time and also in 1967 amounted to approximately 500 people per year. To unleash a full-scale hate campaign directed against Jews, to ultimately purify the party apparatus of the, a catalyst was necessary, an event that the propaganda could show off as proof of their hostile actions aimed at the party and the state’s socialist system. This pretext presented itself in the protests of the student in defence of Adam Mickiewicz’s “*Dziady*” (“Forefather’s Eve”), played on the boards of the National Theatre in Warsaw, the performance of which the censorship decided to ban.

⁴⁷ J. Eisler, *op. cit.*, p. 114.



8. “1968 MARCH EVENTS”: “DZIADY” AND THE “ANTI-ZIONIST CAMPAIGN”

The first leaflets containing anti-Semitic content appeared in circulation almost immediately after the first student protests, in February 1968, and they indicate the origin of their initiators. However, it is assumed that “the end of the period of incubation of anti-Semitism”, as Władysław Bieńkowski described it figuratively, was March 11th. On that day, in “Słowo Powszechne”, a daily paper published by the “PAX” Association, the article “To students of the University of Warsaw” was published in which it was explicitly stated that “the Zionists took up the political order of the German Federal Republic” in order to cleanse the West German authorities of their Nazi past and responsibility for murdering 6 million Jews and to transfer the guilt onto Poland, which in turn would lead to undermining the authority of the political leadership and Władysław Gomułka himself. It was supposed to be revenge for the extremely apt, in the opinion of the authors of the article, assessment of Israel’s aggression against Arab states in June 1967. To this end, “Zionists” would use above all the unconscious, but ideological youth and intelligentsia, to manipulate them, turn them against the authorities, causing chaos in the country. Interestingly enough, the instigators of this conspiracy were pointed in the article by name, emanating Jewish names and noting in detail family ties with those guilty of “errors and irregularities” of the Stalinist era⁴⁸. One did not have to wait long for an answer. Later that very same evening in the Old Town in Warsaw, Stefan Kisielewski, a well-known critic of the party’s cultural policy and columnist for “Tygodnik Powszechny”, whom the article indicated directly as one of such “Zionists”, was beaten.

From that day on, the purge in state and economic administration began as well. State institutions would receive a list of people of Jewish descent working at various levels – the fruit of several months of labour of security organs, who were then laid off, often in the atmosphere of badgering during meeting of party members that would take long hours. Obviously, the charges were as enigmatic as they were mysterious – “Zionism”, because in accordance with instructions, one was not to write or speak directly about the victims of those attacks as Jews, so as not to expose themselves to accusations of anti-Semitism. Besides, as the witnesses to these events themselves point out, not only Jews were accused in this way, but everyone who in a social sense was supposed to be a Jew⁴⁹, and Gomułka himself personally decided on that issue⁵⁰. More often than not, however, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the “Partisans” would be the decision-making bodies on that matter.

⁴⁸ Article in “Słowo Powszechne” of March 11th, 1968 <http://marzec1968.pl/m68/historia/6960,Kampania-antysemicka.html> (accessed on February 24th, 2018)

⁴⁹ H. Pobóg [under the pseudonym M. Grabowska], *Spory o Marzec (Disputes about March)*, [in:] *Krytyka* no 10-11, 1981, pp. 10-11.

⁵⁰ J. Grzędziński, *Zwierzęta patrzą na nas (Animals are looking at us)*, [in:] *Kultura* no 6/7, Paris 1968, p. 81.

“1968 MARCH EVENTS”: “DZIADY” AND THE “ANTI-ZIONIST CAMPAIGN”

On the map of activities as part of the “anti-Zionist campaign”, Łódź occupied a special place due to its historic determinants. There, too, it took on one of the most extreme and aggressive forms due to the still large, 4,000 in the 1960s, Jewish community living there. Suffice it to say that the party propaganda centre in cooperation with the secretary of propaganda and agitation of the Poviát Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party Hieronim Rejniak issued two pamphlets to local party activists. One concerned the participation of Jews in the apparatus of terror in the Stalinist period, and the other by Władysław Kmitowski dealt with anti-Polish aspects of Zionism, referring to ... “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion”⁵¹. Incidentally, the “Protocols...” themselves were unofficially distributed among the party activists under the aegis of the Propaganda Department of the Provincial Committee as a kind of “supplementary literature”. Therefore, one should not be surprised by the brutality with which the city was being “cleaned up”. The editor-in-chief of “Dziennik Łódzki”, a daily paper in Łódź, Stanisław Januszewski, for example, was fired from work, relegated from the party, and thrown out of the hospital on the very same day, where he found himself after a heart attack. In the Department of Ophthalmic Diseases of the Military Medical Academy, the authorities demanded the doctors present their baptism certificates⁵². The director of the Union of the Silk Industry, Bronisław Rałowski, on April 7th, 1968, was reported to the party authorities and denounced to the militia by “honest workers of the Gorzów Silkworks”, accusing him of despotism, giving preference to representatives of his ethnicity, chairing the Jewish *kahal*, and friendship with Roman Zambrowski, one of the leading representatives of the former “Puławian faction,” and long-time member of the Central Committee, and in 1968 the vice-president of the Supreme Audit Office⁵³.

Though perhaps less radical, but comparatively deplorable, were consequences of the unleashed hate campaign in smaller towns. There, people of Jewish origin often occupied sensitive positions not so much in the party apparatus as, for example, health care, being sometimes the only specialists in their fields. It did not save them from anti-Semitic campaign and they shared the fate of other “agents of international Zionism” dismissed from work, but due to the specificity of local community life, they could sometimes count on relatively larger support or sympathy from Poles rather than in large urban centres.

The attitude of the media, which in the realities of the Polish People’s Republic were the main carrier of the propaganda assumptions of the entire campaign, deserves a separate study. The initiators of the campaign against Zionist and reactionary elements were in this environment above all people strongly associated with the Communist apparatus, and only breaking through in the party hierarchy, seeing in its activity the possibility of accelerating their promotion. The first, clear signal for this type of activity, according to some researchers of this subject matter, was given by Witold Filler, editor-in-chief of the editorial office of Telewizja Polska (Polish Television), who in the cultural

⁵¹ J. Eisler, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 121.

⁵³ *Ibidem*.

“1968 MARCH EVENTS”: “DZIADY” AND THE “ANTI-ZIONIST CAMPAIGN”

programme “Pegaz”, broadcast on February 3rd, 1968, approved of the decision to remove “Dziady” off the stage, accusing the drama’s director of departing from the ingenious metaphor and romantic poetry of Adam Mickiewicz in favour of petty politics. National press took over justifying the authorities’ actions, followed closely by local press, exposing the “instigators” of student protests along with their motivations. Subsequently, the leading slogans of the campaign were created which quickly found their way to posters and banners on numerous rallies, meetings, or similar conventions organised by party apparatus. However, this did not prevent journalists from almost simultaneously expressing indignation at the accusations of anti-Semitism that flowed from the West at that time⁵⁴.

Generally speaking, several main trends can be distinguished in the press and the other media of the Polish People’s Republic. The first was the permanent indication of the alleged connections of the “instigators” of student and social unrest with propaganda centres in Western Europe, such as Radio Free Europe or the Parisian “Culture”⁵⁵. Another, in line with the rhetoric presented by General Moczar in October 1967, was the denigration and ridicule of Israel and its political class. An example of this is the notorious “open letter” to the Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir written by Piotr Goszczyński and published in Łódź’s “Głos Robotniczy” (“Workers’ Voice”), in which he joked that she kept the Nazi criminal Martin Bormann hidden in her closet. Related to this trend was the emphasis put on how many chief public positions are held in Israel by emigrants from Poland. Alojzy Sroga stood out in particular in this matter, who in a radio series “Co dzień niesie?” (“What has happened today?”) would inform his listeners that 6 out of 18 ministers in the government of Golda Meir were Polish Jews, and out of 120 deputies, more than a half could admit their Polish heritage. It allowed him, on the basis of this information, to come up with a hypothesis that Jews in Poland did not feel much of a connection with the country, and when emigrating to the Middle East they could count on making a great career⁵⁶. Tadeusz Walichnowski also wrote in a similar tone, pointing out that a significant part of the Israeli oppression apparatus consisted of emigrants from Poland from 1947-1956 and 1956-1958⁵⁷. Properly understood information activity, in line with the guidelines of the propaganda apparatus, with the intent to explain to the public the reasons behind the authorities’ actions, was of key importance from the point of view of the authorities. An example of just such an “informational” journalism can be a series of three articles from April and May 1968, published on the pages of “Dziennik Łódzki” and written by the present-day Member of the Parliament Iwona Śledzińska-Katarasińska from Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform). “An exam without grades in the transcript” or “For those who forgot – Zionism, activity and passivity” lectured the reader in an accessible way on the reasons why the authorities carried out “anti-Zionist campaign” and on the dangers of passivity towards the slander campaign that Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany unleashed

⁵⁴ W. Sęczyk, *Marzec 68’ w publicystyce PRL. Studium z dziejów propagandy (March 1968 in the journalism of the Polish People’s Republic. A study of the history of propaganda)*, Wałbrzych 2009, p. 76.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ J. Eisler, *op.cit.*, p. 124.

⁵⁷ T. Walichnowski, *Mechanizm propagandy syjonistycznej (Mechanisms of Zionist propaganda)*, Katowice 1968, p. 19.

“1968 MARCH EVENTS”: “DZIADY” AND THE “ANTI-ZIONIST CAMPAIGN”

against Poland. The cooperation and mutual complementation of all these trends created the full image of a reality desired by the initiators of the campaign, which marginalised and stigmatised actions taken in defence of the attacked Jewish population.

However, two names: Kazimierz Kąkol, editor-in-chief of “Prawo i Życie” (“Law and Life”), and Ryszard Gontarz, journalist of “Sztandar Młodych” (“Banner of the Youth”), grew to the rank of sinister symbols of propaganda for actions undertaken in March. It was them that one of the leaders of student protests, Józef Dajczgewand called “angry barking dog of communism”. Both of them stood out not only in the journalistic field, but perhaps primarily on the ideological, acting to cleanse their environment of Zionist elements or people contesting the direction taken by the party.

Essentially, the campaign launched by the authorities in March served in many cases as an opportunity to settle personal accounts or obtain a previously blocked promotion in party or administrative structures. Another characteristic feature of March, elaborated on by, among others, Dariusz Stola was that it allowed Poles to violate a taboo related to the criticism of the alienated political, financial, or cultural elitist establishment. Naturally, it was limited criticism and directed at a predetermined group, but “open and honest critical statements” which were encouraged at meetings or rallies, could be referred to the situation of the Polish People’s Republic as such⁵⁸. It served as a kind of a safety valve for the authorities, which in this way cleverly channelled social moods, pinpointing the ones guilty of all post-October 1956 pathologies, and again promising a “new hand”.

The temptation to demonstrate dissatisfaction, be it even staged and directed by the party, with the situation in the country was certainly considerable for many. Just as the fear whether lack of proper involvement in the hate campaign would not turn against the person avoiding participation in organised rallies. Nevertheless, it is impossible today to clearly and precisely determine what percentage of the society got carried away by moods created in March and actively joined the activities against the Jewish community. One can, of course, try to build a certain narrative based on the reports of participants of those events, which are naturally numerous, however, one must bear in mind that in this case, we would get quite a fragmentary picture with subjective (no matter positive or negative) feelings and memories.

Some light on the phenomenon of the “anti-Zionist campaign” is cast by archival materials gathered in the Institute of National Remembrance, but they also create an incomplete picture, based mainly on official documentation, in which exposing and exaggerating certain issues was desirable, especially that those who prepared them very often presented anti-Semitic views at that time. However, it cannot be denied that under the influence of the campaign developed by the authorities and obedient media, in some of the lower social strata, the old anti-Jewish resentments – social, cultural, religious or economic were revived. In some circles, the authorities’ actions were a confirmation

⁵⁸ D. Stola, *Emigracja pomarcowa (Post-March emigration)*, Warszawa 2000, p. 68.

“1968 MARCH EVENTS”: “DZIADY” AND THE “ANTI-ZIONIST CAMPAIGN”

of beliefs in conspiracy theories about “Jewish domination and control”. Therefore, there was no lack of anti-Semitic statements, as well as physical assaults on people of Jewish origin, but one would seek in vain information about pogroms or killings of people of this background. As a matter of fact, the society very quickly understood that the Zionist element of the campaign did not only refer to Jews, although they were the main victims of it. This was also influenced by the mass character of the purge, reaching far beyond the party apparatus and the ambiguous, even contradictory image of the enemy – a communist-Zionist on the services of Western imperialism. In this situation, the most reasonable solution seemed to outwait the storm without engaging in extreme attitudes – whether to clearly stand in the defence of the victims, or on the contrary to join the condemning and stigmatising choir.

It seems that the most sensible position in this matter was taken by Jan Józef Lipski, who in March 1981 said on this subject: “I am deeply convinced that the vast majority of Polish society remained at least indifferent to this concept of playing a great political and social game. (...) At that time, the purges were very deep and far beyond the apparatus. They went, so to speak, to the very bottom. They would throw people out from anywhere it was possible, so long as somebody had Jewish roots, so long as it was suspected that he was perhaps a Jew”⁵⁹.

⁵⁹ J.J. Lipski, *Kwestia żydowska (The Jewish question) [in:] Marzec '68. Sesja w Uniwersytecie Warszawskim 1981 r. (March 1968. Exam session at the University of Warsaw), part 1, Warsaw 1981, p. 46.*



9. “1968 MARCH EVENTS”: PURGE IN THE POLISH ARMY

In the political realities of a totalitarian state like the Polish People’s Republic, the army always held a key position, although not always exposed. This testifies to the special role of the army in the establishment and subsequent perpetuation of the people’s power as well as its attitude during subsequent political crises, until December 13th, 1981, when the law was violated, but the army fully embraced the rule of government in the state. A significant part of the establishment, not only political, but even cultural, came from military personnel. Generally speaking, the army in addition to being one of the main pillars of the communist system, served also human resources while the moods prevailing in it were a kind of gauge of the political situation. It came to light even in October 1956, when the important, though later exaggerated role in the peaceful takeover of power by Władysław Gomułka, was played by the soldiers with generals Jan Frey-Bielecki, Juliusz Hibner, Janusz Zarzycki, Waław Komar and the Rear Admiral Jan Wiśniewski⁶⁰. It was no different in the case of “March events”, when due to the special “care” that the “Partisans” surrounded the uniformed services with, radical personnel changes were preceded by similar actions in the party apparatus. It should be emphasized that no reshuffles among the senior commanders, and certainly not on such a scale could have been carried out with at least a sympathetic neutrality of the Soviets. This may suggest that Moczar’s circle largely met Moscow’s expectations, for which maintaining control over the “brotherly” Polish Army was, after all, a priority task.

At the end of the 1950s and in the first half of the 1960s a systematic process of relieving senior officers related to October of their posts began. These were usually forced resignations, but also mitigated by entrusting them with high positions in the civil administration. And so Rear Admiral Wiśniewski in November 1959 became Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Shipping, and General Zarzycki resigned from the post of the Chief Political Executive of the Polish Army in April 1960. In the context of both officers, it was unofficially said that the reason for their dismissal could have been the fact of a marriage with Jews, which could have slowly signalled the upcoming anti-Semitic wave in the army⁶¹. Soon thereafter, virtually all generals actively involved in the events of October 1956 or activities following it were removed from their exposed positions under various pretexts. According to some researchers, the KGB directly pulled the strings concerning the army, acting through the deputy head of the Military External Service, Lieutenant Colonel Teodor Kufel, a graduate of higher security courses in Moscow. Also, the list of generals to be dismissed was supposedly developed by the Soviets⁶². Interestingly, General Zarzycki was replaced as the Chief Political Executive of the Polish Army by the just thirty-seven-year-old commander of the 12th Mechanised Division in Szczecin, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, thus starting a stunning career, who later became one of the architects of anti-Semitic purges. It was at his command that in December 1960

⁶⁰ J. Eisler, R. Kupiecki, *Na zakręcie historii – rok 1956 (On the curve of history – 1956, Warsaw 1992, pp. 38-39.*

⁶¹ J. Eisler, *op.cit.*, p. 465.

⁶² Cf. M. Chęciński, *Poland. Communism, Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, New York 1982.*

“1968 MARCH EVENTS”: PURGE IN THE POLISH ARMY

the head of the Military Internal Service, General Aleksander Kokoszyn, produced a strictly confidential Note regarding staffing of certain posts in the General Staff, Institutions of the Ministry of Defence or Military Districts by officers who did not evoke trust. The list contained about 40 names of officers of mostly Jewish origin. The Military Internal Service had been dealing extensively with this topic for some time, carefully observing especially the Jewish emigrants and their careers in the Israeli army. The impulse to take a more decisive action against the Jewish minority in the army, however, was only to take the positions of the head of the Military Internal Service by General Kufel and the head office of Chief Political Executive of the Polish Army by General Józef Urbanowicz, who would call the Zionist and revisionist elements in the army: “dirty October foam”⁶³. The pretext as in the case of the whole “anti-Zionist campaign” was the Israeli-Arab conflict in June 1967.

It should be emphasised that although the official reason for the purges were naturally pro-Israeli sympathies revealed during the Six-Day War, in many cases it was used as a pretext for internal personnel games. This was for instance the case of the meticulous actions of General Moczar and the “Partisans” against the Minister of National Defence, Marshal Spychalski, one of the main beneficiaries of the political crisis of October 1956 who had powerful political influence due to his function. His position, in spite of the distrust of the Soviets in relation to him, was too strong to attack him directly. Therefore, the targets of the attacks of the “Partisans” became officers universally recognised as his supporters – generals Czesław Mankiewicz, Tadeusz Dąbkowski and Jan Stamieszkin from the National Air Defence Forces.

In July 1967, so immediately after the end of fighting in the Middle East, all three were accused not only of putting up with pro-Israeli sympathies or demonstrating them themselves, but also that with their attitudes, they contributed to the creation of anti-Semitic moods⁶⁴. This provocation, for which the people of General Moczar were without a doubt responsible, quickly became reason for resignation or dismissal of not only three generals, but also of 45 other soldiers and officers. All were removed from the party, and consequently also from the professional military service, thus losing half of their pensions⁶⁵.

The purge initiated in the National Air Defence Forces quickly spread to the rest of the military structures, especially under the influence of anti-Semitic moods growing among the officers’ staff. The Chief Political Executive of the Polish Army, especially General Urbanowicz, contributed largely to their creation and subsequent fuelling. This was done, among others by developing and distributing in the army a number of various studies, indicating the percentage of people of “Jewish nationality” in individual structures of the army and the rapid career paths, especially the Personnel Department, suggesting unambiguously that they shaped and implemented, especially in the post-war

⁶³ T. Pióro, *Czystki w Wojsku Polskim 1967-1968 (Purges in the Polish Army 1967-1968) [in:] Więż no 6/1998, p. 157.*

⁶⁴ J. Eisler, *op.cit.*, p. 478.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 479.

“1968 MARCH EVENTS”: PURGE IN THE POLISH ARMY

years, a certain policy. Similar actions quickly led to an anti-Semitic fever in the army and the tracking of Jewish officers who allegedly were ensuring promotions and better careers for each other. Officers who did not have Jewish ancestry, but were hostile towards the “Partisans” also fell victim to the campaign. They, in turn, were accused of the convenient “Zionism” and pro-Israeli sympathies. Only in the first stage, immediately after the end of the Israeli-Arab conflict in 1967, 17 officers were dismissed from the military and party structures: 10 colonels, 6 lieutenant colonels and one major⁶⁶. In order to give his activities a more organised character and at least a semblance of the rule of law, on November 21st, the Minister of National Defence appointed a special commission to consider similar staff requests during monthly meetings. At its head stood General Wojciech Jaruzelski, from 1965 the Chief of General Staff, accompanied by generals Urbanowicz (head of the Chief Political Executive of the Polish Army), Kufel (head of the Military Internal Service) and Wytyczak (head of the Personnel Department). The commission, which was baptised in the jargon as “un-Jewing” quickly gained a gloomy reputation. One of the biographers of General Jaruzelski, Colonel Lech Kowalski, describing the actions of the commission, stated that in the most extreme cases, the officers were being forced to prove their Polish origin by revealing their most intimate body parts⁶⁷. Interestingly, the anti-Semitic purge in the army did not end with the extinguishing of the “anti-Zionist campaign” and lasted in the years to come. According to Lech Kowalski, the last of the officers of Jewish origin were expelled from the army as late as in 1980⁶⁸.

Historians differently estimate the number of victims of this anti-Semitic campaign in the army. Typically, a number is given from several dozen⁶⁹ through 150⁷⁰ to even 1348⁷¹ officers and non-commissioned officers. It should be added that the officers dismissed and removed from the army were deprived of part of their pensions, and if they emigrated to Israel, they were degraded⁷². The brutal course of action, combined with the intimidation of officers who fell victim to the purge, sometimes led to dramatic situations when officers subjected to such practices took their lives⁷³.

At the end of this thread, it ought to be noted that the activities of the “Partisans” aimed at first at undermining the position of Marshal Marian Spychalski and later at the resignation from his function of the Minister of National Defence, ended in full success already in April 1968. The new head of the Ministry of National Defence became General Wojciech Jaruzelski, an ally of general Moczar, who proved resourceful during the purge.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁷ Lech Kowalski, a statement in the documentary film by Grzegorz Braun and Robert Kaczmarek *Towarzysz Generał (Comrade General)* of 2009.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁹ P. Raina, *Jaruzelski, Warsaw 2001*, p. 689.

⁷⁰ A. Grubińska, *Czystka antysemityczna w Wojsku Polskim 1967-1968 (Anti-Semitic Purge in the Polish Army 1967-1968)* <https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/slownik/czystka-antysemityczna-w-wojsku-polskim-1967-1968> [accessed on February 24th, 2018].

⁷¹ L. Kowalski, *Jaruzelski – generał ze skazą: biografia wojskowa generała armii Wojciecha Jaruzelskiego (Jaruzelski – general with a flaw: military biography of general Wojciech Jaruzelski)*, Poznań 2012, p. 379.

⁷² J. Eisler, *op.cit.*, p. 482.

⁷³ There are at least three known and confirmed such cases: lieutenant colonel Zygmunt Ostrowski, lieutenant colonel Halina Orlińska and her husband colonel Jan Orliński, who survived the suicide attempt.



10. “1968 MARCH EVENTS”: EMIGRATION

The anti-Semitic campaign unleashed by the “Partisans” was followed by a sad epilogue – the forced emigration from Poland of Jews and people of Jewish origin. Its full and comprehensive estimation is still quite problematic due to discrepancies or deliberate understatement by the press or documents of the communist authorities in the number of people who ultimately left Poland. It is universally assumed, however, that it was a number totalling approximately 15-20 thousand people, 25% of whom settled later in Israel⁷⁴. It was, therefore, relatively the smallest emigration compared to the previous ones, falling in the times of the 1940s and 1950s, but its uniqueness should be seen not in the number of emigrants but in the emigrants themselves. It was, above all, intellectual emigration. One of the available documents of the Passport Office shows that out of 9,570 persons who applied for permission to leave the country, there were 217 former employees of higher education institutions, 275 persons previously employed in scientific institutions, 944 students and 1823 persons with higher education⁷⁵. It gives a certain picture of the losses suffered in March 1968 by Polish culture and science. Amongst the people who left Poland then were Aleksander Ford, Leszek Kołakowski, Włodzimierz Brus, Krzysztof Pomian, Paweł Korzec, Jan Kott, Arnold Ślucki, Stanisław Wygodzki, Witold Wirpsza and Henryk Grynberg. With their departure, the authorities tried to obliterate their achievements as well. Censor’s guidelines from May 1968 explicitly prohibited not only the publication of texts or works of émigrés, but even mentioning their names, except for political criticism or condemnation⁷⁶. Therefore, it was also a kind of a social engineering operation aimed at breaking the centuries-old common Polish-Jewish tradition. It is thence not surprising that many of the emigrants, even if they did not feel Jewish before March, after March ceased to feel Polish.

Of course, one must not ignore the fact that a certain percentage of people who were actively involved in the crimes of the Stalinist period left with them, thus avoiding punishment, but again – as in the case of post-October emigration – it was not in any way the majority, as the propaganda of the “Partisans” wished present the matter. Another factor that determines the uniqueness of this emigration is also the enormous pressure to make decisions about leaving the country, which the Jews and people of Jewish origin were subjected to. This involved many personal dramas – the breakup of marriages, the breakup of families or the end of friendships. This is also the main reason it is still being assessed primarily through the prism of personal feelings of the people on whom it was forced. This assessment is inevitably still primarily emotional, associated above all with the experiences of specific people or families. However, in the context of all similar actions targeted at specific social groups in the period of the Polish People’s Republic, it should be emphasised that despite very frequent personal tragedies or dramas caused by

⁷⁴ M. Chęciński, *op.cit.*, pp. 245-246.

⁷⁵ J. Eisler, *op.cit.*, p. 131.

⁷⁶ D. Stola, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

“1968 MARCH EVENTS”: EMIGRATION

the necessity of leaving the country, it stands out through a rather mild degree of repression. Not to mention the fact that a trip abroad, even if a permanent one, for the majority of Poles at that time remained in the sphere of completely unreal dreams. Stefan Kisielewski described it in his “Dzienniki” (“Journals”) in his own way, recording it on November 27th, 1970: “I have to say that it pisses me off when I’m reading that, for example, some guy states that March 1968 was the biggest shock for him that he ever experienced in the Polish People’s Republic, the shock that allowed him to see straight. The biggest shock! So, not the Kielce Pogrom, not the imprisonment and execution of National Army soldiers, not the generals’ trials, not appointing Rokossowski as marshal of Poland, not imprisoning Gomułka, and later Wyszyński, not the Poznań 1956 uprising, but just March 1968. Because only then **they** got kicked in the ass. Mightily exaggerated⁷⁷.”

⁷⁷ S. Kisielewski, *Dzienniki (Journals)*, Warsaw 2001, p. 507.



11. “1968 MARCH EVENTS”: INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

It is impossible to fully understand March 1968 without putting it in the proper context of international events of the late 1960s. While the issue of the Six-Day War has already been mentioned several times, it is also necessary to mention other key events affecting the situation of the Polish People’s Republic both in its foreign and internal policies. These are primarily relations between Warsaw and Moscow as well as the Czechoslovak crisis and its subsequent “Prague Spring”.

As in the case of October 1956, the events in Poland in the eyes of Kremlin politicians were somewhat out of the way of interest concerning the situation in Hungary, so in the case of March 1968, the situation in relation to events in Czechoslovakia was similar. This does not mean, however, that at that time Poland was less important to the Soviet Union than these countries, on the contrary. Due to its geostrategic location, it held a crucial position in the face of the need to control the political crises which were boiling up in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The difference, however, was that both in 1956 and 1968, the Soviets maintained an almost full level of control over the situation in Poland, and none of the crises of that time posed a threat of the break of the Polish People’s Republic from the Eastern bloc. This is clearly illustrated by the fact that Poland broke off diplomatic relations with Israel on June 12th, 1967, which took place under clear pressure from Moscow, ultimately justifying and accelerating the unleashing of an anti-Semitic campaign around the country. However, it should not be concluded on this basis that the Soviets inspired the Polish authorities to the “anti-Zionist campaign”, although some relations seem to suggest it may be the case. The correspondent of “Trybuna Ludu” in Moscow, Michał Łucki, recalled that even before the Arab-Israeli war, Soviet comrades were chiding Gomułka that the Polish mass media did not speak with one voice with the Soviets even on the allegations against China. Supposedly this way they were trying to point out gently that this was due to the fact that Jews – Leon Kasman and Michał Hofman were at the head of the Polish United Workers’ Party press body and of the Polish Press Agency⁷⁸. Another source of such a message might be the Deputy Minister of Higher Education Roman Mistewicz, who during his business trip to Moscow and Leningrad in 1966, was to be approached by Soviet companions for the percentage of Jews in his ministry. Of course, similar relations may indicate that the source of inspiration for the anti-Semitic campaign was to some extent in the Soviet Union, but they do not determine in any way its actual impact on its final shape. Similarly, the issue of a direct impulse to start the “anti-Zionist” campaign in the form of imposing a ban on the performance of “Dziady” directed by Kazimierz Dejmek, allegedly the result of pressure from the Soviet ambassador in Warsaw, Averky Aristov, which he himself strongly denied, as did Mieczysław Rakowski in his own “Dzienniki Polityczne” (“Political Journals”), clearly incriminating Zenon Kliszka as the person behind all the confusion around the performance⁷⁹.

⁷⁸ J. Eisler, *op.cit.*, p. 109.

⁷⁹ M.F. Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1967-1968 (Political Journals 1967-1968)*, Warsaw 1999, p. 120.

“1968 MARCH EVENTS”: INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

It also seems doubtful that in view of the growing conflict with China, the unexpected Romanian volta, and the ongoing crisis in Czechoslovakia, the authorities on Kremlin were eager to begin a new “front” in Poland only to undermine Władysław Gomułka’s position to the benefit of Moczar whom they did not sufficiently trust. The more so, because they were more inclined towards Edward Gierek’s candidacy for the potential successor of Gomułka, and his position was still too weak. Meanwhile, in the face of the “Prague Spring”, a strong position of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the PUWP was required, and this task Władysław Gomułka fulfilled in the eyes of the Soviet comrades in flying colours, what they confirmed in November 1968 by demonstratively giving him full support.

A wholly separate issue that deserves its own study is the catastrophic damage that Poland suffered to its image as a result of the “anti-Zionist campaign” and the subsequent emigration. These events had wide repercussions around the world, becoming, among others, the topic of the discussion that took place in May 1969 at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Western press did not avoid the comparison of Władysław Gomułka to Adolf Hitler, and the whole phenomenon to the campaign of hatred and purge in Germany, in the first years after the Nazis had come to power. At the international forum, the Polish authorities were called to stop similar activities and to guarantee the Jewish population due religious and cultural rights. In Poland, the propaganda apparatus considered similar calls, of course, as an argument confirming the alleged gigantic influences of world Zionism or did not inform the public about them at all. It must be remembered that the year 1968 in Western Europe was also a time of considerable social unrest caused by the left wing and movements of protesters, which serves as prologue to the later cultural revolution. As Jacek Kuroń rightly pointed out, they were held in a completely opposite spirit than the anti-Semitic campaign in Poland. In May 1968 students demonstrating in Paris retorted to the statement that one of the initiators of the protests, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the “Red Dany”, was a German Jew: “We are all German Jews”⁸⁰. In this context, it is easy to imagine how easy it was to label Poland and the Polish people as xenophobic and anti-Semitic taking into view the “anti-Zionist campaign” taking place in the country.

It is difficult not to get the impression that Poland is suffering from it to this day and that March 1968 is the main source for its image in the collective consciousness of Western elites that at least in part come from the then student movements.

⁸⁰ J. Kuroń, *Między Październikiem 56 a Marcem 68 (Between October 1956 and March 1968) [in:] Marzec '68. Sesja w Uniwersytecie Warszawskim 1981 r. (March 1968. Exam session at the University of Warsaw), part 1, Warsaw 1981, p. 7.*



12. SUMMARY

Therefore, the conclusion of this study, one should clearly answer the question why March 1968 cannot be included in the phenomenon of Polish mass anti-Semitism, for which, on the occasion of subsequent anniversaries, the Polish nation should apologise. First of all, this is caused by the fact that there is no such thing as Polish mass anti-Semitism. Antisemitism, of course, existed and was variously motivated in different historical periods, but it never took the dominant position in Polish society in the shape of organic hatred towards Jews and everything Jewish. In other words, anti-Semitic attitudes were usually caused or justified by something more than just racist prejudices. At times less, at other times more likely to translate into actual social or cultural relations, but necessarily fulfilling this condition, because racial antisemitism, apart from the social margin, never won a greater base in the Polish society. This is clearly seen during the “anti-Zionist campaign” in 1968, when at some point the trend of official propaganda gave up a mask of appearances, expressed by the hypocritical slogan “Anti-Semitism – no, Anti-Zionism – yes”, starting an ordinary racist battle targeting Jews as such⁸¹. This did not meet with the expected response from the society, which in its majority remained as passive to the campaign as it had been passive as before. However, the authorities’ attempts to undertake such actions, wanting to play on the lowest instincts, may testify on the one hand to a certain desperation, and the other, to a lack of proper recognition of moods and overestimation of the role of an alleged deeply rooted anti-Semitism.

A similar mistake was made in 1956 by the “Natolinians” and the “March events” themselves seem much more understandable if we look at them through the prism of political games within the Polish United Workers’ Party from October 1956 and the rise of Władysław Gomułka. General Moczar’s “Partisans” appear as a sort of continuation of the “Natolinians” fight against the “Puławians”, using against them almost the same rhetoric, but in a much more thoughtful and effective way. Although they were often characterised by the most primitive form of anti-Semitism whose main driving force in many cases appeared to be racial prejudice, they were able to successfully use this phenomenon as an instrument to attack the circle of their political opponents who were not Jews and had nothing in common with them – “Marxist revisionists” or “dirty post-October foam”.

Bearing in mind all this, it is extremely difficult to put forward the thesis that March 1968 was a kind of eruption of deeply hidden Polish anti-Semitism, whose sources were the anti-Semitic attitudes of the Polish pre-war political right wing, and over which the communist authorities lost control at some point. It takes a lot of bad will to interpret facts in this way. Certainly, such an eruption occurred in many or even very many individual

⁸¹ An example of this type of abandonment of the game of appearances may come in form of the writings of the then head of the Department of Science of the Central Committee of the PUWP Andrzej Werblan, for example his article published in *Miesięcznik Literacki* no 6/1968 under the title *Przyczynki do genezy konfliktu (Origin of the conflict)*.

SUMMARY

cases, finally confirming their phobias in the official party line, but it is impossible to speak in this context about the majority or even the entirety of Polish society.

There is also such a problem with the “March events” that they are relatively recent and to a large extent still vividly remembered by victims or even contemporary political elites, stemming from student movements in May 1968. It causes March to somehow determine the picture of the whole of Polish-Jewish relations, extending the negative experiences of the “anti-Zionist campaign” to the entire centuries-long history of the coexistence of both nations. This is a very dangerous phenomenon, because it places Poles in the position of torturers of the Jews and brings mutual relations down to a constant fight against anti-Semitism. Accepting such false optics, which situates March 1968 as one of many demonstrations of mass and universal Polish anti-Semitism, we involuntarily agree to such a narrative.

What was March 1968 then in terms of the Polish-Jewish relations? Undoubtedly, a tragic epilogue to a nearly thousand-year coexistence of Poles and Jews on the very same soil. A cynical and instrumental anti-Semitic campaign of one of the coteries of the Polish United Workers’ Party against another in their struggle for political influence and positions. A great propaganda and manipulation campaign based on the conviction of the existence of a deeply rooted anti-Semitism in the Polish society that hoped to engage them in the co-participation and legitimisation of party purges. A huge drama of thousands of people who very often lost everything in a short time – friends, work, home, homeland, to the benefit of which they wanted to serve and work. Undoubtedly a multifaceted phenomenon with many aspects to it that is difficult to summarise even on several hundred pages, let alone similar studies.

The last question that should be asked when discussing this topic is: should Poles feel guilty and apologise for March 1968?

Here the answer seems simple. Those should feel guilty and apologise who feel today as the heirs of the ideas behind the unleashing of the “anti-Zionist campaign”. And it should be remembered that its sources were more than just anti-Semitism itself.



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