

Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikov

A Citizen of Yiddishland

Dovid Sfar and the Jewish Communist Milieu
in Poland



Studies in Jewish History
and Memory



PETER LANG

This pioneering study shows what brought Yiddish-speaking Jewish intelligentsia to the Communist movement in the interwar years. They believed that Communism is not only a way to solve the Jewish problem but also to save the Yiddish culture. Biography of the central protagonist of the book, a Yiddish writer Dovid (David) Sfar, is just a pretext to show a full range of Jewish Communist activists (such as Hersh Smolar, Bernard Mark, Szymon Zachariasz, etc.) and their life choices. This relatively small milieu influenced and controlled the Jewish life in post-war Poland until the anti-Semitic campaign of 1968. Their lives, reconstructed thanks to sources in several languages, make up a panorama of Jewish Communist experience in 20th-century Eastern Europe.

Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikov is an associate professor at the Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History in the Polish Academy of Sciences. Her research interests include history of East European Jewry in the 19th and 20th centuries, Polish-Jewish relations and history of Yiddish culture. She is a cofounder of the Polish Association of Yiddish Studies.

A Citizen of Yiddishland

Studies in Jewish History and Memory

Edited by
Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-P dlich

Translated by
Paul Glasser

Volume 13



PETER LANG

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**Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche
Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available online at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

The Publication is funded by Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Poland as a part of the National Programme for the Development of the Humanities. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Ministry cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



**NATIONAL PROGRAMME
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMANITIES**

Translated by Paul Glasser/Copyedited by Ri J. Turner Cover
image by Leon Sfard

ISSN 2364-1975

ISBN 978-3-631-80387-5 (Print) E-ISBN 978-3-631-80845-0 (E-PDF)

E-ISBN 978-3-631-80846-7 (EPUB) E-ISBN 978-3-631-80847-4 (MOBI)

DOI 10.3726/b16415

PETER LANG



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Peter Lang – Berlin • Bern • Bruxelles • New York •
Oxford • Warszawa • Wien

This publication has been peer reviewed.

www.peterlang.com

*To Gennady
For his love, support and patience
Particularly during the several years of our ménage à trois with
Dovid Sfard*

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Anyone who believes that history is heading toward some goal will certainly not be satisfied by contemplating this goal, but will begin to contrive how to realize it.

Karl Jaspers

Introduction

A knowledge of the history of Polish Jews allows us to trace the possible life paths of a man born at the beginning of the twentieth century on Polish soil in a traditional Jewish family—assuming that our hero survived World War II. He could have chosen Zionism—the idea of rebuilding a Jewish state in Palestine. The consequence of this choice might have been emigration to Palestine before the war or after it. He could have chosen to assimilate to a lesser or greater degree into Polish culture, perhaps rejecting his own Jewish roots in the process. He could have signed onto the Jewish version of socialism, i.e., the Bund, the most powerful Jewish party in prewar Poland, and during the war, experienced the end of the worldview represented by the Bund. He could have chosen communism for its promise of internationalism, of a world not divided into Jews and non-Jews, a world offering an escape from one's own Jewishness—and if he had not been in the Soviet Union during the purges of the 1930s, he would have had the chance to spend the war there and then return to Poland as an enthusiastic builder of the new order. Finally, he could have chosen that same communism—but for its promise of a world in which Jews would exist side-by-side with non-Jews, possessing the same rights and privileges; a world in which there would no longer be pogroms, and the Yiddish language would lose its stigma as a contemptible “zhargon” (jargon); a world in which Jews would not have to give up the right to be Jews.

The group that chose the last option was not large—either before the war or after 1945. Yet it had an influence on the Jewish community in Poland that belied its numbers; after the war, it offered Polish Jews a new framework that offered a measure of stability throughout the decades, even despite the successive waves of emigration, including the final one in March 1968. The members of this group considered themselves Communists—that much is clear. Most of them were active before the war in the Communist Party of Poland (KPP), the Communist Party of Western Ukraine (KPZU) or the Communist Party of Western Belarus (KPZB) and survived the war thanks to their flight to the Soviet Union. They also—perhaps even first and foremost—considered themselves Jews. They were Jews not only by birth, but also by upbringing, education, culture, and—of course—language. They certainly cannot be described by Polish-Jewish writer Julian Strykowski's oft-cited statement that a Jew who is a Communist has

ceased to be a Jew.¹ The members of this group never ceased to be Jews. Many of them undoubtedly never ceased to be Communists either.

The relatively few monographs published thus far about Jews in the Polish Communist movement fit into either historiography on Communism, historiography on the Jewish people, or finally—historiography on Poland (wherein Jewish Communism is usually treated as a foreign body). In many instances, these three subject areas have naturally meshed and complemented each other. In this book, I propose a somewhat different outlook: I will trace the story of Jewish Communism in Poland through the lens of the biography of a Jewish intellectual, Communist, sociocultural activist and Yiddish writer, and thus trace the ways it was an integral part of the history of Yiddish language and culture in Eastern Europe.

The protagonist of this book, Dovid Sfar, was one of the most highly placed Jewish Communists in the postwar years. Despite this, he is practically unknown, except to a small circle of historians of postwar Polish Jews. His long life overlapped with most of the stormy twentieth century, beginning with his birth in 1903 in Czarist Russia. He lived through the Second Polish Republic and spent time in France and the Soviet Union. Thereafter, he returned to the Polish People's Republic, where he lived until his emigration to Israel after the antisemitic campaign of March 1968. Beyond his various state citizenships, he was above all a citizen of Yiddishland—that “chimera of a country”² with no precise borders, in which citizenship was determined by involvement with Yiddish language and culture.

In an essay devoted to the modern function of the term “Yiddishland,” Jeffrey Shandler notes that it is a term that has long been used in Yiddish, yet cannot be found in any existing dictionary of the language.³ In common usage, the term “Yiddishland” defines an imprecise area of Eastern Europe which until 1939 was inhabited by Jews living in a traditional style and using Yiddish in their daily life. Yet it appears that Yiddishland, although native to Eastern Europe, was not so much a concrete physical place on earth, but rather a certain mentality

1 *Ocalony na Wschodzie. Z Julianem Strykowskiem rozmawia Piotr Szewc*, Montricher 1991, p. 48.

2 Z. Segalowitch, *Tlomatske 13: Fun farbrentn nekhtn*, Buenos Aires 1946, p. 33.

3 J. Shandler, “Imagining Yiddishland: Language, Place and Memory,” *History and Memory*, vol. 15, 2003, no. 1, pp. 123–149, here p. 125. Recently, new research on this term has been conducted by Efrat Gal-Ed, who presented some of her findings at the international conference “Jiddisches Europa/Thinking Europe in Yiddish,” held in June 2018 at the Heinrich-Heine-Universität in Düsseldorf.

and state of mind that could be found in many places—in prewar Warsaw and Vilna, Moscow and Paris, in postwar Dzierżoniów in Lower Silesia, and in Buenos Aires, New York and Czernowitz. Yiddishland was carried within and from place to place, as *moykher-sforemnikes* (book peddlers) once carried the first Yiddish books from *shtetl* to *shtetl*. Newspapers and books were the coat of arms of this physically nonexistent country. As Shandler writes, “The place where Yiddishland truly flourished during the pre-World War II era was on the printed page and in the minds of an extensive, widely scattered readership.”⁴ In Yiddishland, the People of the Book became the People of Books.

Yiddish writers had to reconcile their own contradictory roles: on the one hand, they served as idols, mentors and masters; on the other hand—thanks to Yiddish—their readers experienced them as nearby and intimate, like residents of the same neighborhood or small town. Yiddish books were often the force that pushed youth onto the path of progress, departure from tradition or even apostasy. However, in the 1920s, the choice of Yiddish as the language of creative expression was not necessarily self-evident. In comparison to many other European literatures, Yiddish literature was still taking its first steps. Until 1915, all three classic Yiddish writers of the first generation—Sholem Aleichem, Yitskhok Leybush Peretz and Mendele Moykher Sforim—were still alive. The tradition of Yiddish creativity was very fresh. Deciding to write in “zhargon” meant trespassing on territory traditionally reserved for Hebrew. It is thus no coincidence that most twentieth-century Yiddish writers took their first literary steps in Hebrew.

The same was true for Dovid Sfar: He had to make a conscious choice in order to identify Yiddish, the language of home and family, as the language in which he would write and conduct his sociocultural activities. He appears to have made this decision in the early 1930s. After graduating from a Polish-language gymnasium in Lutsk and from the Polish Free University (Wolna Wszechnica Polska) in Warsaw, he completed a doctorate in philosophy at the University of Nancy. When he returned to Poland from France, he did not assimilate. He did not attempt to write in Polish—at least, nothing is known of such an attempt. He returned to Yiddishland and remained there. Until the end of his life, he wrote exclusively in Yiddish, which was far from usual among leftist writers of Jewish origin: Stanisław Wygodzki and Arnold Ślucki wrote their best poems in Polish. Yet on the other hand, Sfar, as far as I know, never defined himself as a Yiddishist, i.e., one who views the development of Yiddish language and

4 Ibid., p. 132.

literature as ideologically desirable. Yiddishist ideology was, after all, rejected by Jewish Communists as a manifestation of Jewish nationalism.

The development of Yiddish literature in the twentieth century and its full entrance into the creative sphere, the shift from the stigmatization of Yiddish as a contemptible “zhargon” that was little more than corrupted German to its recognition as a language fully capable of serving high cultural functions, is closely connected to its role in promoting socialist and Communist ideas. This role was mutually beneficial: both Communists and the Bund appealed to Yiddish culture as the joint cultural foundation of Eastern European Jews in general and the Jewish working class in particular; in return, the Communist state (the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s; the Polish People’s Republic after the war) supported Yiddish culture by financing the activity of cultural organizations, publishing periodicals and books, and giving Yiddish writers a status (at least theoretically) equal to that of writers of the dominant language. It was precisely this prospect of government patronage of Yiddish culture and a guarantee from the powers that be that the Jewish minority would have its own cultural autonomy (although the word “autonomy” was never used in this context) that appear to have been the main factors that attracted Jews who were invested in the development of Jewish culture to the Communist Party. They were not interested only in gaining equal rights as individual citizens; rather, they sought an opportunity to continue living a communal Jewish life—with a Jewish school system, press, literature and a rich array of Jewish cultural institutions. Yiddish was the key element of the political conception known as “Nusekh Poyln” (the Polish Way), which was developed by Jewish Communists in Poland.

How realistic was this vision of Yiddishland? Or rather: was it not a vision based on a utopian assumption? It appears that since they were living in a strictly Jewish environment, the Communists never fully realized how mighty assimilation was; that it was inevitable in a country that officially offered equal rights; that there was thus no need to remain in what many perceived as a mental and linguistic ghetto. This was not only true of the postwar Polish Jewish community, its numbers devastated by the Holocaust and emigration, but also of the several million Soviet Jews, among whom rapid linguistic and cultural assimilation had been observed even before the war. Why speak and write in Yiddish when speaking and writing in Polish or Russian would make it possible to reach much broader masses? Did Yiddish culture have any hope of remaining a basic determinant of Jewish identity in a utopian Communist world? The experiences of the first postwar generation—the children of the Communist leaders and activists of the Socio-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ)—showed

that although it was possible to speak of an enduring Jewish community in Poland, Yiddish culture would no longer be a determinant of the identity of a younger generation that functioned almost exclusively in Polish, and for whom the defining experience was the events of March 1968. For their part, the older, prewar generation, for whom multilingualism was as natural as breathing, belonged less and less to Yiddishland as time passed, and more and more—to a Yiddish Atlantis.

The Jewish Communists did not always seem to think clearly about the future of their ideal Yiddishland. Did Yiddish cultural leaders in postwar Poland realize that their children were growing up under completely different conditions, and that this meant not only that native knowledge of Yiddish, but also the heretofore customary bilingualism, had become a rarity? Did the lack of Yiddish educational programs for children and youth before 1956 (apart from several state-sponsored schools) result from a lack of experience in working with youth, or rather from an unconscious acquiescence to linguistic assimilation? It appears that only after October 1956 did TSKŻ leaders notice that their children were becoming teenagers, and that it was too late to plant in them the Yiddish language skills that would enable them to find fulfillment in a Yiddish-language environment—so much so that many of them did not even know the Yiddish alphabet.

Nevertheless, the Jewish Communists felt that in Poland, they had to a great extent attained the Jewish communal autonomy for which they had hoped. Polish literary scholar Jan Błoński once wrote that pre-partition Poland was paradise for Jews because they could live there “in greater separation than anywhere else.”⁵ The same can be said of the proposed Communist Yiddishland: it was to be guaranteed the protection of the state, equal rights and access to every sphere of life, and at the same time it was to be allowed to keep the cultural and linguistic distinctiveness that had evolved over the centuries. That was what the Jewish Communists expected and hoped for from the Communist authorities. Significant evidence of this is found in a letter addressed (but never sent) by the TSKŻ to the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, Nikita Khrushchev, in 1958. On one hand, the letter’s demands can be interpreted as proof of the extreme naïveté of its authors. On the other hand, it

5 J. Błoński, “Polish-Catholics and Catholic-Poles: The Gospel, National Interest, Civic Solidarity, and the Destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 25 (1996), p. 195.

is also proof of their profound faith in what they saw as the only possible way to solve the “Jewish problem”: to appeal to the leader of the state which only a few years earlier had murdered the most renowned representatives of Yiddish culture—and to present Poland to him as an example of a land where Jewish schools, clubs, newspapers and publishing houses existed.

The events of March 1968 were a personal defeat for Sford and his circle. They meant not only a return to anti-Semitic propaganda, including a de facto declaration that the Jewish Communists made up an Israel-sponsored “fifth column,” but also the institution of arduous new censorship policies that made it impossible to do any serious publishing. The emigration of most of the Polish Jewish community after 1968 caused the Jewish Communists to lose their constituency. It is no coincidence that most high-ranking TSKŻ activists also emigrated, since they no longer saw any way to pursue their work in Poland.

From a present-day perspective, it is clear that the concept of a Communist Yiddishland carried the seeds of its own defeat from the very beginning. It was not possible to establish and maintain it in a modern society, in which Yiddish was at best the language of a small, rapidly assimilating minority. Authentic Yiddish culture created by native users of the language was on the wane, not only in the countries of the Eastern Bloc, but throughout the world, in every region in which Yiddish-speaking Jews lived in large numbers. However, the perhaps predictable failure of the vision does not make the history of its evolution and attempted implementation any less interesting or worthy of study.

* * *

The central source for information about Sford’s life is his memoir, *Mit zikh un mit andere: Oytobiografye un literarishe eseyen* (With Myself and With Others: Autobiography and Literary Essays), which was published in Jerusalem in 1984, three years after the author’s death, and edited by a committee made up of Yitskhok Harkavi, Yankev Gutfraynd, Avrom Bick, Prof. Gershon Winer, Prof. Regina (Riva) Dreyer-Sford, Yosef Kerler and Efroim Siedlecki. The main force behind the publication of the memoirs was Sford’s widow, Regina (Riva) Dreyer-Sford, who in a letter to theater director Jakub Rotbaum wrote: “The autobiography that I published, i.e., I provided the text, was written at the invitation of Tel Aviv University right after he arrived in this country [i.e., Israel]. He considered the text unfinished and believed that it needed to be completed and reviewed. For this reason, he did not even think about publishing it as is. He mentioned names [of people] that he intended to describe as well [...] without which the book was not ready to be published, but he did not live long enough. And for a few years after his death, I had no intention of publishing it. But I saw that time

was flying, I was already on the verge of getting sick and I decided to publish it, because otherwise it would never be published.”⁶

Regina Dreyer-Sfard’s letter helps to explain the condition in which Sfard’s memoir was published. The memoir is divided into two parts: in the first, which includes the period from his early childhood until his return from the USSR in 1946, he describes events in chronological order, although with certain digressions and general reflections. This portion is relatively well-edited, but does contain some errors in the dates of various events, as well as other more serious errors; e.g., when he describes his wartime stay in Białystok, Sfard consistently calls the local Jewish newspaper *Byalistoker lebn*, whereas its name was actually *Byalistoker shtern*. The second part of the memoir, however, reads like a draft, notes for an unfinished autobiography in which the chronology is sketched very cursorily, and the author does not so much relate what happened as contemplate his state of consciousness and that of other Jewish Communists at the time. The memoirs end at the moment of the author’s expulsion from the Party in 1968 and do not include the period of his emigration to Israel.

The manner in which the memoirs were edited, as well as the fact that they were compiled posthumously, often casts doubt on the reliability of the information which they contain. Thus, they must be read in continuous consultation with other sources. From a historian’s perspective, they are also less useful due to the author’s discretion; he sometimes omits last names, especially when discussing people in TSKŻ circles.

Another source of biographical information is interviews which were conducted with Sfard on various occasions. Two of them, recorded for the Institute of Party History (Zakład Historii Partii) in 1964, are about the cultural work of the Communist Party of Poland (KPP) in the Jewish community, and copies of it are preserved in the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute (ŻIH).⁷ In the Oral History Division at the Institute for Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, I found three interviews granted by the writer in Israel between 1972 and 1979 in which he mainly discussed the years of World War II.⁸ Michał Chęciński was kind enough to provide me with the text of

6 Letter from Regina Dreyer-Sfard dated June 19, 1987, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (henceforth: AŻIH), Papers of Jakub Rotbaum, file no. 962.

7 Dovid Sfard’s testimony, recorded on April 24, 1964 and May 18, 1964, AŻIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 193.

8 Interview conducted by Shimon Redlich in Yiddish, call no. 6(93), and interviews conducted by Yosef Litvak in Hebrew, call no. (160)4a and (160)4b, Oral History Division at the Institute for Contemporary Jewry.

an interview which he conducted with Sfarid in 1978 on the subject of relations between TSKŻ and government authorities.⁹

An important source for a writer's biography is his literary production. In Sfarid's case, this has meant five of his six volumes of poetry,¹⁰ two collections of literary criticism,¹¹ and his only short story to appear in print,¹² as well as texts published in the Yiddish press over the course of more than fifty years: poetry, prose, literary criticism and political articles. As for the latter, I primarily took an interest in his writings on the connections between culture and politics, with particular attention to those linking literature and politics. I deliberately omitted Sfarid's many texts on Yiddish theater from my corpus, since in this context, he was primarily a consumer, whereas in respect to literature he was both a consumer and a producer. This type of source permitted me to reconstruct his writerly views in various time periods—at least those views which he expressed publicly. His poems are often a poetic record of his experiences, although one must be careful to avoid overidentifying their narrator with their author.

An unusually valuable source for Sfarid's biography is his preserved correspondence. I was able to find his letters to the writers Leyb Olitsky (1963–1970),¹³ S.L. Shneiderman (1971–1981),¹⁴ and Chaim Sloves (1957–1980[?]),¹⁵ and to the director and painter Jakub (Yankev) Rotbaum (1971–1981)¹⁶—altogether, several dozen letters, all in Yiddish (with one exception, in Polish).

Unfortunately, I was unable to access to all of Sfarid's personal archives. When his widow moved into an eldercare home in the early 1990s, she donated his library to the National Library of Israel and his personal archives to the Research Center for East European Jewry. The Center closed sometime afterwards, and its collections are now at the disposition of the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem. The only archival materials I was able to find there were letters which he received in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, mainly from

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- 9 Interview no. 39: Dovid Sfarid, Jerusalem, September 1973 (in Polish), private collection of Michał Chęciński.
 - 10 *Lider* (Warsaw 1957), *A zegl in vint* (Warsaw 1961), *Borvese trit* (Warsaw 1966), *Brenendike bleter* (Tel Aviv 1972), *Shpatsirn in der nakht* (Tel Aviv 1979). I was unable to locate even a single copy of his debut volume, *Shtaplen* (Warsaw 1929).
 - 11 *Shrayber un bikher* (Warsaw 1949) and *Shtudyen un skitsn* (Warsaw 1955).
 - 12 *Vegn tsegeyen zikh* (Warsaw 1933).
 - 13 The National Library of Israel, Manuscript Department, call no. 1449.
 - 14 Diaspora Research Institute (Tel Aviv), Papers of S.L. Shneiderman, call no. B-5/2.
 - 15 Bibliothèque Medem (Paris), Papers of Chaim Sloves.
 - 16 AŻIH, Papers of Jakub Rotbaum, call no. 962.

the USSR and written mostly in Yiddish, with a few exceptions (in Russian). These include both work-related correspondence (involving, e.g., the publication of texts by Soviet authors in the Polish Yiddish press) and private letters.¹⁷ It is unclear what has become of the rest of the estate.

Apart from the sources mentioned above, I also used also other sources of various types, sometimes scattered and fragmentary, from archives in Poland, Russia and Israel. A full list is found in the bibliography, as is a list of the secondary sources upon which I relied for information about and analysis of the history of the Yiddish language and culture, the history of the Communist movement (especially in Poland), and Eastern European history in the twentieth century.

I would like to acknowledge the kindness of Leon Sfar, Jacob S. Dreyer, Leopold Sobel, Joseph Sobelman and Irena Wygodzka, who shared their reminiscences of Dovid Sfar with me.

* * *

This book comprises seven chapters in chronological order.¹⁸

Chapter One describes the position of Jews in Czarist Volhynia, Dovid Sfar's childhood home, in the early twentieth century; his first contact with communist ideology during the Polish-Bolshevik War; and his studies at gymnasium, against the backdrop of the stormy early years of independent Poland. Next, I describe the beginnings of Sfar's literary career in Yiddish in 1920s Warsaw as well as his doctoral studies in Nancy. This was the period when Sfar began to subscribe to communist ideology himself. In this chapter, in view of the scattered nature of the few archival sources which exist from the period, I must depend on Sfar's memoirs to a great extent. Chapter Two begins with Sfar's joining the ranks of the KPP and an analysis of the reasons why some Jews considered the KPP party program attractive. I detail Sfar's active participation in the Warsaw Jewish literary and cultural scene in the 1930s, focusing on the milieu of the so-called left-wing writers' group. Chapter Three covers the two years that Sfar spent in Soviet-occupied Bialystok. Based on memoirs and articles from the Yiddish press of the time, I reconstruct the attitudes of the Yiddish writers there, refugees from the Nazi-occupied General Government region, including both Communists and opponents of communism. Chapter Four describes Sfar's fate in the Soviet

17 Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, call no. 932.

18 A fragment of Chapter 2 has been published in English before as: "Yiddish Form, Communist Content: Jewish Communist Writers in Warsaw, 1932–1939," *Polin* 28, 2016, pp. 351–370.

Union after the outbreak of German-Soviet hostilities: flight deep into the country, a long stay in Almaty, and then his activity with the Organizational Committee of Polish Jews (KOŻP) of the Union of Polish Patriots (ZPP) in Moscow, at times in collaboration with the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. Chapter Five covers the initial postwar years; it portrays the cluster of Jewish Communists who were active in the Jewish Caucus of the PPR against the backdrop of the political pluralism that existed in the Jewish community at the time, and the gradual rise to power of the Communists. The turning point was 1950, when practically the only remaining body officially representing Polish Jews was the TSKŻ, run by the Jewish Communists. Chapter Six describes Sford's work with the TSKŻ in the 1950s, as well as the big changes in the Soviet Communist Party at the time, particularly in 1956, and their consequences for Poland and the Polish Jewish community. Here I also discuss the publishing house Yidish Bukh and the periodical *Yidische shriftn*. The chapter ends with a description of Sford's first visit to Israel. In Chapter Seven I present Sford's cultural and literary activity in the 1960s, with particular attention to his attitude toward the Six-Day War and the events of March 1968. The chapter ends with Sford's departure for Israel with his family. The last twelve years of his life, which he spent in Israel, are presented in brief in the Postscript.

Sford spent time in Czarist Russia, the Second Polish Republic, interwar France, the wartime Soviet Union, the Polish People's Republic, and finally Israel. In order to reconstruct his wide-ranging life's path, I had no choice but to rely extensively upon the good will and aid of many people. Some people should be thanked in particular: First of all, I wish to thank Leon Sford, who spent many hours helping me draw closer to his father's story, and who patiently answered all my oft-repetitive questions. Jacob (Jakub) S. Dreyer, Regina Dreyer-Sford's son from her first marriage, sent me letters containing much important information on the war years and early postwar years and also helped me to ascertain and verify some details. My mentor and PhD supervisor, the late Prof. Jerzy W. Borejsza, was always available for inspiring conversations about various matters discussed in this book, and significantly contributed to my understanding of the complexity of the topic. My friends Kalina and Sławomir Gawlas were careful readers of the first versions of the book and patient listeners to my monologues about each of the chapters. Karen Auerbach, Audrey Kichelewski and Judith Rubanovsky-Paz helped me gain access to publications unavailable in Poland. I owe Prof. Jerzy Eisler a debt of gratitude for enabling me, fourteen months after I applied for access, to finally look at a few documents at the Institute for National Remembrance (IPN). I also wish to express my gratitude to Grzegorz P. Bąbiak, Grzegorz Berendt, the late Michał Chęciński, Katarzyna

Chmielewska, Agnieszka Cieślukowa, Nathan Cohen, Jan Jagielski, Natalia Krynicka, Włodzimierz Mędrzecki, Avrom Novershtern, Renata Piątkowska, Alina Skibińska, Leopold Sobel, Joseph Sobelman, Yechiel Szeintuch, the late Prof. Jerzy Tomaszewski, the late Prof. Feliks Tych and the late Irena Wygodzka, as well as the archival staff at the Jewish Historical Institute.

I began to study the Yiddish language and culture in 1993 at the State Jewish Theater in Warsaw under the direction of the late Michał Friedman; I was able to continue in New York, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem thanks to scholarships received from the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (Uriel Weinreich Summer Program in Yiddish Language, Literature and Culture), Beth Shalom Aleichem and Tel Aviv University (Tel Aviv Yiddish Summer Program), and Beth Shalom Aleichem and the Hebrew University (The Fourth International Advanced Seminar in Yiddish Studies). The Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, where I have been privileged to work since 2007, made it possible for me to travel to Israel and Russia to conduct on-site research without which it would have been impossible to write this book.

The last person I would like to mention here, my friend Danuta Wawiłow, unfortunately did not live to see this book published; yet she had a significant hand in it. It was she, many years ago, who handed me a volume of Itsik Manger's poetry and then persuaded me to attend my first Yiddish language class. This opened the door for me to a world that I never could have imagined. May her memory be for a blessing.

* * *

This book, based on a PhD dissertation which I defended at the Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History in the Polish Academy of Sciences, was originally published in Polish in 2009. Since its initial publication, many new studies have appeared in both Polish and English. Wherever possible, I have added references to new research in footnotes, but overall, this monograph presents the state of the field as it stood in 2009.

YIVO transliteration of Yiddish names, words and titles is used throughout this book, with occasional exceptions due to the multilingual context in which the protagonists of this book lived and worked. For names which are in widespread use in English (Sholem Aleichem, for example), I use the standard English spelling for their names; for figures who were primarily active in the Yiddish milieu, I write their names in YIVO transliteration; for other figures I employ the standard Polish spellings of their names. In quotations from archival materials, I standardize the spelling of Dovid Sfard's name (which often appears in the sources as Swart or Sward).

Last but not least, I wish to thank my translator, Dr. Paul (Hershl) Glasser and my copyeditor, Ri J. Turner. No author produces a book alone, let alone a book translated from one language (Polish) into another (English) with a third present at all times in the background (Yiddish). I was very lucky to work with people who were able to move smoothly between all three language systems. This book is theirs as much as it is mine.

Chapter One: In a Closed Circle (1903–1931)

The Jewish Problem in Tsarist Russia

Jews have lived in Volhynia since time immemorial. The earliest mention of a Jewish settlement in the region dates to 1288. The golden age for Volhynian Jews was the period between the Brest Union (when Volhynia was annexed to the Kingdom of Poland) and the outbreak of the Khmelnitsky rebellion. Along with neighboring Podolia, Volhynia was one of the first areas where Hasidism arose at the turn of the eighteenth century. In 1795, when the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was partitioned for the third time, the region came under Russian rule.

According to the census of 1897, approximately five million Jews (46 % of the world's Jewish population at the time)¹⁹ lived in the Russian Empire, of whom about three million lived in the fifteen provinces of the Pale of Settlement, over one million in the ten provinces of Congress Poland, and 300,000 within the Empire proper, in Siberia and the Caucasus. The census indicated a Jewish presence of 395,782 in Volhynia, which made up 13.21 % of the Volhynian population (the second-largest ethnic group, after Ukrainians and before Poles and Germans).²⁰ As Polish historian Włodzimierz Mędrzecki writes, social relations in Volhynia before World War I were organized along feudal lines:

The overwhelming majority of the population lived within the bounds of traditional rural societies, whose contact with the wider world came through communal officials, policemen, clergymen and landed gentry. The gentry was at the apex of the hierarchy, and the only wide-ranging institutions were the state and sectarian apparatuses.²¹

The situation of the Jews was somewhat different, since most of them inhabited Volhynian towns, in which they made up 50.77 % of the inhabitants. They were also distinguished by a higher rate of literacy than members of other religious groups (about 32.8 % of Jews could read and write; only Protestants had a slightly

19 P. Wróbel, "Przed odzyskaniem niepodległości," in: *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce w zarysie (do 1950 roku)*, ed. J. Tomaszewski, Warsaw 1993, p. 25.

20 Y. Shabad, "Volynskaya guberniya," in: *Evreiskaia entsyklopedia*, vol. 5, Moscow 1991 (reprint of 1906–1913 edition), pp. 738–743, here p. 739.

21 W. Mędrzecki, *Województwo wołyńskie 1921–1939: Elementy przemian cywilizacyjnych, społecznych i politycznych*, Wrocław–Warsaw–Krakow–Gdańsk–Łódź 1988, pp. 23–24.

higher rate, at 38.2 %).²² Their main source of income was trade and industry.²³ Polish influences were lesser there than in Lithuania and Belarus, although in 1909, nearly half of agricultural properties in the so-called southern provinces (Volhynia, Podolia and Kiev) belonged to Poles.²⁴

The turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought great changes to the entire Russian Empire, as well as to Jewish life. The increase of nationalist sentiments and the rise of politically active masses throughout Europe led to the spread of two antithetical ideologies. In Vilna in 1897, the General Jewish Workers' Union of Lithuania, Poland and Russia, known as the Bund for short, was founded. In the same year, in Basel, the first World Zionist Congress took place. The fundamental difference in the programs of the Bundists and Zionists concerned the place of Jews in the world: the Bund favored national-cultural autonomy for Jews in the Diaspora; the Zionists believed that the "Jewish problem" could only be solved if Jews possessed their own independent territory.

The rise in political awareness was accompanied by the further spread of literacy. In that same year, 1897, two publications were founded that would play a major role in Jewish life for many decades to come: the *Forverts* in New York and *Ha-Shiloah* in Odessa. The latter, edited at first by one of the leading Zionist ideologists, Ahad Ha'am, became the main publication of the Hebrew-reading Jewish intelligentsia before World War I. Additionally, in that same year, the first of the *Letters on Old and New Jewry* by prominent historian Simon Dubnow appeared. Dubnow proposed cultural autonomy for diasporic Jews, and he considered the Yiddish language to be the basic factor that distinguished Jews as a separate people.²⁵

The growing political crisis and social ferment in Russia inspired the Jewish population to demand full equal rights. However, Jews, one of the groups that should have benefited from the changes in domestic policy, were the main

22 It is possible that "literacy" in the context of the census meant "literacy in Russian." If so, Jewish literacy rates would have undoubtedly been recorded as much higher if those literate in Jewish languages only had been included as well.

23 Y. Shabad, "Volynskaya guberniya," pp. 739–742.

24 T.R. Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia: Nationalism and Russification on the Western Frontier, 1863–1914*, DeKalb, IL 1996, p. 79.

25 To a certain extent, the idea of cultural autonomy for Jews sprang out of the Springtime of the Peoples, which emphasized the right to national independence. These ideas spread as individual nations within the Austro-Hungarian Empire gained autonomy and developed associated theoretical impulses (e.g., the programs of cultural autonomy of the Austrian Social Democrats).

victims of grassroots frustrations and political game-playing by the Tsarist elites. One of the most extreme manifestations of public anti-Semitism in Russia was the Kishinev pogrom of April 1903 (47 murdered, 600 wounded). Two main waves of pogroms passed through the Pale of Settlement in October and November 1905 (after the so-called October Manifesto). As many as 690 pogroms took place in the southwestern provinces in a span of six weeks, as well as in June 1906 (in Białystok).²⁶ Historians have not found proof that anti-Semitic outbreaks were encouraged by the imperial government; however, it is well known that local authorities declined to intervene.²⁷ In the opinion of Abraham Ascher, the pogroms were a spontaneous reaction by various social groups that wished to suppress all opposition and to reestablish the old order.²⁸ The atmosphere additionally became more heated due to the outbreak of war with Japan and the events of “Bloody Sunday” in St. Petersburg.

The Union for the Attainment of Equal Rights for Jews in Russia (the so-called Equal Rights Union) was founded in Vilna in March 1905, and the First Duma included thirteen Jewish deputies. The debate on the “Jewish Problem,” which was particularly lively after the Białystok pogrom, dominated many sessions of the Duma, yet no changes took place in legislation pertaining to Jews. However, several years later, Russia (and Europe) were shocked by the so-called Beilis affair, in which Mendel Beilis was accused of the ritual murder of a twelve-year-old boy in Kiev. Although Beilis was ultimately acquitted, the Beilis affair symbolized to the world what the Dreyfus affair in France had some years earlier—the anti-Semitism and obscurantism which still prevailed in Tsarist Russia.

As French historian Nathan Weinstock has written, nothing was the same in the Pale of Settlement after 1905.²⁹ In the aftermath of revolution and pogroms, an enormous wave of Jewish emigrants crossed the ocean. As Shmuel Ettinger describes, “In the years 1898–1914 about one and a quarter million Jews left Russia [...]. The percentage of emigrants among the Jews of Russia was three times or more that amongst other peoples leaving Russia at that time—the Finns

26 A. Ascher, “Anti-Jewish Pogroms in the First Russian Revolution, 1905–1907,” in: *Jews and Jewish Life in Russia and the Soviet Union*, ed. Y. Ro'i, Ilford, Essex 1995, pp. 127–129.

27 For recent research on this topic, see A. Markowski, “Anti-Jewish Pogroms in the Kingdom of Poland,” *Polin* 27, 2014, pp. 219–255.

28 Ascher, “Anti-Jewish Pogroms,” p. 133.

29 N. Weinstock, *Le pain de misère: Histoire du mouvement ouvrier juif en Europe*, vol. 1, *L'empire russe jusqu'en 1914*, Paris 1984, p. 214.

and Poles, for example.³⁰ Three-quarters of Jewish emigrants from the Empire headed for the United States.³¹

However, the revolution did also, albeit temporarily, lead to the blossoming of the Bund as a modern Jewish political party, the development of cultural life in Yiddish (discussed below), and the first signs of secularization of everyday life (although in rural Volhynia, these signs were certainly scarcer than, e.g., in Warsaw).

Learning One's Own Mother Tongue

The turn of the century brought with it certain changes in the linguistic circumstances of the Jewish minority in the Empire. In the Diaspora, Jewish society was traditionally multilingual; in addition to Hebrew as the sacred language of prayer, liturgy and religious studies, Jews also spoke local languages and created their own vernaculars as well, which eventually became full-blown cultural languages. The Jewish vernacular most relevant for our purposes here is Yiddish, a language that came into being in the late Middle Ages in the Germano-Slavic borderlands. During the course of the nineteenth century, Yiddish underwent rapid development, emerging as a modern language with its own literature and press.³²

Three writers who were later recognized as the classic authors of Yiddish literature—Sholem Aleichem (1859–1916), Mendele Moykher Sforim (1835–1917) and Yitskhok Leybush Peretz (1852–1915)—played a leading role in the development of Yiddish into a modern literary language. Like many of their contemporaries, all three writers debuted in Hebrew before they began to write in Yiddish, and often used Russian in their daily home life. In a certain sense, they were beginning from square one: much of the rich, centuries-long Jewish

30 S. Ettinger, “The Jews in Russia at the Outbreak of the Revolution,” in: *The Jews in Soviet Russia since 1917*, ed. L. Kochan, Oxford–London–New York 1978, p. 22.

31 K. Zieliński, “Emigracja żydowska z Rosji i Królestwa Polskiego do USA (1881–1918): Zarys problematyki,” *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* [henceforth: *BŻIH*], 2002, no. 1 (201), p. 24. See also Eric L. Goldstein, “The Great Wave: Eastern European Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1880–1924,” in *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America*, ed. Marc Lee Raphael, New York 2008, pp. 70–92.

32 For further information on the history of Yiddish, see: M. Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*, vol. 1–2, translated by Shlomo Noble with the assistance of Joshua A. Fishman, ed. Paul Glasser, New York 2008.

literary tradition had been built in Hebrew. A literary tradition in Yiddish had yet to be created.

After the revolution of 1905, Yiddish began to compete seriously with Hebrew and Russian in the domain of cultural creativity. In the 1880s, only one Yiddish newspaper had been published in Russia—the weekly *Yudishes folksblat*, with a circulation of 7,000—and Yiddish theater had been prohibited. But after 1905, everything changed drastically. Between 1905 and 1914, twelve daily newspapers and 40 magazines were published in Yiddish. The largest daily newspaper, *Haynt*, had a circulation of over 100,000 by 1911.³³ Over a dozen Yiddish theaters were active—both local and traveling theaters—and the annual rate of books being published in Yiddish increased more than fivefold (from 78 titles in 1888 to 407 in 1912).³⁴ Printing shops specializing exclusively, or nearly exclusively, in Yiddish books opened.³⁵

“This cultural flowering,” writes David E. Fishman, “was accompanied by the rise of ideological Yiddishism, which saw in Yiddish a thing of great value to the Jewish people, and consequently aspired to make Yiddish the main medium of contemporary Jewish culture and social life in Eastern Europe.”³⁶ At the founding meeting of the Bund in 1897, none of the participants gave a speech in Yiddish. It was not until the seventh party congress, in October 1906, that Yiddish was granted equal status to Russian. In 1910, Yiddish became the official language of Bund deliberations.³⁷

The difficulties facing the earliest Yiddishists were blatantly evident at the first Yiddish conference in history, which took place in 1908. The initiator of the conference, Dr. Nathan Birnbaum, a former Zionist, addressed the conference in German. There were seventy participants, including 55 from Galicia, one from Romania and fourteen from Russia (the latter group included the most prominent luminaries, including Y.L. Peretz, Sholem Asch, Avrom Reyzen and

33 For recent research on the circulation of the Yiddish press, see J. Nalewajko-Kulikow, “‘Who Has Not Wanted to Be an Editor?’ The Yiddish Press in the Kingdom of Poland, 1905–1914,” *Polin* 27, 2015, pp. 273–304.

34 D.E. Fishman, “Judaizm świeckich jidyszystów,” in: *Duchowość żydowska w Polsce: Materiały z międzynarodowej konferencji dedykowanej pamięci profesora Chone Shmeruka (Kraków 26–28 kwietnia 1999)*, ed. M. Galas, Krakow 2000, p. 370.

35 D.E. Fishman, “The Bund and Modern Yiddish Culture,” in: *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Z. Gitelman, Pittsburgh 2003, pp. 107–108.

36 D.E. Fishman, “Judaizm,” p. 370.

37 D.E. Fishman, “The Bund,” p. 111.

Noah (Noyekh) Pryłucki). Sholem Aleichem excused his absence by pleading illness; Mendele gave no excuse for his own. Only 36 people took part in the vote that declared Yiddish to be a national language of the Jews (in addition to Hebrew). However, the very fact that at least a few of the scholarly lectures were given in Yiddish made an impression on those participants whose grasp of Yiddish at that time was only adequate for use in everyday life.³⁸ As Joshua A. Fishman put it: “The intelligentsia was learning its [own] mother tongue so that the latter could fulfill new functions, and thereby provide new statuses to masses and intelligentsia alike.”³⁹

The development of Yiddish had no influence on the perception present in many circles, in particular Zionist and assimilationist (not to mention non-Jewish) circles, that Yiddish was a “zhargon” or “corrupted German.” Traditionally, Yiddish was placed opposite the “authentic” language of the Jewish people, i.e., Hebrew, which also greatly developed as a modern language in the nineteenth century, thanks mainly to the ideology of the Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment.

In a certain sense, creativity in Yiddish and Hebrew posed similar challenges, as the process of adapting a language that had been used only in strictly limited realms to the needs of modern literature required the coining of new vocabulary in both cases. In general, it was also necessary to acquaint Jewish readers with world literature. The most prominent authors who wrote in Hebrew were likewise often translators; for example, Shaul Tchernichovsky translated Homer, Longfellow and *The Tale of Igor’s Campaign*, and Dovid Frishman translated the works of Pushkin, Nietzsche, Byron, Goethe, Heine and Oscar Wilde, among others. The Hebrew poetry of that time was most strongly influenced by German romanticism and Russian poetry, as well as borrowed from the former’s conception of a poet—the bard.⁴⁰ “It is no accident,” writes Benjamin Harshav, “that the great prose at the end of the nineteenth century was in Yiddish, and the great poetry in Hebrew.”⁴¹ The most prominent writer in Hebrew (who also wrote in Yiddish) was Chaim Nachman Bialik, author of the poem “In the City of

38 J.A. Fishman, “Attracting a Following to High-Culture Functions for a Language of Everyday Life: The Role of the Tshernovits Language Conference in the ‘Rise of Yiddish,’” in: *Never Say Die! A Thousand Years of Yiddish in Jewish life and Letters*, ed. J.A. Fishman, The Hague–Paris–New York 1981, pp. 377–379.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 373.

40 B. Harshav, *Language in Time of Revolution*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 1993, pp. 27–29, 65.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

Slaughter,” which was written in response to the Kishinev pogrom. Bialik was the bard of Jewish youth regardless of their political views—including Dovid Sford.

Zionist ideology, which declared that Hebrew had to be the official language of a Jewish state, also influenced the development of the language. The leaders of the Haskalah contributed to the development of Hebrew on the elite level, but the Zionists played a major role in enabling the language to reach the masses. Much of the credit goes to Russian Jew Eliezer Perelmann, better known as Eliezer Ben-Yehudah, who settled in Palestine and began to use Hebrew in everyday life. When Great Britain assumed the Palestinian Mandate in 1922, Hebrew was recognized as one of the three official languages of Palestine for the first time.

Aside from Hebrew and Yiddish, the Jewish population of the Empire also used local languages, i.e., the official language, Russian, and the other languages that predominated wherever they lived (Polish, Ukrainian, etc.). The extent of their fluency certainly varied, and depended on their degree of assimilation and education. The situation was similar in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Roman Zimand, a literary scholar of Polish Jewish descent, recalled: “My father, who only attended *heder* because there was no money for him to study in a yeshiva, had a command of five languages: Hebrew, Yiddish, German, Polish, and Ukrainian, although I do not think that he could write Ukrainian. No one found this at all unusual. I suppose that no one even noticed. ‘Real’ foreign languages were French or English. If my father had been asked before World War I, he would certainly have answered that he did not know any foreign language.”⁴²

For a certain group of Jewish cultural and political activists in the Russian Empire, the main, and sometimes the only, language of their political and creative work was Russian or Polish. That was the case for, among others, Ber Borokhov, Vladimir Medem, and Vladimir Jabotinsky, who mainly used Russian, as well as Stanisław Mendelson and Feliks Perl, whose main language from a very early age was Polish.

The multilingualism of Jewish culture in the Diaspora (Hebrew-Yiddish-local language) gave the Jewish population, and Jewish writers in particular, the unusual opportunity to define their own linguistic identity. In later years, an author's social background and mother tongue did not always determine the language in which he or she wrote: Sford's contemporaries Stanisław Wygodzki and Julian Strykowski, both raised in traditional Yiddish-speaking Jewish families, consciously chose to write in Polish.

42 R. Zimand, “Gatunek: podróż,” *Kultura*, 1983, no. 11, p. 24.

Aside from ideological reasons, practical considerations often also played a role: one had to publish in Yiddish in order to reach the broad Jewish masses. However, with the turn of the new century, the number of people for whom Yiddish was more than a necessary evil began to grow. For a portion of Jewish society, the development of Yiddish into a modern secular language opened up the Jewish ghetto to the wider world. The “zhargon” enabled ordinary Jews to be both producers and consumers of modern culture.

The Earliest Years

“Probably everyone thinks that the town where he was born and raised is exceptional. I think so too.”⁴³ These are the opening words of Dovid Sfarad’s autobiography, which he wrote shortly before the end of his life. The first riddle arises at the very outset: which town is he talking about? Although in his autobiography Sfarad lists Turiysk, near Kovel, as his birthplace (and Turiysk is also mentioned in one of his poems⁴⁴), when providing personal information on forms he always listed his birthplace as Melnytsya, located in the same general area. There is similar uncertainty about his birthdate—on official forms, Sfarad always wrote down 1903,⁴⁵ whereas in various encyclopedia entries (some of which appeared during his lifetime, including the entries in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* and the *Lexicon of Modern Yiddish Literature*), his birthyear is given as 1905.⁴⁶

It is unclear how long the Sfarad family had been living in Volhynia. The resemblance of the family name to the Hebrew word *Sfarad* (meaning “Spain”) may suggest that Dovid’s ancestors arrived in Eastern Europe after the expulsion

43 D. Sfarad, *Mit zikh un mit andere: Oytobiografye un literarishe eseyen*, Jerusalem 1984, p. 17 [henceforth: *Mit zikh*].

44 D. Sfarad, “Di toyte kale,” in: idem, *Shpatsirn in der nakht*, Tel Aviv 1979, p. 62.

45 Although he always wrote down the year as 1903, the exact birthdate varied—he usually wrote down July 15, but also occasionally July 12 and January 15.

46 A birthyear of 1905 is also found on the frontispiece of his memoirs, as well as in a special issue of the magazine *Yerusholaymer almanakh* devoted exclusively to Sfarad (1982, no. 13). An inquiry that I sent to the State Archives of the Volhynian District in Lutsk about his birth record went unanswered. However, it is worth remembering that in Jewish families, the requirement to register births was often neglected, unless a birth certificate was needed for a particular purpose. For example, Sfarad’s friend from the Lutsk gymnasium, Zalmen Elbirt, was registered as a student of the Polish Free University with the birthdate of February 24, 1905, based on a birth certificate that was not issued until February 14, 1914 (see APW, *Wolna Wszechnica w Warszawie*, *Albumy Wydziału Humanistycznego*, v. 5, entry no. 1027).

of Jews from Spain in 1492. In Ostroh, Volhynia, the rabbis in the nineteenth century were the Hasidic preacher Yakov Yosef ben Yehudah Sfard, followed by his grandson Yakov Yosef Sfard (known as the Second), followed by the latter's grandson, Alter Mordechai Sfard and then Alter Mordechai's son, Zeev.⁴⁷ The Melnytsya *yizker-bukh* states that Rabbi Yehude Leyb Sfard, Dovid's father, belonged to the same family.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, Dovid Sfard did not write about his family history at all in his memoirs. We know only that his grandfather, Arn Dovid Sfard, was a rabbi, and that our Dovid was most probably named after him.⁴⁹

Before Yehude Leyb assumed the post of rabbi in Turiysk, he lived in Maciejów (now Lukiv, Ukraine), as the son-in-law of the local rabbi. After a family tragedy, in which his two young daughters died within a week and his wife lost her senses—permanently, as it turned out—he obtained permission from the rabbinical court to remarry. His second wife, Feyge-Yente Erlich née Levartov, was divorced and had a daughter, Khane, from her previous marriage. Dovid was the only child they had together and their only son, which certainly influenced the surprisingly liberal education he received at home.

When Dovid was still a small child, the family moved to a smaller town, Ozeryany, where Yehude Leyb served once again as the rabbi. “[The town] got its name because it was surrounded by seven lakes [*ozero* in Ukrainian], which were later connected by canals. It was located on a vast plain covered with succulent green meadows, endless arable fields of all kinds and a multitude of dense fruit orchards [...].”⁵⁰

Turiysk, Ozeryany, and Melnytsya were all classic *shtetls*, i.e., small towns with a preponderance of Jews. In 1921, Turiysk had 1,501 inhabitants, 1,081 of them Jewish. In Melnytsya, 871 out of 899 inhabitants were Jewish. The situation was different in Ozeryany, in which Ukrainians predominated (558 out of 917 inhabitants). Jews were in second place (with a population of 340).

It should be stressed that in Melnytsya and Ozeryany, the same percentage of inhabitants declared that they were of the Jewish faith and that they were ethnic

47 *Pinkas ha-kehilot Polin*, vol. 5: *Volin ve-Polesie*, ed. S. Spektor, Jerusalem 1990, pp. 36, 38.

48 Y. Lior, “Divrei yemei Melnitsa ha-yehudit,” in: *Melnitsa: Pelech Volin – Ukraina. Sefer hantsahah, edut ve-zikaron le-kehilat Melnitsa*, ed. Y. Lior, Tel Aviv 1994, p. 37.

49 Up until World War II, Sfard signed most of his publications “A.D. Sfard,” but in the enrollment records of the Faculty of Humanities of the Polish Free University, his name is given only as “Dawid” (APW, Wolna Wszechnica w Warszawie, Albumy Wydziału Humanistycznego, v. 5, entry no. 1034).

50 *Mit zikh*, p. 17.

Jews, which attests to the fact that these were traditional communities in which Jewish faith and Jewish ethnicity were understood to be one and the same. It was somewhat different in Turiysk, where 1,081 persons declared Jewish faith and 1,033—Jewish ethnicity.⁵¹ These data were obtained approximately two decades later, in the first general census of Poland in 1921. However, it is likely that the ethnic situation at the beginning of the century in those same *shtetls* was quite similar.

Life in the *shtetls* centered around the market square and the synagogue, which was a place not only for prayer but for socializing as well.⁵² In Ozeryany, “Sabbath battles” often broke out on Saturday mornings between the carpenters and stablemen, most often because of a quarrel over who would get an *aliyah* to the Torah.⁵³ These were frequently fistfights, which ended only at nightfall, and were confined to the synagogue itself so as not to turn into a spectacle for the local non-Jews.⁵⁴

As mentioned above, Dovid Sfarid received a surprisingly liberal education at home. The driving force was undoubtedly Rabbi Yehude Leyb. Many years later, Dovid wrote:

Whenever I think about my father, the figure of Socrates enters my mind. Most likely, it was the striking resemblance between them, which I once noticed in a picture, that influenced my memory of him. However, it was not only that. His composure and thoughtfulness, his unusual common sense when answering various questions on religious matters, the logical motivation behind his every moral act, his well-balanced conversational skills—all this together evoked the association in me. [...] My father almost always sat immersed in a religious book with his chin resting in his palms. [...] He never imposed his opinions on me, not even when I was still very young. “If you feel like going out now to play with other children,” he would say, “go ahead. It is pointless to study unwillingly. But I don’t want you fighting—that’s not what Jews do.”⁵⁵

51 *Skorowidz miejscowości Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, vol. 9: *Województwo wołyńskie: Opracowany na podstawie wyników pierwszego powszechnego spisu ludności z dn. 30 września 1921 r. i innych źródeł urzędowych*, Warsaw 1923, pp. 21–24.

52 On *shtetls* see B.-C. Pinchuk, “The Shtetl: An Ethnic Town in the Russian Empire,” *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 41, no. 4, 2000, pp. 495–504, and idem, “How Jewish was the Shtetl?,” *Polin* 17, 2004, pp. 109–118.

53 *Aliyah*—being called up for a portion of the Torah reading during prayer services, considered an honor.

54 *Mit zikh*, pp. 19–20.

55 *Ibid.*, pp. 46–47.

Yehude Leyb was a well-known raconteur. Saturday evenings, the whole town would gather at his house to hear stories, mostly Hasidic, which always featured the motif of a contrast between rich and poor characters, and which ended with a didactic moral. The rabbi realized that some of his listeners were poor and uneducated, and it was easier to instruct them in religion by using fables or parables than with Talmud study. Yehude Leyb also ran a sort of “bank” for the townspeople, to which he was ill-suited, considering that in discussions with his wife, he always took the side of the debtors.

Later, he frequently spoke with his adult son about worldly injustice: “When I would return home years later from the big city [...], many times, my father would point out the injustice prevailing in the world, not only on the part of Christians toward Jews, but also among Christians themselves, among Jews themselves and on the part of Jews toward Christians. He illustrated this with concrete examples from the town, pointing to Jewish workers, carpenters, and blacksmiths, who toiled from Sunday at dawn until Friday [...] and could barely make ends meet, in contrast with those who did little work and were nevertheless well-to-do or at least comfortable, and enjoyed an elite status in town to boot.”⁵⁶

In later years, former residents of Melnytsya recalled the liberal, unusually worldly figure of Rabbi Sfar. David Gibel described a woman who came to him with a religious question: a little milk had accidentally spilled into a pot used for cooking meat. Was the meat still kosher? “The rabbi, who knew how hard it was for Melnytsya Jews to buy meat, pronounced the verdict: Kosher!”⁵⁷

Family stories confirm that the rabbi’s good will and common sense brought him esteem and authority among not only local Jews, but also Ukrainian peasants, who supposedly went to him rather than to their own priest for advice on worldly matters.⁵⁸

Dovid Sfar does not mention anything concrete about his earliest educational experiences, but one can assume that they were not very different from the standard of the time in the Jewish community. This standard was the *heder*, the elementary religious school in which young boys learned to read and write, repeated fragments of the Hebrew Bible (chiefly the Pentateuch with Rashi’s

56 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

57 D. Gibel, “*Al ha-ayarah ve-ansheha*,” in: *Melnitsa: Pelech Volin – Ukraina*, p. 109. According to Jewish religious law, meat is still kosher in such a situation if it is sixty times greater by volume than the accidentally spilled milk. Rabbi Sfar’s ruling was liberal because he pronounced the meat kosher without ascertaining whether the relative proportions actually met this condition.

58 As told by Leon Sfar, personal communication.

commentary) along with its translation into Yiddish, and at a later age studied Talmud and rabbinical literature. The lessons were not particularly engaging; they generally demanded straight memorization rather than comprehension of the text being read. The historian Simon Dubnow called the *heders* “children’s prisons”: “The [children] are taught nothing of the real world, or nature, or life, and everything about the world beyond the grave, death, commandments, heaven and hell.”⁵⁹

As religious schools, the *heders* were exempt from the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, which had no say in either the language of instruction or the curriculum. The *heder* was, as David E. Fishman put it, “a bastion of Yiddish,” although in the late nineteenth century, Russian Zionists instituted a new type of *heder*, known as the *heder metukan*, in which the language of instruction was Hebrew.⁶⁰ Having learned Hebrew in the *heder* and possibly at home as well, Dovid maintained it his whole life,⁶¹ and after he had left his native Volhynia, he continued to correspond with his father in this language.⁶²

God Abandoned My Old World

Although this was not immediately obvious at the time, the outbreak of World War I in the summer of 1914 meant the end of the old order for the Jews living in the Pale of Settlement. Some scholars even consider it the end of the “golden age” of East European Jewry.⁶³ “We heard the distant roar of the cannons,” as Julian Strykowski, who spent the war years near the front in the town of Stry, recalled

59 Quoted in S. Dubnov-Erlich, *The Life and Work of S. M. Dubnov: Diaspora Nationalism and Jewish History*, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1991, p. 79.

60 D.E. Fishman, “The Politics of Yiddish in Tsarist Russia,” in: *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism: Intellect in Quest of Understanding; Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, vol. 4, ed. J. Neusner, E.S. Frerichs, N.M. Sarna, Atlanta 1989, p. 169.

61 After Sfarad had settled in Israel, his knowledge of Hebrew caused him peculiar problems—he spoke quite an old-fashioned, literary Hebrew that was often incomprehensible to Israelis.

62 Such an advanced knowledge of Hebrew was not that common among average *heder* graduates. For more on the teaching of and fluency in Hebrew in traditional Jewish society in Eastern Europe see S. Stampfer, “What Did ‘Knowing Hebrew’ Mean in Eastern Europe?”, in: *Hebrew in Ashkenaz: A Language in Exile*, ed. L. Glinert, New York–Oxford 1993, pp. 129–140.

63 J. Frankel, “The Paradoxical Politics of Marginality: Thoughts on the Jewish Situation during the Years 1914–21,” in: idem, *Crisis, Revolution, and Russian Jews*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 131–154, here p. 153.

many years later. “I remember the fascinating sight of Cossacks on small horses, in great bearskins, riding westward day and night by the thousands. There was an endless stream of supply trains, pontoons on truck platforms, cannons drawn by three pairs of horses, machine guns, field ambulances, wagons with hay for the horses and provisions for the people. This went on endlessly.”⁶⁴ Similar scenes were undoubtedly witnessed by Strykowski’s contemporary, Sfard, near the front in Ozeryany.

The new era was ushered in especially tempestuously in Volhynia, which from 1914 to 1920 was occupied and reoccupied several times by successive armies which, as was traditional, celebrated their occupations by inflicting pogroms on the Jews. Ozeryany was occupied by the Germans first. Rabbi Sfard continued to demonstrate his diplomatic talents: he repeatedly interceded with the Germans on behalf of inhabitants of the town who had been drafted for forced labor, and his requests were generally granted.

The Russian military authorities, however, accused the Jews of spying for Germany and began to remove them from the regions near the front. Between 1914 and 1917, over half a million Jews were forced to leave their homes.⁶⁵ The inhabitants of Ozeryany were sent to Congress Poland, to the Kielce and Lublin regions. The Sfard family ended up in Bełżyce, near Lublin.⁶⁶ The relocation came as a shock to the young boy, both because of the serenity of the small town far from the front, where it was possible to ignore the fact that there was a war going on, and because of the difference between Volhynian and Polish Jews—the latter were better educated and more sophisticated. Jewish youth in Congress Poland were also much more open to a nontraditional way of life, to secular education and modern Yiddish literature.

It was thus no coincidence that Dovid, who had heretofore received an exclusively religious education, encountered secular studies for the first time in Bełżyce, taught in Russian using Russian textbooks. His teacher, hailing from a progressive Jewish milieu, lectured for free. Sfard was enraptured by the “simple, logical structure of the functioning of the world and all physical and spiritual phenomena that can be compared to each other.”⁶⁷ But making the acquaintance

64 *Ocalony na Wschodzie: Z Julianem Strykowskim rozmawia Piotr Szewc*, Montricher 1991, p. 31.

65 P. Wróbel, “The Kaddish Years: Anti-Jewish Violence in East Central Europe, 1918–1921,” *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* 4, 2005, p. 213.

66 For further information on Jewish life in the Lublin region during World War I see K. Zieliński, *Żydzi Lubelszczyzny 1914–1919*, Lublin 1999.

67 *Mit zikh*, p. 26.

of this new world meant the collapse of the old one—the loss of faith and of the desire to pursue religious studies: “I could no longer pray or study ardently, lovingly—but neither could I throw it all away and suddenly become a heretic. Habit becomes second nature. God had indeed abandoned my old world, but the old world remained and I could not part with it immediately.”⁶⁸

His radical change in worldview did not bring about an internal rebellion or protest, but only resignation and indifference. These emotions would typify his reaction to disappointment and disillusionment throughout his entire life.

A further attestation of Rabbi Sfar’s liberalism: after the family returned to Ozeryany, which was now ruled by the Poles, he permitted his son (“after long, friendly debates”)⁶⁹ to go to Lutsk to continue his secular education. Dovid probably chose Lutsk for practical reasons: aside from the fact that it was the largest city in the area, his married sister lived there and could provide a home for him during his studies.

Under Ukrainian control at the time, Lutsk was overflowing with refugees from Russia in the upheaval after the Bolshevik Revolution. Despite the insecure, anxious wartime atmosphere, Dovid made up his mind to enroll in the fifth year of the gymnasium—even though he barely had the skills to qualify for the first year. He was prepared for the exams by a private teacher, a Russian Jew named Kalmanson. When he was introduced to his student (the conversation was conducted in Russian, of which Sfar still had a poor command at the time), Kalmanson, quick to understand, asked: “So you write poetry à la Bialik?” At that time, Chaim Nachman Bialik was the spiritual guru of the Jewish youth: the “father” of modern Hebrew literature. Writing “à la Bialik” was no shame—all the young people aspired to write that way.⁷⁰ But Kalmanson’s future student retorted without missing a beat: “No, à la Sfar.” This bold answer won the teacher’s favor. Many years later, Sfar described Kalmanson as one of the noblest people he had ever met.⁷¹

Thanks to his teacher, Sfar was able to enroll in the third-year evening course at the Russian gymnasium, but his time there was short. On May 16, 1919, Lutsk was occupied by the Polish military, which immediately perpetrated a pogrom on the Jewish population.⁷²

68 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

69 *Ibid.*

70 Among them was, e.g. Julian Strykowski: “At the age of twelve, not only did I read the poets Bialik, Tchernichovsky, Shneur in the original, but I even wrote down poetry in the Holy Tongue” (*Ocalony na Wschodzie*, p. 28).

71 *Mit zikh*, p. 28.

72 *Pinkas ha-kehilot Polin*, p. 121.

Among the five people murdered were one of Sfard's classmates and the classmate's father. "The town looked dead. The doors and windows of the houses were all bolted shut. The Jewish residents were in hiding. From time to time, noise and cries for help could be heard from one of the houses. When things calmed down and people began to come out into the streets, [General] Haller's men organized a second tragic spectacle using the Jews—they began to cut off [their] beards."⁷³

The pogrom in Lutsk was one of many that took place at that time throughout Ukraine. It is estimated that between December 1918 and December 1919, about 1,300 pogroms took place in which 50,000–60,000 Jews perished. Jews were accused of being alternately pro-Polish and pro-Ukrainian. There is no doubt that the experiences of those years—fear, humiliation, defenselessness in the face of often absurd and unverified accusations—had a strong influence on the young Sfard. Perhaps this was the basis for his sympathy toward communist ideology, which promised Jews a world without humiliations or pogroms.⁷⁴

While Dovid was staying in Lutsk, his parents left Ozeryany and moved to Kovel, then back to Melnytsya, where his father was offered the position of rabbi. Dovid joined them there, and that was where they were when the Bolsheviks marched in.

Like a Whirlwind, Like a Stream of Lava

After the defeat of Marshall Józef Piłsudski's army outside Kiev in June 1920, the Red Army entered Volhynia proclaiming world revolution and equal rights for all. Volhynian *shtetls* were inspired, and not only devotees of the prospect of Soviet rule. Yoel Perel, who lived in Lutsk, wrote years later in an autobiographical novel: "Rallies with stormy speeches, singing in the gardens, on the streets; frightened policemen, prison gates opening, mass demonstrations under a forest of banners. The words of the Internationale⁷⁵ rang out: 'We renounce the old world...' 'Our hope is not yet lost,'⁷⁶ sang Zionist youth. 'We lift our hands and

73 *Mit zikh*, p. 29. For recent research on anti-Jewish violence in Poland in the wake of World War I, see William W. Hagen, *Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1914–1920*, Cambridge 2018.

74 P. Wróbel, *The Kaddish Years*, p. 218.

75 The author writes here "the *Marseillaise*," undoubtedly by mistake.

76 *Od lo avda tikvateynu* (Hebr.) – fragment of *Hatikvah*, anthem of the Zionist movement, subsequently the Israeli national anthem.

swear,⁷⁷ could be heard sung by newly minted Bundists.⁷⁸

In the meantime, while traveling through Ukraine and Belarus, Isaac Babel took a look at the Jewish cemetery outside Malyn and noted: “[...T]he cemetery is overgrown with grass, it has seen Khmelnytsky, now Budyonny, unfortunate Jewish population, everything repeats itself, now that whole story—Poles, Cossacks, Jews—is repeating itself with stunning exactitude, the only new element is communism.”⁷⁹

This Red Army, moving—per Babel—“like a whirlwind, like a stream of lava,”⁸⁰ finally reached Melnytsya. Sfarid recalled their arrival as follows: “Each of them was dressed differently, each of them walked as he pleased. And yet all of them together made up a whole. We followed them as if bewitched, emitting incessant cries of joy and welcome, and, in their torn clothes and twisted shoes or completely barefoot, they sang and answered us with friendly, grinning faces [...W]hen they sang the Internationale, all three of us cried like little children.”⁸¹

Anyone who reads these memoirs cannot help but wonder: whom did Sfarid mean by the word “we”? The entire population of the town or just the local Jews? Everyone regardless of age or only children and youth? Based on the excerpt above, it can be assumed that the improvised “welcoming committee” was made up of three friends, including the author of the memoirs, who was then a boy of about seventeen. Was their reaction and behavior typical of the Jewish population of Volhynia or at least of Melnytsya? “Jewish girls and youths watch enthralled, old Jews look on indifferently,” Isaac Babel reported.⁸² According to him, it was primarily the youth who were enthusiastic.⁸³

77 *Mir heybn di hent un mir shvern* (Yid.). Here, Perel apparently confused the Bund’s anthem “Di shvue” (The Oath) with the Poale Zion hymn “Di Poaley-Tsien shvue.” The latter, not the former, includes the words “Mir heybn di hent kegn mizrekhn un shvern” (We raise our hands eastwards and swear). I wish to thank Ri J. Turner for pointing this out to me.

78 Y. Perel, *Dem morgnshtern antkegn*, Tel Aviv 1967, p. 44.

79 I. Babel, *1920 Diary*, transl. H. T. Willets, ed. Carol J. Avins, New Haven & London: 1995, p. 23.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

81 *Mit zikh*, p. 32.

82 Babel, *1920 Diary*, p. 10.

83 It is worth noting that the arrival of the Bolsheviks elicited enthusiasm from at least a few other future activists in TSKŻ in Poland: Moyshe Hersh Tabacznik, known among Jewish Communists as Michał Mirski, who then lived in Kovel, enlisted in the Red Army (G. Berendt, “Michała Mirskiego rozrachunek z Polską Ludową,” *Niepodległość* LIII–LIV, 2003/2004, p. 286), and fifteen-year-old Hersh Smolar joined the Revolutionary Committee in his hometown of Zambrów as the representative of

Where did this enthusiasm for the Red Army come from?⁸⁴ Sfarid must have heard plenty about the October Revolution from Russian refugees in Lutsk; his teacher, Kalmanson, was bitterly anti-Bolshevik. The main factor was probably his direct experience of the Lutsk pogrom. And the news about the coup in Russia, about equal rights for all states and nations, about social justice, must have sounded very tempting.

When Dovid arrived home, his father was mingling with Bolshevik soldiers who were to be quartered in his apartment, asking them half in Yiddish, half in Ukrainian: “And there will no longer be rich and poor, or hatred between peoples, between Jews and non-Jews, and no more pogroms?”⁸⁵ Rabbi Sfarid was astounded by everything: that the Bolshevik commander was sitting together with his soldiers and smoking the same cheap tobacco that they were, and that he was speaking with him, a Jew, as an equal.

However, after the first burst of incredulous delight, a new routine took hold: “The boys from the poor streets had assumed the mantle of power. At first, they behaved politely, addressing rich Jews as ‘Mister,’ always saying: ‘No hard feelings,’ ‘Excuse us’; but as time passed, they became bolder, they began to confiscate whatever they felt like from the wealthiest, they let everyone know that the good old days of feudalism were over [...] Everyone in the town spared no effort to show that they had always been Soviet sympathizers, except for a few stubborn mules who kept quiet the entire time and smiled bitterly and sarcastically.”⁸⁶

Before the old order of the *shtetl* could be completely disrupted, the fortunes of war turned and the Soviets were forced to flee, leaving ruins behind them. “We walked around the scorched, destroyed country. Dead horses lay all over the fields,” noted the young Polish soldier Stanisław Rembek, describing the march to Kovel in September 1920.⁸⁷ Two weeks earlier, Isaac Babel, in the very same

the “socialist youth” (W. Najdus, *Lewica polska w Kraju Rad 1918–1920*, Warsaw: 1971, p. 337).

84 This enthusiasm on the part of Jews was accompanied by a counterreaction on the part of Poles in the form of the new stereotype “Judeo-Communism.” See S. Zloch, “Nationsbildung und Feinderklärung – ‘Jüdischer Bolschewismus’ und der polnisch-sowjetische Krieg 1919/1920,” *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* 4, 2005, p. 286. On the Jews’ attitude toward the Red Army see also O. Budnitskii, *Russian Jews Between the Reds and the Whites, 1917–1920*, transl. Timothy J. Portice, Philadelphia 2011, Chapter 10.

85 *Mit zikh*, p. 32.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

87 S. Rembek, *Dzienniki: Rok 1920 i okolice*, Warsaw 1997, p. 130.

town of Kovel, not far from Melnytsya, had wondered whether the Red Army had had any permanent impact: “Quiet little houses, meadows, Jewish back streets, a quiet life, wholesome, Jewish girls, youths, old men by the synagogue, perhaps wigs, Soviet power doesn’t seem to have troubled the surface.”⁸⁸

Perhaps Babel would have been surprised to learn that their retreat caused at least one observer to feel unhappy. “I stood and watched the Red Army men, who no longer looked human, but rather like hunted animals, and my heart was heavy from the pain of knowing that my beautiful world of hopes and dreams had suddenly collapsed,” Sfard wrote years later.⁸⁹ At the very end of the occupation, a group of Bolshevik soldiers broke into the Sfard apartment, looted whatever they could get their hands on and threatened to kill Dovid if his family did not hand over the Polish soldiers who were supposedly hiding there. This was not the farewell that the young fan had expected. And when barely a half-hour later the Polish army entered Melnytsya, conveying a spirit of restraint, order, tidiness, and a friendly attitude toward the Jews, Dovid felt a distinct distance, a distance that he did not feel with respect to the Red Army soldiers.⁹⁰

The end of the Polish-Bolshevik War meant the final incorporation of Volhynia into the Second Polish Republic. For the Jews of the former Russian Empire, however, this had completely different implications than for the Poles from the three partitions. It meant separation instead of unification, for “the territorial unity of the *Ostjuden* was destroyed.”⁹¹ The newly defined borders divided one heretofore-single community, the Jews of the Russian Empire, among several different states. Although they maintained their religious and linguistic commonalities, each of these partitions of the Eastern-European Jewish community would now pursue its own path.

Between Socialism and Zionism

“After a two-hour trip, a city appeared on the left side of the postal route that we were on, a city located in a valley over the Styr meadows, and a mountain that still had the ruins of a castle on top. A beautiful cathedral and the towers

88 Babel, *1920 Diary*, p. 96.

89 *Mit zikh*, p. 34.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 35. Of course, it is difficult today to know how much this is literary sublimation and how much an accurate reconstruction of long-ago emotional responses.

91 P. J. Wróbel, “Foresadowing the Holocaust: The Wars of 1914–1921 and Anti-Jewish Violence in Central and Eastern Europe,” in: *Legacies of Violence. Eastern Europe’s First World War*, ed. J. Böhler, W. Borodziej and J. von Puttkamer, Munich 2014, p. 203.

of several other churches could be seen in the distance [...].” Thus Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, a prolific Polish novelist, described Lutsk in 1840.⁹² Sfard probably saw the same vista when he returned to Lutsk after the war’s end to complete his education.

At one time known as the “Rome of the East,” Lutsk was a multiethnic, multicultural city. A list of its houses of worship is telling: three Catholic churches, one Lutheran church, four Orthodox churches, a Karaite temple and a synagogue. According to the 1921 census, the city had 21,157 residents. More than half declared themselves to be of Jewish faith and ethnicity (14,860 and 13,990 respectively). 4,613 declared themselves ethnic Poles, 1,378—Ukrainians, 152—Germans. In addition, there were Russians, Czechs and Karaites.⁹³ In this part of Volhynia, Lutsk was one of the most modern towns: twenty-four of its ninety streets were paved and electrically lit.⁹⁴

Sfard entered the fifth year at the private Jewish Polish-language-medium gymnasium. At that time, the gymnasium had eight grades and (in 1926) 380 students out of the total of 437 Jewish students in the entire city.⁹⁵ Jewish students also attended Polish, Ukrainian and Russian schools. Amateur Jewish theaters in Volhynia performed exclusively in Russian.⁹⁶ A guidebook to Volhynia from the early 1920s said of the local Jews: “They mostly speak *zhargon* amongst themselves, whereas their intellectuals and half-intellectuals use Russian, and thus Russian can be heard considerably more in Volhynian towns than would be expected based on the very small percentage of Russians in the population of Volhynia.”⁹⁷

Although the classes in the gymnasium were taught in Polish, the study of Hebrew was emphasized. The entrance exams focused on knowledge of Hebrew, the Bible and history.⁹⁸ Sfard’s Hebrew compositions were greatly appreciated by

92 J.I. Kraszewski, *Wspomnienia Wołynia, Polesia i Litwy*, ed. and with an introduction by S. Burkot, Warsaw 1985, p. 177.

93 *Skorowidz miejscowości Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, p. 35; *Łuck w świetle cyfr i faktów*, ed. B. Zieliński, Lutsk 1926, pp. 50–51.

94 N. Sharon [Shtrakhman], “Unter der poylisher hershaft,” in *Sefer Lutsk*, Tel Aviv 1961, p. 155.

95 *Łuck w świetle cyfr*, p. 187.

96 Mędrzecki, *Województwo wołyńskie*, p. 182.

97 M. Orłowicz, *Ilustrowany przewodnik po Wołyniu ze 101 ilustracjami i mapką województwa*, Lutsk 1921 (reprint 1994), p. 28.

98 Perel, *Dem morgnshtern*, p. 86.

his teacher, who even suggested publishing them in a Hebrew magazine,⁹⁹ and admired by his fellow students, including Zalmen Elbirt and Yoel Perel. Sford soon became friends with these two, in particular with Elbirt, who also wrote poetry in Hebrew and read Bialik voraciously.

These new friends introduced Sford to Uri Gliklich, who had founded the Lutsk branch of the Zionist scouting organization Hashomer Hatsair. As Perel describes it, Gliklich was inspired by British-style scouting, which was fast gaining popularity in Poland, particularly its principles of “love of one’s neighbor,” discipline, and abstinence from smoking, drinking and card-playing. “Later, ethnic values were added: pride in one’s ethnicity, knowledge of the language of one’s ancestors [i.e., Hebrew], the study of Hebrew culture, aspirations to build an independent Jewish state in Palestine.”¹⁰⁰ The members of the organization wore uniforms made out of rustic white linen, and on May 3, 1920 (Constitution Day), they organized a parade in Lutsk in which they sang both Zionist songs and “The First Brigade,” the official song of Józef Piłsudski’s Legions.¹⁰¹

Uri Gliklich was the son of the local rabbi, Mojżesz (Moyshe) Gliklich, who was also the founder of the gymnasium. Their family belonged to the assimilated Jewish intelligentsia: Polish and Russian were spoken in their home, not Yiddish. Thanks to the unquestioned position of Uri Gliklich among local youth, a group of enthusiasts—Elbirt, Perel and Sford—managed to realize two plans: to found a youth organization and to publish their own magazine. The latter was, in fact, not uncommon among high school youth in Volhynia then.¹⁰²

Sford’s time in gymnasium took place during the first years of the Second Polish Republic, with all its accompanying political twists and turns. There is no doubt that the Lutsk gymnasium students breathlessly followed current events such as the vote on the March constitution and the signing of the Treaty of Riga, which ended the war with Bolshevik Russia. Particular attention was paid, not only by those who stood to be most directly affected, to the safety of the Jews in the reborn Polish state. “The basic issue which confronted Polish politicians,” writes Ezra Mendelsohn, “was whether Poland was a multinational state by

99 This is further evidence of Sford’s advanced knowledge of Hebrew. At that time he was already tutoring other students in Hebrew and mathematics (*Mit zikh*, p. 36).

100 Perel, *Dem morgnshtern*, p. 59.

101 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

102 A.J. Cieślíkowa, “Prasa w województwie wołyńskim 1918–1939,” *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze* 45 no. 3–4, 2002, p. 112.

definition or a Polish nation-state despite the undeniable existence of numerous non-Poles.”¹⁰³

Most Polish politicians took the latter position, and the ethnic question was one of the main topics of political life throughout the entire twenty years of the Second Republic. The Treaty of Versailles was supposed to regulate the relations between the Polish state and the ethnic minorities living in it; however, many of its provisions, especially those regarding the use of a minority language, remained theoretical, and Polish public opinion considered the treaty itself to have been imposed by force.¹⁰⁴

Among all the minorities living in the Second Republic, the Jews presented a particular problem. On one hand, they posed no territorial claims; on the other hand, they differed significantly from the rest of society with respect to language, religion, customs, and external appearance (in the case of Orthodox Jews). Moreover, Jewish culture in Poland was highly developed in three languages (no other ethnic minority in Poland had such strong and significant ties to the Polish language), and the Jewish community had its own firm political traditions.

Political tensions came to a head in 1922. In the campaign for elections to the Sejm, a Bloc of National Minorities was formed that included representatives of the German, Belarussian, Ukrainian and Jewish minorities. In Lutsk, as in all of Poland, temperatures ran high: the idea of forming a joint minority bloc provoked doubt. In the meantime, the Zionists and Folkists were nursing their own intra-Jewish conflict over the distribution of parliamentary seats within the Bloc; in the end, the Folkists decided to run an independent campaign. The conflict resulted from the fact that Zionists and Folkists embodied two opposing political conceptions: the former favored building a Jewish national settlement in Palestine and using Hebrew in everyday life; the latter demanded ethnocultural autonomy for Jews in Poland (including an autonomous Jewish parliament) and considered Yiddish to be the Jewish national language.

It was unknown until the last minute whether all the large Jewish parties would support the Bloc of National Minorities. Perhaps the conference of Volhynian rabbis, held in Lutsk on September 7, 1922, ultimately helped to convince the parties to do so.¹⁰⁵ In the end, the Bloc won 79.4 % of the votes in Volhynia,

103 E. Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars*, Bloomington, 1983, p. 36.

104 On the linguistic situation of the Jews and the application or nonapplication of the provisions of the treaty see: J. Ogonowski, “Problem uprawnień językowych Żydów w II Rzeczypospolitej,” *Sprawy Narodowościowe* 1996, no. 2 (9), pp. 61–77.

105 Mędrzecki, *Województwo wołyńskie*, pp. 177–178.

sending thirty-five deputies to the Sejm, most of whom were General Zionists, who founded a Jewish Caucus (*Koło Żydowskie*) in the Sejm.¹⁰⁶

A particularly bitter conflict in Volhynia between the Zionists and the Orthodox, Gabriel Narutowicz's¹⁰⁷ election to the presidency thanks to the votes of left-wing and minority parties, his assassination in Warsaw on December 16, 1922—all this could not but arouse young people's interest in politics. Ethnically conscious Jewish youth took the side of the Bloc of National Minorities in the elections; however, later, disillusioned by the slow course of parliamentary politics, they reflected bitterly: "We asked ourselves: whom have we joined? Those who shed Jewish blood in 1648? Those who only a few years ago, when they made up Petliura's forces and other gangs, murdered Jews and looted their possessions?"¹⁰⁸ This disappointment led to the rise of the Nonpartisan Youth Organization, known to its members as the Worldwide Nonpartisan Jewish Youth Organization. Among its founders and leaders were Uri Gliklich, Zalmen Elbirt, Dovid Sfar, Yoel Perel and Shmuel Chazan.

The goals of the Worldwide Nonpartisan Jewish Youth Organization were as broad as its name: spreading interest in Yiddish literature and culture among the youth, minority language rights for both Yiddish and Hebrew, ethnocultural autonomy for Jews in the Diaspora, and the revival of the Jewish national home in Palestine (to some extent the organization fused the Zionist and Folkist programs). Plans were concocted to publish a literary organ, to set up a speakers' bureau to promote Yiddish literature throughout Poland, and to found a publishing house to publish the works of talented young writers.

Meanwhile, a clubhouse was founded, where Organization members could meet and hold literary events and lectures.¹⁰⁹ These activities continued later as

106 S. Rudnicki, *Żydzi w parlamencie II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warsaw 2004, p. 136.

107 Gabriel Narutowicz (1865–1922), a renowned Polish professor of hydroelectric engineering, was elected as the first president of Poland by the National Assembly (Sejm) thanks to votes from the left and national minorities. He got assassinated five days after taking office by Eligiusz Niewiadomski, a painter with right-wing views. For more information, see P. Brykczynski, *Primed for Violence: Murder, Antisemitism, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Poland*, Madison 2016.

108 Perel, *Dem morgnshtern*, p. 120.

109 Titles of some of the talks given at the club: "The Credo of Jewish Youth" (Gliklich), "The Philosophy of Yiddish Literature" and "The Past and Future of Yiddish Literature" (Sfar), "The Golem Problem in Yiddish Literature" and "About Our Prose" (Elbirt), and "Theater Then and Now" (Perel). Y. Perel, "Di oysserparteyishe yugnt-organizatsye," in: *Sefer Lutsk*, Tel Aviv 1961, p. 193.

well, once the young activists were studying in universities (they returned to their native Volhynia for their vacations). Particularly popular were the “trials,” or formalized debates which they held about various topics, such as Y.L. Peretz’s short story *Bontshe Shvayg*.¹¹⁰ The participants—plaintiff, defendant, prosecutor, defense attorney, experts, witnesses—were appointed by the organizers; the audience elected the judge and jury.

The most renowned “trial,” over the activity of the Jewish Caucus in the Sejm, lasted from Saturday night until Monday at noon—supposedly, almost uninterrupted. Crowds of ordinary citizens took part, alongside notables like Rabbi Gliklich, who was invited to serve as an expert witness. Perel played the plaintiff and Sfard the prosecutor, assisted by Elbirt. The counsels for the defense were local Zionist activists. Among the witnesses was Motye (Mateusz) Oks, who was later active in the Communist movement and served after the war on the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party (Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR).

Unfortunately, in his autobiographical novel Yoel Perel did not list the charges brought by the plaintiffs against the Jewish Caucus. He did, however, write about the great agitation which the trial provoked in the town, which split into two camps—proponents and opponents of the Caucus. He also discussed individual participants in the “trial”: he praised Sfard in his role as prosecutor for “having a good head on his shoulders and the gift of gab.”¹¹¹ Unfortunately, before the judges reached a verdict, the police burst into the hall and ordered the crowd to disperse.¹¹² This type of gathering probably played an important role in shaping public opinion, especially because the significant rate of illiteracy in Volhynia and lack of access to media sources meant that political literature in written form had a limited reach.

Judging by the organizational program, the Worldwide Nonpartisan Jewish Youth attempted to integrate socialist ideology with Zionism. “We did not see any contradiction between socialism, or even communism, and Zionism,” Sfard

110 The eponymous hero of the story is a poor, humble Jew, who after a life of hardship and suffering dies and goes to heaven; when he is asked what he would like for his eternal reward, he requests a roll and butter for breakfast every morning. Depending on which interpretation one prefers, the hero can either be considered a humble, virtuous representative of the simple faith of the poorest strata, or a representative of the naivete of the exploited masses.

111 Perel, *Dem morgnshtern*, p. 203.

112 *Ibid.*, p. 201–203.

stated years later.¹¹³ Julian Strykowski, also a Zionist in his youth, considered Zionism to be a replacement for his lost religious faith.

In 1923, Sfard debuted as a poet on the pages of the Hebrew-language newspaper *Al hamishmar* (On Guard)—the local organ of *Hashomer Hatsair* (apparently, Uri Gliklich had had a hand in submitting Sfard's poetry to the newspaper). Among the poems he published there were "Levadi" (I Alone), "Le'an" (Where to?) and "Hu lo met" (He is not dead), the last of which was dedicated to Yosef Trumpeldor,¹¹⁴ a hero of the Zionist youth at the time. As Perel recalled, one of the gymnasium teachers, Peczenik, unselfishly edited, corrected and prepared for publication "the first Hebrew works of his students: Dovid's poems about Trumpeldor, Zalmen [Elbirt's] poems and my column."¹¹⁵

Sfard's gymnasium years augured his future path in life. Practically everywhere and in every era, he revealed himself first and foremost to be an organizer, a planner, the person who got things done. "Dovid is not in the habit of asceticism. He likes good food and a comfortable place to live," Perel wrote about him. "And yet he wants to be independent and to work for a living. Dovid has his own mind and a desire to leave his family circle and venture forth into the world. He thinks in a sophisticated way, can speak beautifully, knows how to act and to influence others. The blood of his remarkable ancestors flows in his veins."¹¹⁶

The Central Address for the Provinces

Their high school diplomas were not honored by the public Polish universities, so the three friends left for Warsaw to study at the (private) Polish Free University (*Wolna Wszechnica Polska*). Elbirt and Sfard chose to study philosophy, Perel chemistry. In the enrollment records of the Faculty of Humanities, under entry number 1034, the following is written, "Name: Sfard Dawid; Ethnicity: Jewish; Religion: Jewish; Born July 12, 1903, Melnytsya, Kovel County; Preparatory Studies: eight-grade private coeducational Polish-language Jewish gymnasium in Lutsk; Matriculation Date: February 27, 1925 under Rector A[ntoni] Górski."¹¹⁷

113 *Mit zikh*, p. 38.

114 Yosef Trumpeldor (1880–1920)—Zionist leader, organizer of Jewish self-defense forces in Palestine, where he settled after leaving Russia in 1912. After the October Revolution, he worked to organize the Zionist youth movement *Hehalutz* in Russia and to give its members military training. He was killed in the Battle of Tel Hai.

115 Perel, *Dem morgnshtern*, p. 90.

116 *Ibid.*, p. 188.

117 APW, *Wolna Wszechnica w Warszawie*, Albumy Wydziału Humanistycznego, vol. 5, entry no. 1034.

The enrollment records also contain a note indicating that Dovid was accepted into the university on the basis of a certificate of graduation from the gymnasium dated June 28, 1923. Thus, more than a year and a half had passed between his gymnasium graduation and his matriculation into university. As his relatives tell it, Dovid's first choice was to study medicine, but he soon dropped out in favor of studying philosophy. There is no mention of this in his autobiography, but if true, it helps to explain why he did not enter the Polish Free University immediately upon graduation from gymnasium.¹¹⁸ Another explanation for the delay could be the fact that beginning with the academic year 1924–1925, in order to enter university, students from private gymnasia without public charters were required to take an entrance exam that was offered only in September, February and June.¹¹⁹

In his memoirs, Sfard describes only episodes from his university studies. It appears, however, that the Free University was a place where his leftist orientation was affirmed. According to researcher Zofia Skubała-Tokarska, "It would be a mistake to believe that only people of leftist, radical or liberal-progressive views worked in the Polish Free University. Nevertheless, this group gave direction to the University's activity. [...] [The lecturers] combined the passion of researchers with the passion of social activists, and often with political passion as well. Their work was not confined within the walls of the research laboratory."¹²⁰ In later years, Sfard argued that a Jewish Communist writer was obligated to connect his literary work with his sociopolitical activity. Perhaps he reached this conclusion based on his observations of the University faculty.¹²¹

In the academic year 1924–1925, 1,195 students were enrolled in the Free University, of which 936 declared Polish ethnicity; 244—Jewish. (Unfortunately, there are no data on religious affiliation; however, we can surmise that a certain

118 According to family stories, one thing did come out of Sfard's abortive medical training: he became acquainted with fellow student Moshe Kleinbaum-Sneh, later a Zionist activist, commander of the Haganah and chairman of the Israeli Communist Party (Leon Sfard, personal communication).

119 Z. Skubała-Tokarska, *Społeczna rola Wolnej Wszechnicy Polskiej*, Wrocław–Warsaw–Krakow 1967, pp. 202–203.

120 *Ibid.*, pp. 133–134.

121 Examples of such lecturers include historian Natalia Gąsiorowska (a member of the left wing of the Polish Socialist Party from 1905 on) and attorney Adam Ettinger and philosopher Stefan Rudniański, members of the Polish Communist Party (*ibid.*, p. 134). The University's main patron was the well-known sociologist and progressive social activist Ludwik Krzywicki.

percentage of the students declared themselves to be simultaneously ethnically Polish and religiously Jewish.)¹²² In the following years, the total number of students decreased (in 1926–1927, Sfarđ's last year there, only 583 enrolled); however, these were still predominantly ethnically Polish and Jewish students who did not have the diplomas from public gymnasia that were required for admission to the state universities.

The institution cultivated its nonconformist, or even subversive, image. Refuting the objections of opponents of the University, one of its lecturers, philosopher Ignacy Halpern-Myśllicki, wrote in 1923: "They also say [...] that the Polish Free University is a 'Jewish institution.' Not true, for the latest statistics show only 23 % Jews. They say that it is 'Bolshevik.' That is laughable—it is as Bolshevik as it is Catholic or Muslim."¹²³

The son of the small-town rabbi from Volhynia was a model student. Although his course of study also included psychology, Greek, ethnology, anthropology, and general biology, various subjects related to philosophy predominated, including history of philosophy, theory of knowledge, theory of logic, and a philosophy seminar with Prof. Halpern-Myśllicki. We know that he passed ten exams, with superlative or above-average marks in all; however, there is no record of his having written a thesis or passed a graduation exam.¹²⁴

However, it appears that Dovid was much more interested in literary and journalistic work than in philosophy. In Warsaw, it was finally possible to begin to realize the Worldwide Organization's second project, i.e., to publish a magazine in Yiddish for Jewish youth in Poland. In January 1925, the Youth Literary Union was founded (its name was subsequently changed to "Youth Cultural-Literary Union" in May of that year). Its goal was to "develop young literary talents." Gliklich was the chairman of the Union; vice-chairmen were M. Zylbersztajn (Zilbershteyn) and Sfarđ; the secretary—Perel.¹²⁵ Its first project was to publish a magazine. The future magazine's title, *Shprotsungen* ("sprouts"

122 For example, in the academic year 1920–1921, out of 1,169 students, 564 declared Jewish religion, but only 202 of those declared Jewish ethnicity (ibid., pp. 208–209).

123 I. Myśllicki, "Wolna Wszechnica Polska w obecnym jej stanie," in: *Ex Litteris Libertas: Jednodniówka studentów Wolnej Wszechnicy Polskiej w Warszawie*, ed. M. Tyll and J. Zawistowska, Warsaw 1923, p. 29.

124 APW, *Wolna Wszechnica w Warszawie*, Albumy Wydziału Humanistycznego, vol. 5, entry no. 1034.

125 "Bay undzer yugnt," *Shprotsungen*, 1925, no. 1. See also N. Cohen, *Sefer, sofer ve-iton: Merkaz ha-tarbut ha-yehudit be-Polin, 1918–1942*, Jerusalem 2003, pp. 216–217.

or “buds” in Yiddish), had already been determined in Lutsk. The revenue from the ticket sales for the “trial” over the Jewish Caucus was earmarked for operating costs for the magazine.¹²⁶ The first issue (a total of seven have survived) was published in 1925. The editorial board did their work in a room shared by the three friends—Sfard, Elbirt, and Perel—on Muranowska Street, and later at the apartment of Moyshe Levartov, Sfard’s cousin, on Nowolipki Street. In between these two addresses, as we learn from the mastheads of the surviving issues, the magazine had two other contact addresses: 61 Miła Street, apt. 1 and 7 Hoża Street, apt. 58. The editorial board included M. Bernholts, M. Zylbersztajn, Sfard, Elbirt and Perel (according to other sources, the editorial board was made up of Beynish Zylbersztajn, Arn Bekerman and Sfard).¹²⁷ Elbirt and Sfard took the lead; Perel was the administrator. In no time, the room on Nowolipki became the “central address for the provinces. The writers spent whole days there, debating and arguing.”¹²⁸

Sfard, M. Bernholts, Yitskhok Shternfeld, Yisroel Zaydntsayg, Sh. Chazan, Uri Gliklich, Sh. Prager, Dovid Mitsmakher, Shmuel Zaromb and Yoel Perel all contributed material to the magazine. In his memoirs, Sfard adds to the list of authors associated with *Shprotsungen*: Arn Mark, Elkhonen Vogler, Shmuel Vulman, Shmuel Leyb Shneiderman, Shimen Horonczyk, et al.¹²⁹ Most of them were young people without any previous writing experience. An exception was Horonczyk, a generation older than Sfard, who had already published a novel in 1924.¹³⁰

Several of Sfard’s stories published in *Shprotsungen* reveal that naturalism was near and dear to their author, and that rather than describe events, he preferred to trace the psychological characteristics of his heroes, who were usually impoverished or otherwise marginal figures.

Programmatic articles also appeared in *Shprotsungen*, responding to the situation of the youth and the condition of Yiddish literature. For example, in “Tsu der grindung fun kultur-literarishn yugnt-farband” (On the Founding of the

126 Perel, *Dem morgnshtern*, p. 204.

127 “Bay undzer yugnt,” *Shprotsungen*, 1925, no. 1; M. Knapheys, “Der letster dor yidische shraybers in Poyln farn khurbn,” *Argentinier YIVO-shriftn*, no. 13, 1981, p. 84.

128 *Mit zikh*, p. 39.

129 *Ibid.*

130 The novel was entitled *Farpionterte vegn: Tsvishn di khurves fun yidishn lebn*, Warsaw 1924, which caused a sensation in Warsaw—one of its chapters was an attack on the Warsaw Yiddish writers’ milieu, undoubtedly inspired by I.M. Weissenberg’s critiques of the same (see below).

Cultural-Literary Youth Association),¹³¹ Gliklich condemned “politicking” (a “dry dogma” approach, which treated party appeals and brochures as literature and expected the youth to study party articles as if they were the catechism) and “sportsmania” (physical development and engagement in sports as the main ideal of Jewish youth).¹³² In his opinion, in all arenas of activity, including political activity, the main frame of reference should be “one’s own ethnic culture.” The Cultural-Literary Youth Association was to encourage this by assembling those who wanted to “destroy, uproot [...] cultural assimilation, superficiality of thinking, and depression, ugliness and obsequiousness.”¹³³

The young Yiddish writers’ spiritual leader was a writer of the middle generation, Itshe-Meyer Weissenberg (Vaysnberg), then in his mid-forties. He was one of Peretz’s disciples, an author of naturalistic prose, the translator into Yiddish of *A Thousand and One Nights*. The only work of fiction ever published by Sfard, *Vegn tsegeyen zikh* (Roads Diverge), discussed in the next chapter, was likely inspired by Weissenberg’s *A shtetl* (Warsaw 1906), which tells of political upheaval among provincial Jews around the time of the 1905 revolution.

Years later, Sfard recalled Weissenberg as a true original and an autodidact with major gaps in his general knowledge. He apparently had aspirations to become a second Peretz—he gathered the literary youth around himself, and in his apartment on Elektoralna Street strove to create a literary milieu that could compete with the Yiddish Writers’ and Journalists’ Union at 13 Tłomackie Street.¹³⁴ Supposedly, he did not like it when his admirers struck out on their own, but he “did not take losing them too much to heart, since every day he discovered some new literary talent and held him tight to prevent him from escaping.”¹³⁵ In *Shprotsungen*, Weissenberg enthusiastically and rather pompously described his first meeting with Sfard and Elbirt, whose “young, pleasant faces” were very much to his liking.¹³⁶

131 U. Gliklich, “Tsu der grindung fun kultur-literarishn yugnt-farband,” *Shprotsungen*, 1925, no. 3, pp. 2–6.

132 This may have been a reaction to the Maccabi movement, a Zionist sports organization that preached the importance of physical strength.

133 Gliklich, “Tsu der grindung,” p. 5.

134 In her *I.M. Vaysnberg: Zayn lebn un shafn 1878–1938*, Montreal 1986, pp. 162–174, the writer’s daughter, Perl Weissenberg-Axelrod, recalled his mentorship of young writers. Most groups of young writers during that period, including the “Khalyastre,” took an attitude of rebellion and went in search of a path independent of the hegemonic Writers’ and Journalists’ Union.

135 Z. Segalowitch, *Tlomatske 13: Fun farbrentn nekhtn*, Buenos Aires 1946, p. 97.

136 I.M. Weissenberg, “Etlekhe gedanken,” *Shprotsungen*, 1925, no. 3, p. 9.

The young authors of *Shprotsungen* also continued the other activities that they had begun in Lutsk. They organized lectures on cultural-literary subjects, not only in Warsaw, but also during their travels in the provinces. They considered themselves to be the bearers of the light of modern education to poor Jewish youth. Isaac Bashevis Singer recalled: “The young writers had brought from their small towns their disheveled hair, their anger at Warsaw, and a desire to revolutionize literature. They hung around the Writers’ Union in their provincial fur coats and boots. In the little magazines that they published, such as *Shprotsungen*, etc., they used highbrow language seasoned with provincial expressions.”¹³⁷ Despite their rebellious attitudes, the younger writers received encouragement from members of the older generation: Yosef Opatoshu and H. Leivick both visited the editorial offices of *Shprotsungen* when they were in Warsaw.¹³⁸

However, the decline of the World Organization, the editors’ preoccupation with their studies, and other matters, including the lack of funds, led to the closure of the magazine in 1926. Weissenberg hoped to found a new publication that would present literary texts alongside popular articles about the natural sciences. Elbirt and Sfarid were eager to work with him on this project until they realized that Weissenberg wanted to oversee not only the literary sections but also the popular scientific ones, despite the fact that he was not qualified to do so.¹³⁹

In 1928, Sfarid’s first book of poetry was published, entitled *Shtaplen* (Rungs).¹⁴⁰ In his later retrospective reflections, Sfarid did not seem to consider this volume very important.¹⁴¹

Both *Shprotsungen* and the corresponding chapters in Sfarid’s autobiography did not reflect much influence from the Polish context. While this context is mentioned in connection with historical events and some biographical facts, it is completely absent as an acknowledged influence on the cultural life of the young contributors to *Shprotsungen*. Among the lecture titles mentioned in the magazine and in Perel’s article, there is not a single reference to or comparison with Polish literature or culture. It is as if Sfarid and his colleagues were working in a Yiddish literary bubble drifting over Warsaw—which could just as easily

137 Y. Bashevis [Singer], “Arum der yidisher literatur in Poyln,” *Di tsukunft*, August 1943, p. 472.

138 Perel, *Dem morgnshtern*, p. 206.

139 *Mit zikh*, pp. 43–44.

140 Unfortunately, I was unable to locate a single copy of this volume.

141 *Mit zikh*, p. 45.

have been drifting over Moscow or New York.¹⁴² However, graduates of a Polish-language high school, who had had to pass exams in Polish literature and history in order to matriculate into the Free University, could not have been completely uninterested in contemporary developments in Polish literary life, especially considering that the 1920s were an exuberant period in the development of Polish literature (for example, Stefan Żeromski's famous novel *Przedwiośnie* (Early Spring), which generated stormy debate in Polish society, was published in 1924, when Sfarid was on the brink of adulthood¹⁴³). So why didn't the contributors to *Shprotsungen* mention Polish literature in their writings?

Guta Firer, who also attended the Polish-language Jewish gymnasium in Lutsk, recalls that students who had begun their studies in Russian found it difficult to become accustomed to the new language of instruction, to study Polish literature and history, and in general “to become Polish patriots overnight.”¹⁴⁴ Yet she continues:

The new teachers achieved their goal, turning us into faithful Polish citizens. How did this happen? They managed it by means of the inspiring literature of Poland and the history of the martyrdom of the Polish people. [...] We threw ourselves into the works of Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Żeromski, Prus, Sienkiewicz, Wyspiański, Orzeszkowa, et al., with all our Jewish sensitivity. The similarity between the political situation of our people and downtrodden Poland, the struggle to solve problems of social and political equality, in addition to the beauty of the Polish language, the high quality of Polish poetry—all this caused us to embrace the [new] subjects of study, and we began to speak, think and behave in Polish.¹⁴⁵

In light of Guta Firer's reminiscences, one possible hypothesis is that young people who identified with the Yiddish language and its young modern culture regarded Polish culture—which was dominant, well-developed and state-sponsored—as a threat to its own emerging cultural identity.¹⁴⁶ It is possible that

142 In 1926, prominent Yiddish poet Dovid Bergelson described these three cities as the major centers of Yiddish literature (see Ch. Shmeruk, “Hebrew – Yiddish – Polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture,” in: *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, ed. Y. Gutman et al., Hanover and London 1989, p. 298).

143 Incidentally, Sfarid's adolescent literary efforts may reflect the influence of Żeromski's work.

144 G. Firer, “Arum der yidisher gimnazye in Lutsk,” in: *Sefer Lutsk*, Tel Aviv 1961, p. 273.

145 Ibid., pp. 273–274. In contrast, Perel writes in his autobiographical novel that he and his colleagues were unable to read Polish authors like Juliusz Słowacki or Bolesław Prus in the original and resorted to abridged study guides (*Dem morgnshtern*, p. 105).

146 Julian Strykowski, who as a young Zionist read Hebrew literature almost exclusively, wrote “I did not pick up many Polish books published between 1918 and 1922. [...]”

discussion of Polish culture was avoided in *Shprotsungen* because the young writers felt that Polish culture took up more than enough room in the Polish press, and Yiddish culture deserved a space of its own.

Perhaps the silence about Poland and Polish culture was also connected to a new sense of uncertainty felt by Jews in the reborn Polish Republic—a country full of new citizens who could now proudly affirm their Polishness, and who looked grudgingly at the large populations of ethnic minorities, with their own linguistic, cultural and political aspirations. Piotr Wróbel describes the Jewish reaction to Polish independence: “On November 11, [1918,] Polish Jews did not experience a sea change in their daily life. [...] Most of them had ceased being ‘Polish’ Jews during the 120 years of partition and had lost any motivation to identify themselves with the Polish state.” As a result, Jews had to choose between “submission, a marginal existence, emigration, feverish trickery or rebellious impulses.”¹⁴⁷ Dovid Sfarđ—and his peers—chose the latter option.

A Week Without Sociocultural Activity

On June 23, 1927, Sfarđ passed his final exams at the Free University.¹⁴⁸ He and Elbirt decided to pursue doctoral studies in France, at the University of Nancy. They may have chosen to pursue further education in France rather than in Poland because French, unlike Polish, universities recognized the Free University and allowed its graduates to sign up for doctoral studies.¹⁴⁹ Perhaps

I did, however, have my favorite writers: Żeromski, Jerzy Bandrowski and Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, Jerzy Żuławski, Reymont, Sieroszewski, and others. I read Romain Rolland and Gide in French, Mann and Kellermann in German, etc.” (*Ocalony na Wschodzie*, p. 47).

147 P. Wróbel, “Żydzi polscy w czasie I wojny światowej,” *Przegląd Historyczny* 83, no. 4, 1992, p. 664–665.

148 APW, *Wolna Wszechnica w Warszawie*, Albumy Wydziału Humanistycznego, vol. 5, entry no. 1034.

149 About the Free University, Ignacy Mysłicki writes: “The Polish Free University is obviously well-regarded abroad, as its students are accepted as full-time graduate students and even allowed to take doctoral exams in French universities, including the Sorbonne; in Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, etc.” (I. Mysłicki, *Wolna Wszechnica Polska: Cele i zadania, ustrój, uprawnienia* (Warsaw 1930), pp. 19–20). Meanwhile, in Poland, it was only beginning in the academic year 1931–1932 that students of the Faculty of Humanities were allowed to take the state master’s exam; the Free University was only given the right to grant master’s degrees beginning a few years before World War II (Skubała-Tokarska, “*Spoleczna rola*,” p. 217).

the two young men were also attracted to France due to its reputation as a land of equality, revolution, and sophisticated culture; perhaps, like many other young socialists of the era, they were inspired by the story of the French Revolution.

Sfard's memoirs do not explain why he and Elbirt chose Nancy and not Paris, for example. Perhaps they were enticed by the lower cost, or perhaps they had personal connections in Nancy. Its location in German-speaking Alsace might also have made it seem more accessible to them as Yiddish speakers.

On the way to Nancy, the two friends promised each other that while they were in France, they would devote their time to their studies and academic research only, and not get involved in sociocultural activity. "Our obedience to that promise [...] did not last for even one week."¹⁵⁰ In fact, only a few weeks after arriving in Nancy, Sfard was elected to the board of the local Jewish Student Union. The youth organization *Funk* (Spark), which was directly influenced and "discreetly run" by the Communist Party, was the most influential voice in the Union. Among its leaders were Kuba Bachrach, later a Communist Party activist in Belgium, and a certain Kon, later a Communist activist and journalist in Israel (under the pseudonym Temkin).¹⁵¹

Funk organized open discussions on sociopolitical subjects, which attracted great interest, according to Sfard.¹⁵² Its young members were somewhat fanatical: in Metz in 1930, *Funk* organized a demonstration against the observance of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the most important Jewish holiday of the year. The demonstration ended badly for the speakers and organizers: "A group of religious Alsatian Jewish workers [...] learned of this 'red' Yom Kippur, came to the gathering, beat all the participants to a pulp, and we barely escaped with our lives," one of the organization's members later wrote.¹⁵³ A branch of *Funk* was also established, with 30 founding members, in the nearby city of Strasbourg in 1929.¹⁵⁴

150 *Mit zikh*, p. 45.

151 *Ibid.*

152 *Ibid.*, pp. 45–46. Unfortunately, the only source of information about Sfard's activities in Nancy is his autobiography (*Mit zikh*, pp. 45–51). As far as I know, the archives of the district of Meurthe-et-Moselle in Nancy do not possess any documents regarding *Funk* or Sfard himself (letter from Christel Jajoux of Archives Départementales de Meurthe-et-Moselle dated April 25, 2006, personal communication. This suggests that Sfard did not play a major role in Nancy student circles.

153 F. Shragar, *Oyfn rand fun tsvey tkufes*, Paris 1976, p. 31.

154 L. Khayat, "Les étudiants juifs étrangers à Strasbourg au tournant des années trente," *Archives Juives*, no. 2, 2005, p. 127.

It is admirable that in Nancy, Sfard managed to write and defend his doctoral dissertation, because judging from his memoirs, he was above all absorbed in sociocultural—and perhaps even political-cultural—activity. Aside from *Funk*, he contributed to the Jewish student magazine *Trit* (Steps).¹⁵⁵ Meanwhile, *Funk* did not escape the notice of the French police, and after a discussion on the subject of Birobidzhan, those who had participated were arrested, searched and interrogated. The fact that a large number of *Funk* members were foreigners (especially Eastern European Jews) placed the organization in jeopardy—foreigners could, after all, be deported. As Lynda Khayat has stated, the French Ministry of the Interior began to keep an eye on foreign student circles, which they suspected of propagating revolutionary ideas, already in the 1920s. There were quite a few such circles in the universities of Alsace-Lorraine; in 1931, there were 2,134 foreign students out of a total of 5,062 at the University of Nancy, and at the University of Strasbourg, foreign students made up one-third of the student body. Beginning in February 1930, the French police paid particular attention to the members of *Funk* and did not rule out the possibility of deporting its leaders.¹⁵⁶ It is not clear whether Sfard was among the deportees.¹⁵⁷ In any case, both Sfard and Elbirt managed to complete their dissertations and pass their doctoral exams.

It is worth mentioning something that Sfard himself does not discuss in his autobiography, namely, his knowledge of foreign languages. Doctoral studies in France required an advanced knowledge of, if not complete fluency in, French. His choice of Hegel as his topic implies at least a reading knowledge of German.¹⁵⁸ These were not skills that he could have acquired growing up in a rabbi's home in Volhynia. Even if Sfard had excellent language teachers in Lutsk and at the Free

155 I was unable to find any trace of this publication.

156 Khayat, "Les étudiants juifs étrangers," p. 124 n.

157 In a survey conducted of the members of the Fourth National Conference of the Jewish Caucus of the Polish Labor Party (PPR) in 1947 under the rubric of "Where and when were you imprisoned?," Sfard answered: "Arrested in France and deported"; however, it is possible that this was not, strictly speaking, a deportation, but rather an ultimatum: "Leave of your own free will or we will send you home" (Results of the Survey of the Fourth National Party Conference, AŻIH, Papers of Michał Mirski, file no. 10, unpaginated).

158 His family members tell the following anecdote: after trying to read Hegel in the original, Sfard went to his advisor to admit that he did not understand anything that he was reading. "Since you are reading it in German, it is no wonder that you do not understand," his advisor supposedly answered. "Try reading it in French" (Leon Sfard, personal communication).

University, there is no doubt that the lion's share of his language-learning was autodidactic.¹⁵⁹ The fact that he received a doctoral degree from a French university shows how far he managed to travel from his family of origin. Elbirt demonstrated similar fortitude, having written a dissertation on phenomenology as it was defined by Edmund Husserl.

Sfard's dissertation, titled "The Role of the Idea of Contradiction in Hegel's Works," was dedicated to his parents.¹⁶⁰ The author also mentioned his professors at the Free University, Benedykt Bornstein and Ignacy Halpern-Myslicki, in his acknowledgments. His dissertation advisor was one Professor Souriau.¹⁶¹ It was apparently thanks to the latter's intervention that Sfard was able to leave Nancy, one way or another, with a Ph.D. diploma in his knapsack.

159 Among Sfard's pursuits in connection with the French language, he translated Romain Rolland's *The Life of Tolstoy* from French into Yiddish in 1925 for the Warsaw publisher Sh. Goldfarb (*Shprotungen* 1925, no. 6, p. 41).

160 His dissertation was published by the publishing house of Librairie R. Poncelet, Nancy, 1931, as one of a series of doctoral dissertations written in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Nancy. I thank Maria Więckowska-Sztark for her help in locating a copy of this dissertation.

161 Almost certainly Michel Souriau (1891–1986), dean of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Nancy.

Chapter Two: Winning over Jewish Hearts and Minds (1932–1939)

Unknown Warsaw

After he returned to Poland in 1931, Dovid Sfarid lived for a time in the provinces (perhaps in Melnytsya, at his parents' house). A year later, he returned to Warsaw—at the time, one of the two largest Jewish communities in the world. The 1930s was the period of Warsaw's greatest efflorescence.

In 1931, 352,569 Jews lived in Warsaw, comprising about 30 % of the population of the city and 10 % of all the Jews living in the Second Republic.¹⁶² They were concentrated primarily in the so-called northern district (*dzielnica północna*), which included the areas Muranów, Powązki, Leszno and Grzybów. The journalist Bernard Singer called it “the unknown Warsaw.” He wrote: “[...T] here was an invisible wall that separated the area from the rest of the city. Many Polish children spoke of it fearfully, and adults treated it with contempt.”¹⁶³ Not surprisingly for an area characterized by wide economic gaps, the Jewish district was a major area of Communist activity.

In December 1935, 1,059 members of the Polish Communist Party lived in Warsaw, out of a total of 3,660.¹⁶⁴ Especially active neighborhood organizations were found in Muranów and Powązki.¹⁶⁵ Isaac Bashevis Singer recalled: “In Warsaw, there was a street that, nearly every day and sometimes several times a day, saw Communist demonstrations. This was Dzika Street. Suddenly, some boys and girls would break into a run while shouting slogans. A red flag would appear. After a few minutes, policemen would arrive and chase them away.”¹⁶⁶

As was true throughout Poland, the Warsaw Jewish community was not homogeneous. As Ezra Mendelsohn describes, Polish Jews were primarily “lower

162 “Drugi powszechny spis ludności z dnia 9 grudnia 1931: Mieszkania i gospodarstwa domowe, ludność, stosunki zawodowe, miasto st. Warszawa,” *Statystyka Polski*, seria C, no. 49, Warsaw 1937, table 10.

163 B. Singer (Regnis), *Moje Nalewki*, Warsaw 1993, p. 11.

164 J. Ławnik, *Represje policyjne wobec ruchu robotniczego 1918–1939*, Warsaw 1979, p. 139.

165 Z. Szczygielski, „Warszawska organizacja KPP: Problemy organizacyjne,” in: *Warszawa II Rzeczypospolitej*, vol. 1, Warsaw 1968, p. 185.

166 Yitskhok Varshavski [= I.B. Singer], “Der yidisher yunger dor in Poyln tsvishn beyde velt-milkhomes,” *Forverts*, July 23, 1944.

middle-class and proletarian, with a numerically small, but important, intelligentsia and wealthy bourgeoisie.”¹⁶⁷ Aside from its variegated social and economic composition, the Warsaw Jewish community was also characterized by linguistic heterogeneity. In the 1931 census, 94.4 % of Jews living in Warsaw listed either Yiddish or Hebrew as their native language (in Poland as a whole, this number was 87.7 %).¹⁶⁸ Of these, 313,199 listed Yiddish¹⁶⁹ and 19,739 listed Hebrew. 19,162 others listed Polish.¹⁷⁰ These data are undoubtedly not entirely accurate: in preparation for the census, Jewish parties and organizations appealed to Jews to list Yiddish or Hebrew as their native language as an expression of ethnic identity, whence this high—and highly unlikely—number of “native Hebrew speakers.”¹⁷¹ In any case, one thing is certain—Yiddish was still the predominant language among Warsaw Jews.

In the 1930s, Warsaw was not only one of the largest centers of the Jewish Diaspora in the world, but one of the greatest centers, if not *the* greatest, of modern Yiddish culture. As Ezra Mendelsohn writes: “Never before in modern Jewish history, and for that matter never again, would this version of autonomous Jewish culture make such deep inroads into Jewish life.”¹⁷² Secular Yiddish culture included journalism, belles-lettres, scholarship, theater and film. Of all the Jewish periodical and irregular publications published in Poland, 36.2 % appeared in Warsaw.¹⁷³ The Yiddish-language press was directly linked to life in the “northern district.” The editorial offices of *Der moment* and *Unzer ekspres* were located on Nalewki Street, of *Haynt* on Chłodna Street, and of the *Folkstsaytung* on Nowolipie Street.¹⁷⁴

167 E. Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars*, Bloomington 1983, p. 27.

168 Sz. Bronsztejn, *Ludność żydowska w Polsce w okresie międzywojennym: Studium statystyczne*, Wrocław–Warsaw–Krakow 1963, pp. 30–31.

169 It is worth noting that of those who declared themselves nonreligious or of indeterminate religion, 412 declared their native language to be Yiddish, and four—Hebrew. “Drugi powszechny spis ludności,” table 10.

170 *Ibid.*

171 Ch. Shmeruk, “Hebrew – Yiddish – Polish: A Trilingual Jewish Culture,” in: *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars*, ed. Y. Gutman et al., Hanover and London 1989, p. 288.

172 Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe*, p. 63.

173 G. Zalewska, *Ludność żydowska w Warszawie w okresie międzywojennym*, Warsaw 1996, p. 179.

174 M. Ravitch, *Dos mayse-bukh fun mayn lebn: Yorn in Varshe 1921–1934*, Tel Aviv 1975, p. 312.

The enormous number of periodicals printed in Yiddish and Hebrew was tangible evidence of the vitality of modern Jewish culture: in 1923, there were 72 such publications in the entire country; fourteen years later, there were already 130.¹⁷⁵ When Polish-language periodicals are taken into account as well, it turns out that of the ethnic minorities living in the Second Republic, the Jewish community had the largest number of press organs. Depending on the language in which they appeared, periodicals fulfilled various functions and reached various types of readers. Zofia Borzymińska and Rafał Żebrowski observe that “Yiddish periodicals were to a great extent defined by the ideology embraced by the editorial board, even when they stressed their ‘official’ nonpartisanship, whereas Polish-language publications were much less partisan. In contrast to the more elite Polish-language Jewish press, this political and ideological involvement on the part of publishers who were particularly close to the broad Jewish masses is an important cultural indicator that marks the difference between segments that were purely from the ‘Jewish street’ and more-or-less Polonized Jewish groups.”¹⁷⁶ Historian Andrzej Paczkowski draws our attention to two traits that characterized the Jewish press: a readership abroad (of course, this was only true in the case of a few periodicals, such as *Haynt*), as well as a high number (compared to other ethnic minorities) of Polish-language periodicals.¹⁷⁷

For the Jewish intellectual elite, Yiddish culture was often a deliberate culture. Yiddish, the mother tongue of many (although not all!) Jewish intellectuals, became their consciously chosen language. Their first attempts at writing literature were often conducted in Hebrew, Polish, or Russian. Their choice of Yiddish as their creative language was an ideological decision, as Zusman Segalowitch recollected: “How silly and pointless the handful of poems I once wrote in Russian now seemed to me. I discarded them from both my memory and my archives... I took the road leading to the *shtetls*.”¹⁷⁸

The choice to write in Yiddish presented various challenges. As I.B. Singer stated, “It was easy to be secular by negating the old way of life, but quite different to be secular in a positive way. Yiddish literature was not at all prepared for that. First of all, the writer’s experience did not extend beyond the Jewish world.

175 A. Paczkowski, *Prasa polska w latach 1918–1939*, Warsaw 1980, p. 344.

176 Z. Borzymińska, R. Żebrowski, *Po-lin: Kultura Żydów polskich w XX wieku (zarys)*, Warsaw 1993, p. 171.

177 Paczkowski, *Prasa polska*, p. 353. For more about Polish-Jewish literature written in Polish, see: E. Prokop-Janiec, *Polish-Jewish Literature in the Interwar Years*, transl. Abe Shenitzer, Syracuse 2003.

178 Z. Segalowitch, *Tlomatske 13: Fun farbrentn nekhtn*, Buenos Aires 1946, p. 63.

Generally speaking, his life's path included: *heder*, the study house, his father's shop, and then Warsaw Jewish circles. Unless he wanted to invent them out of whole cloth, he could not write about peasants, hunters, fishermen, miners, sportsmen, railmen, mechanics, police, the military, ships, airplane pilots, horse racing, universities, literary salons and thousands of other objects and people that made up the secular world. Secondly, the language of the Yiddish writer lacked terms for thousands of the objects and activities that were connected to those professions and entities."¹⁷⁹

However, those creating in Yiddish struggled not only with insufficient experience and vocabulary, but above all with rapidly increasing Polonization. In Chone Shmeruk's opinion, of the three interconnected, mutually influential cultural systems—Polish, Yiddish and Hebrew—the second occupied the most powerful position and had the most developed institutions (literature, press, theater). However, it was threatened by the acculturation of children and the youth: the number of pupils whose first (and sometimes only) language was Polish was steadily growing.¹⁸⁰ Shmeruk also states that aside from in the Soviet Union (which was not an attractive option for everyone), there was no possibility of working in Yiddish outside of Poland.¹⁸¹ His opinion was perhaps overly pessimistic considering the existence of other solid centers of the Diaspora, such as New York and Paris; on the other hand, over the course of two or three generations, these Western centers ultimately underwent nearly total linguistic and cultural assimilation, and the survival of Yiddish culture there, such as it was, was largely thanks to the pre- and postwar flow of emigrants from Eastern Europe. (Despite Shmeruk's positive orientation toward Poland as a center for Yiddish culture, it is possible that a similar degree of gradual assimilation would have taken place in Poland as well if not for the outbreak of the war in 1939.)

Thus, Yiddish culture was booming in 1930s Warsaw, just in time for Dovid Sfar, a graduate of a Polish-language high school and college, bearing a doctorate in philosophy from a French university, to return to Poland and become active on the so-called Jewish street as a Yiddish writer.

179 Y. Bashevis [Singer], "Arum der yidisher literatur in Poyln," *Di tsukunft* 48, no. 8, August 1943, p. 471. Sfar's novella *Vegn tsegeyen zikh* (which I will discuss in detail later in this chapter) reflects the importance of this remark of Singer's.

180 Shmeruk, "Hebrew – Yiddish – Polish," p. 310. For more recent research on this topic see Kamil Kijek, "Between a Love of Poland, Symbolic Violence, and Antisemitism: The Idiosyncratic Effects of the State Education System on Young Jews in Interwar Poland," *Polin* 30, 2018, pp. 237–264.

181 *Ibid.*

In the World of Tomorrow

In 1933, shortly after returning to Poland, Sfard made a definitive ideological declaration by joining the Polish Communist Party (KPP).

His memories of the moment when he adopted the communist ideology are contradictory. In one place, he states that on his way to Nancy, he was already “nearly ripe for the communist idea, much more so emotionally than theoretically”;¹⁸² in another, he writes that communism attracted him intellectually more than emotionally.¹⁸³ Perhaps when he was composing his autobiography, Sfard did not perfectly remember his own state of mind after more than forty years had passed, or perhaps he was trying to minimize his youthful commitment to communism, balancing it out (since he could not deny it) by emphasizing his inner doubts and conflicts. Undoubtedly, his entrance to the Party was a turning point.¹⁸⁴

Much has been written on the subject of Jews in the Communist movement, although no exhaustive scholarly monograph on their presence in the ranks of the KPP has yet been written.¹⁸⁵ The extremely prevalent interwar stereotype of

182 D. Sfard, *Mit zikh un mit andere: Oytobiografye un literarishe eseyen*, Jerusalem 1984 [henceforth: *Mit zikh*], p. 48.

183 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

184 The decision to adopt this new ideology can be understood from a sociological and psychological viewpoint as a sort of conversion experience. “[...A] normal member of society sees himself in various social roles, which he evaluates and categorizes in various ways. A convert is the opposite: as expressed in his autobiography, he deems his role of ‘convert’ to be the most important one, one which determines his identity and plays a deciding role in all social and cultural situations” (J. Kurczewska, “Tożsamość kulturowa jednostki i konwersja ideologiczna (rozważania wstępne),” *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* no.4, 1992, p. 41). This description can be said to characterize Sfard’s case.

185 The following works are worth mentioning: S. Zachariasz, *Di komunistshe bavegung tsvishn der yidisher arbetndiker bafelkerung in Poyln* (Warsaw 1954); T. Berenstein, *KPP in kamfkegn antisemitizm*, Warsaw 1956; J. Schatz, *The Generation: The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Communists of Poland*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–Oxford 1991; idem, “Jews and the Communist Movement in Interwar Poland,” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 20, 2004, pp. 13–37; J. Brun-Zejmis, “National Self-Denial and Marxist Ideology: The Origin of the Communist Movement in Poland and the Jewish Question: 1918–1923,” *Nationalities Papers* 22, supplement no. 1, 1994, pp. 29–54; M. Mishkinsky, “The Communist Party of Poland and the Jews,” in: *The Jews of Poland*, ed. Y. Gutman et al., pp. 56–74; J. Jacobs, “Communist Questions, Jewish Answers: Polish Jewish Dissident Communists of the Inter-War Era,” *Polin* 18, 2005, pp. 369–379. On the role of usually docile ethnic minorities (including Jews) in the revolutionary movement,

“Judeo-Communism” and “Judeo-Bolshevism” proclaimed that it was the Jews who were behind the victory of Bolshevism in Russia and the founding of the Soviet Union. The identification of Jews with Bolshevism was facilitated by the fact that revolutionaries of Jewish origin occupied a number of upper-level positions in the new state—positions that had never before been accessible to them.¹⁸⁶ Communism was discursively linked to the idea of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy (à la *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*); it was supposedly the latest method by which Jews were attempting to take over the world.¹⁸⁷

A significant number of Jews were undoubtedly attracted to the Communist movement. Why? Scholars have suggested nine possible reasons.¹⁸⁸ Below I will enumerate these reasons and describe the extent to which each is descriptive of Sfar’s case.

1. Internationalism.

This is the cause most often cited for the fascination of Jews with communism: the abolition of all forms of ethnic discrimination—i.e., a world without anti-Semitism. As historian Jerzy Holzer writes: “Communist conceptions proposed the elimination of the Jewish problem via the elimination of Jewish distinctiveness and as a result, the fusion of the Jews into the rest of humanity.”¹⁸⁹ The ideal communist world would not recognize any division of the population into Jews and

see M. Kula, “Przedstawiciele mniejszości narodowych wśród rewolucjonistów,” in idem, *Narodowe i rewolucyjne*, London–Warsaw 1991, pp. 175–227. For more recent research, see G. Estraiikh, *In Harness: Yiddish Writers’ Romance with Communism*, Syracuse 2005.

186 In fact, among over sixty high officials in the Polish government and diplomatic corps, only two Jews could be found: Szymon Aszkenazy and Anatol Mühlstein (J.B. Michlic, “Żydokomuna: Anti-Jewish Images and Political Tropes in Modern Poland,” *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* 4, 2005, p. 319).

187 Ibid., pp. 304–305.

188 Of course, in addition to motivations specific to the Jewish community, there were certainly also general human considerations, such as the conviction that liberalism was in crisis or that the revolution was ready for its apotheosis (Cf. M. Hirszowicz, *Pułapki zaangażowania: Intelektualiści w służbie komunizmu*, Warsaw 2001, pp. 51–63).

189 J. Holzer, “Polska i żydowska lewica polityczna w II Rzeczypospolitej: Polacy wobec Żydów i kwestii żydowskiej; Żydzi wobec Polski i Polaków,” in: *Narody: Jak powstawały i jak wybijały się na niepodległość? Profesorowi Tadeuszowi Łepkowskiemu w sześćdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin i czterdziestolecie pracy przyjaciela, koledzy, uczniowie*, ed. M. Kula, Warsaw 1989, p. 438.

non-Jews. In other words, the assimilation of the Jewish population would be assumed, but would take place sometime in the future.¹⁹⁰

This version of internationalism was particularly attractive to Jews who felt stigmatized for their Jewishness and/or identified weakly with the Jewish community (e.g., those who had been raised in nonreligious, assimilated families, had graduated from Polish schools, and did not know Yiddish). According to Julia Brun-Zejmis, the prospect of “neutralizing” their own origin was for some a much more important factor attracting them to Communism than any desire to combat social injustice.¹⁹¹ Historian and sociologist Anna Landau-Czajka in turn suggests that communism appeared to be a path to assimilation into the Polish milieu, and membership in the Polish Communist Party offered a sort of confirmation of having successfully assimilated.¹⁹²

Internationalism also appealed to Jews (and other ethnic minorities) because it offered an ideal that seemed loftier than the prospect of pursuing the more “local” interests of their own ethnic group. Sociologist Maria Hirszowicz points out that the adoption of the communist idea “reflected the desire common to many people for a political identification on behalf of loftier matters and the need to serve transcendent goals that went beyond the pedestrian.”¹⁹³ Hirszowicz also describes the perception of the communist idea as universal, whereas nationalism was considered provincial.¹⁹⁴ This could help to explain why many Jews chose Communism over the Bund: Communism seemed to offer a way out of the Jewish “ghetto.”¹⁹⁵

The KPP illustrated its embrace of internationalism by taking a favorable attitude toward Poland’s ethnic minorities. Aside from the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), the KPP was the only party in Poland to pledge in its program that it would combat anti-Semitism. In the October 1932 draft of its program, we read: “With respect to the oppressed Jewish and German populations, the KPP

190 Ibid.

191 Brun-Zejmis, “National Self-Denial,” p. 29–30.

192 A. Landau-Czajka, *Syn będzie Lech...: Asymilacja Żydów w Polsce międzywojennej*, Warsaw 2006, p. 394.

193 Hirszowicz, *Pułapki zaangażowania*, p. 9.

194 Ibid., p. 231.

195 C.f. the statement of one of Hirszowicz’s respondents: “Before the war, when I was 15 or 16 years old, there were two paths before me: one—to go to Palestine and make the desert bloom, the other—to do something to make it possible to live here. This second possibility meant either the Bund or Communism. My sister explained to me that socialism could not be established by means of the ballot box” (ibid., p. 153).

opposes all policies of oppression and violence, of legal and social, cultural and linguistic restrictions. The victory of the Polish proletariat will mean complete political and social equality for ethnic minorities, and the right of ethnic minorities to use their native language at school, in court and in government offices.”¹⁹⁶

To Jews this sounded promising, although it is worth remembering that in the KPP, Polish and Jewish nationalisms were placed on the same plane, without attention to the obvious differences between them.¹⁹⁷ Distrust of “Jewish nationalism” sometimes even led to contempt for Jewish linguistic and cultural distinctiveness.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, the official party line did not always guide the attitudes and behaviors of the rank and file.¹⁹⁹

2. Development of Jewish culture in the USSR.

Some Jews interpreted internationalism not in terms of an open door to assimilation, but rather as a promise of equal rights and government protection and support for the development of Jewish culture per se. To be sure, according to Joseph Stalin’s definition, the Jews did not make up a nation; but it could not be denied that Soviet Jews enjoyed the freedom to develop a distinct Jewish culture in their own language, Yiddish.²⁰⁰ The USSR in the 1920s was the only country in the world where Jewish schools, newspapers, and publications were financed by the state, and where public academic institutions had Yiddish departments. Yiddish cultural life in the USSR peaked in the early 1930s.²⁰¹ For someone like Sfar, who identified strongly with Jewishness and Yiddish culture, and who was not only a consumer but also a producer of this culture, this was a very attractive aspect of the Communist Party.²⁰²

196 H. Cimek, *Komuniści a Polska (1918–1939)*, Warsaw 1989, p. 228.

197 Mishkinsky, “The Communist Party of Poland and the Jews,” p. 70.

198 L. Gamska, “KPP wobec problemów kulturalno-oświatowych ludności żydowskiej w okresie od I Zjazdu do IV Konferencji,” *BŻIH* no. 3 (103), 1977, p. 44.

199 Ester Rosenthal-Shneiderman eloquently entitled one of the subchapters of her memoirs, dedicated to Jews in the KPP, “Izolirt” (Isolated). See E. Rosenthal-Shneiderman, *Oyf vegn un umvegn*, vol. 1, Tel Aviv 1974, pp. 490–494.

200 In his 1913 essay “Marxism and the National Question,” Stalin defined a nation as “a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture.” Quoted in: D. Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture, 1918–1930*, Cambridge 2004, p. 16.

201 Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture*, p. 12.

202 Interestingly, the success of Yiddish culture in the USSR ran counter to Lenin’s stance, that Jewish popular culture was the “slogan of the rabbis and the bourgeoisie” (see *ibid.*, p. 17).

3. The fascist threat.

This was certainly an essential motivation for those Jews who, like Sfar, joined the Party in the 1930s, after Adolf Hitler had come to power in Germany, and a polarization of pro- and anti-fascist forces was underway throughout Europe. Many intellectuals felt that only Communism could stand up to the growing strength of fascism. This perhaps explains why Sfar did not choose to join the Bund even though it linked socialism with the Yiddish culture that was so dear to his heart. The Communist movement, which had the support and backing of a country as enormous as the Soviet Union, appeared to be the best guarantee for the future.

4. Rebellion against tradition.

Alain Brossat and Sylvia Klingberg characterize the traditional Jewish family in Eastern Europe as a “microcosm” that was divided by the tensions and conflicts that divided all of Yiddishland.²⁰³ Sfar’s generation of Jewish Communists—born before World War I—were raised in traditional homes, where traditional learning and religious observance were emphasized. Choosing the communist idea, and leaving religion and tradition behind in the process, was a form of rebellion by children against their parents. However, according to Jaff Schatz, prewar Jewish members of the KPP were characterized by a high level of engagement and dedication, complete commitment to the cause, and fervor in ideological conversations that reflected “the heritage of the shtetl” and the pious ethos of the traditional Jewish world that they had left behind.²⁰⁴ Alain Besançon also describes the ways in which communism served as a “replacement” or alternative outlet for traditional religious values and aspirations: “Communism promised Jews that it would eliminate the burden of the commandments, the hedge of the Torah, as well as end their separation from the nations. [...] Communism was thus an entry into a new world that did not require formal treason or apostasy, since the religious goal of the Torah—peace and justice—was supposed to be guaranteed. The Jewish community, moreover, could continue to exist ideally. The name ‘Jew’ could be carried without shame. No longer involving a particular responsibility or special obligation, it would simply mark a glorious origin, since as an oppressed people, the Jews were related to the ‘proletariat.’”²⁰⁵

203 A. Brossat, S. Klingberg, *Le Yiddishland révolutionnaire*, Paris 1983, p. 54.

204 Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 46.

205 A. Besançon, *A Century of Horrors: Communism, Nazism, and the Uniqueness of the Shoah*, transl. R. C. Hancock and N. H. Hancock, Wilmington 2007, p. 64–65.

5. Messianism.

The Marxist vision of a new, better world echoes the messianic idea that is so deeply rooted in Judaism. “The essence of the messianic idea,” writes Jaff Schatz, “is a yearning for redemption, both for Jews and for the whole of mankind. Jewish messianism is this-worldly [...]. Redemption is understood as peace, justice, harmony and perfection, for both the individual and society. The golden age is thus not in the past but in the future.”²⁰⁶ Just as Zionism is in some ways an attempt to realize the messianic idea in the Jewish dimension, communism attempts to realize it on the universal plane. The messianic idea is also bound up with the kabbalistic conception of *tikkun olam*, in which people and God work together to repair the world. Likewise, a revolutionary movement requires personal engagement.

6. Revolutionary avant-garde.

Joining the Communist movement in the interwar period—in contrast to the postwar years—meant giving up a comfortable life. As Stefan Staszewski, a high Party official in postwar Poland, said to journalist Teresa Torańska: “[T]hese people who joined the Party with me before the war, a time hardly favourable to the making of a career, weren’t looking for positions or a better life in it. At that time, by the very fact of joining the Party they were manifestly jeopardizing their careers and their existence... These people were locked up in prisons, expelled from their studies, dismissed from their work, and very often they sacrificed their personal happiness in order to be able to realize their aims and ideas.”²⁰⁷

The high emotional costs were repaid by the conviction that this was the avant-garde of the revolution, the first to spot the approaching Messiah on the horizon. One KPP activist, Maria Kamińska, wrote in her memoirs:

“Is there, can there be anyone who is happier than we?—we asked ourselves. We are struggling, and we see a vision of humanity emancipated. We know what we are living for. Personal abnegation under these conditions is insignificant to us. No philistine can understand this. How odd are those who are swarming around us, feverishly chasing after profits, positions and honors, corroded by ambition, accustomed to hypocrisy and baseness, wasting their lives. We have rejected all this, we are in a sense living in the world of tomorrow, we follow different ethics, different ideals.”²⁰⁸

206 Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 39.

207 T. Torańska, “*Them*”: *Stalin’s Polish Puppets*, transl. Agnieszka Kołakowska, New York 1987, p. 129.

208 M. Kamińska, *Ścieżkami wspomnień*, Warsaw 1960, p. 312.

Sfard felt similarly. After an initial period of indignation at the supposed egoism of the friends who did not join the Party, his attitude changed: “I began to enjoy the fact that I was not like them, that I had the courage to take risks for an idea, to fight for the common good.”²⁰⁹ This attitude undoubtedly had elements of a cult mentality: it was nourished by a sense of conspiracy, by the closed environment in which everyone knew and trusted each other, as well as by the requirement of absolute obedience to the Party and its leaders, which Aleksander Wat compared to the “cult of a rabbi or a Tsadik.”²¹⁰

This withdrawal from the hostile outside world caused Party members to miss some information—in particular the news of negative developments in the Soviet Union—and perhaps it was not until they reached the end of the road that they realized what a tiny island they had created in the sea of society, whether Polish or Jewish.²¹¹ Celina Budzyńska explained this to Teresa Torańska:

We did, of course, read the press, we heard various information, but this did not help us escape from our closed little world. For from our youth onwards, we had spent all our time within our own circle. Naturally, we went to the factory and attended mass meetings, but basically we only knew our milieu of Party activists, a milieu that was narrow and, for confidentiality's sake, nearly completely closed. Living before the war in a country where we were illegals [i.e. members of an illegal party] or serving time in prison, we also had limited access to information and had no choice but to make do with the limited information that was fed to us. I myself remember that while I was in jail, I found out that some boys had demonstrated on Okopowa, Pawia or Dzielna Street, and I thought that the revolution was about to begin. This was the kind of distortion that helped people living in isolation to take heart.²¹²

Judging by the memoirs of Hersh Mendel, this was not just a “distortion” designed to “help people take heart,” but a Party tactic ordained from above. “Not a week went by when we were not summoned to a general strike,” Mendel writes. “A handful of young Jews participated. We were forced to act in this comedy in

209 *Mit zikh*, p. 56.

210 A. Wat, *My Century: The Odyssey of a Polish Intellectual*, ed. and transl. Richard Lourie, Berkeley 1988, p. 42.

211 The memoirs of contemporary members of the KPP illustrate this point: the same names repeat again and again, which attests to the fact that this was numerically quite a small circle.

212 T. Torańska, *Oni*, Warsaw 2004, p. 40. The interview with Celina Budzyńska is not included in the English edition of Torańska's book. Cf. the remark in Maria Kamińska's memoirs on the number of participants at Party meetings: “It was often very crowded in the district Party cell—I remember a meeting with 20–25 people in attendance” (Kamińska, *Ścieżkami wspomnień*, p. 293).

order to apply Stalin's theory according to which the first very good strike could be transformed into armed rebellion."²¹³

7. The minority experience.

In addition to the attraction of belonging to a small, politically elite vanguard, the prospect of taking on an identity as members of a political and ideological minority did not provoke any particular discomfort for members of ethnic minorities (including Jews), since they were used to being perceived as “different,” “foreign,” “worse.” Historian Marcin Kula writes:

Minority groups are often less bound by the moral obligations engendered by the norms of the dominant society [...]. In general, minorities have much in common with those on the margins, at least psychologically, in comparison to the center of society, and contesting the system often begins on the margins. [...] By the nature of things, minority groups live in cultural borderlands. [...] His multicultural experience favors a different worldview—an alternative vision is the basis of every revolutionary stance. A person who is becoming a revolutionary must question many things that are considered natural.²¹⁴

Engagement in a revolutionary movement can act as a mechanism of compensation, since it is easier to put up with disdain for and incomprehension of choices we have deliberately made than with rejection due to factors that are out of our control (such as ethnic or social background). What's more, as Marcin Kula notes, members of minority groups often must put in more effort than members of the majority group in order to realize their plans and aspirations; as such, the added burden of embracing a marginal political identity does not appear prohibitive, since it amounts to merely one among many hurdles which minority group members must face.²¹⁵

In the Second Polish Republic, members of minority groups experienced hopelessness, especially after 1935, when Polish nationalist phraseology dominated political life. Among the ethnic minorities, Jews were most affected. Assimilation was no longer an acceptable solution to the “Jewish problem”; thus, the popularity of both Jewish nationalist movements (the Bund, Zionism) and radical ones (Communism) increased. Jerzy Szacki, writing about utopianism, remarked: “An ideal that is completely antithetical to the given social reality becomes attractive only when one begins to doubt that it is possible to

213 H. Mendel, *Mémoires d'un révolutionnaire juif*, Grenoble 1982, p. 302.

214 Kula, *Narodowe i rewolucyjne*, p. 203–205.

215 *Ibid.*, p. 205.

live a better life under the current circumstances [...].”²¹⁶ In addition, the Soviet promise to eliminate unemployment, according to Julian Strykowski, had a particularly strong influence on the Jewish intelligentsia.²¹⁷

8. The urge to bring order to the world.

The Jewish youth in interwar Poland were highly engaged in politics, whatever the strand. Ezra Mendelsohn characterizes the attraction to politics as a reaction to the new and difficult situation in which Jews found themselves after the collapse of the Russian Empire. Belonging to a political party enabled them to take control of chaos, gave life meaning and purpose, caused the world to be predictable again. Belonging to the Communist Party particularly enabled them to refuse the stereotype of the defenseless, weak Jew—the perpetual victim—and to feel a part of a powerful supranational movement. “The weak are ideal candidates for internationalism,” Mendelsohn concludes.²¹⁸

Joining the Party evinced mixed feelings in Sfar: on the one hand, “satisfaction that I had become an organic part of a great army that was to conquer the world,” on the other—a feeling of “losing my personal freedom.”²¹⁹ Sfar’s choice to join the Party may also have been a reaction to the chaos that he experienced in his childhood and early youth due to the war and pogroms, as well as a result of his awareness of social inequalities that he wanted to correct, combined with the uncompromising desire to repair the world that is typical of youth.

9. The complex of the intellectual.

Marcin Kula writes that groups with high aspirations who encounter obstacles on their way are most likely to choose the revolutionary path.²²⁰ The idea of fighting for social justice and emancipation, for a better future for the underprivileged, particularly appealed to Jewish intellectuals, who identified simultaneously as victims of discrimination and, in some cases, as members of the privileged classes. Those who belonged to well-to-do, non-proletarian families sought out “real proletarians” in the hopes that the latter would teach them perseverance

216 J. Szacki, *Spotkania z utopią* (Warsaw 2000), p. 165.

217 *Ocalony na Wschodzie: Z Julianem Strykowskim rozmawia Piotr Szewc*, Montricher 1991, p. 73.

218 E. Mendelsohn, “Reflections on East European Jewish Politics in the Twentieth Century,” *YIVO Annual* 20, 1991, p. 32.

219 *Mit zikh*, p. 55.

220 Kula, *Narodowe i rewolucyjne*, p. 191.

and fortitude.²²¹ This sentiment was mirrored by Communist stereotypes of the intellectual. Renata Tulli writes:

In accordance with this stereotype, the intellectual is an individualist, unsuited for teamwork, undisciplined, has anarchistic tendencies, is indecisive, tends to vacillate and ruminate about the past, is an undependable opportunist because he is soft and recoils from action. [...] The fear of being accused of being an intellectual manifested itself in a certain external style [...], but incomparably more important was internal self-control—the effort not to vacillate, not to break down, not to stand out, to be a fighter, an uncompromising, firm and worthy comrade to the workers in their revolutionary struggle. This anti-intellectual complex of Party intellectuals caused them to lack self-confidence, to avoid deciding individually on matters within the orbit of Party concerns, to be their own and each other's harshest critics.²²²

Intellectuals like Sford were attracted to the idea of participating in an illegal, supranational revolutionary movement, because it promised to take them out of their intellectual complexes (which they saw as a sign of weakness) and into the realm of action. An anecdote can serve to illustrate this extreme self-consciousness and the sense of exaggerated personal risk which accompanied it: a few days after joining the Party, Sford was instructed to go immediately to Falenica, a small town next to Warsaw, to deliver a lecture on Maxim Gorky. He went there convinced that he would be arrested on the way back. A nervous wreck, he took the wrong train, and instead of returning to Warsaw, he found himself ... in Lublin. When he finally arrived home after midnight, his room was filled with friends and acquaintances, all very amused by his unfortunate adventure.²²³

It is difficult to say which of the aforementioned motifs played the most important role in leading Sford to join the Communist Party. In an essay which he wrote after settling in Israel, he indicated that the ideological stances of Jewish intellectuals in Poland were influenced by their experiences of social, political and economic discrimination; political literature promising social and ethnic equality; and ethical principles learned from their families, especially faith in the prospect of achieving ethical perfection, which many members of Sford's

221 This motif repeats throughout the memoirs of Maria Kamińska (cited above), who was born into a wealthy family of assimilated industrialists. On intellectuals' fascination with Communism, see also: D. Cauter, *The Fellow-Travelers: Intellectual Friends of Communism* (New Haven and London 1988).

222 R. Tulli, "Przesłanki adaptacji intelektualisty partyjnego do stalinizmu," *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, no. 2, 1995, p. 90.

223 *Mit zikh*, p. 55.

generation attempted to pursue by becoming Communists.²²⁴ The array of reasons which he identifies here can perhaps be assumed to be a prioritized list of his own motivations.

Despite the widespread stereotype, the choice of communist ideology in Jewish circles in the 1920s and 1930s was not a matter of course.²²⁵ The numerical data available are highly inaccurate due to the illegality of KPP activities, but I will provide them here nevertheless for the purposes of partial orientation.

Zbigniew Szczygielski estimates that in 1931, Poles made up 75 % of Party members, Jews 22 %, and other ethnic groups, including Ukrainians—3 %.²²⁶ The KPP estimated that the number of members of all Communist organizations in interwar Poland in that year was 21,400.²²⁷ Jaff Schatz hypothesizes that Jews made up between one quarter and one third of the entire Communist movement (including youth organizations), i.e., between 5,000 and 8,500 members.²²⁸

However, the relatively high percentage of Jewish members in the Communist Party was not mirrored by the interest that the Party elicited within the Jewish community. According to the research of Jeffrey S. Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg, who analyzed the results of the 1928 Sejm elections (the best year ever for the Communists as far as number of seats won), barely 14 % of votes for Communist candidates were cast by Jews, and about 93 % of Jews voted for non-Communists.²²⁹ These data are further evidence that the Communist Party had much less influence within the Jewish milieu in Poland than was and is commonly thought.

224 D. Sfar, “Di groyse antoyshung,” in: *Tsuzamen*, ed. S.L. Shneiderman, Tel Aviv 1974, p. 347.

225 In conversation with Ruta Pragier, historian Żanna Kormanowa remarked on some of the reasons for this stereotype: “[We must keep in mind] that the successors of the KPP took charge of the country, and thus after the war, representatives of this political orientation convened openly in conspicuous places. In contrast, the masses of people who had belonged to the PPS and the Bund—not to mention conservative political groups—perished in the Holocaust or left Poland, and those who stayed behind were simply invisible” (R. Pragier, *Żydzi czy Polacy*, Warsaw 1992, p. 99).

226 Z. Szczygielski, *Członkowie KPP 1918–1938 w świetle badań ankietowych*, Warsaw 1989, p. 90; J. Auerbach, “Niektóre zagadnienia działalności KPP w środowisku żydowskim w latach kryzysu (1929–1933),” *BŻIH*, 1965 no. 3 (55), p. 42.

227 J. Ławnik, *Represje policyjne*, p. 135.

228 Schatz, “Jews and the Communist Movement,” p. 20.

229 J.S. Kopstein, J. Wittenberg, “Who Voted Communist? Reconsidering the Social Bases of Radicalism in Interwar Poland,” *Slavic Review* no. 1, 2003, p. 106.

Those to Whom the Future Belongs

After arriving in Warsaw, Sfard and Elbirt joined forces with a group of Jewish writers with left-wing politics.²³⁰ Among others, this “left-wing writers’ group” (also referred to in the literature as “the revolutionary writers’ group”) included Bernard Mark, Dovid Richter, Dovid Mitsmakher, Moyshe Levin, Moyshe Shulshteyn, Binem Heller, and Michał Mirski. The group came into being in about 1931, but most of its members did not join the KPP until 1933.²³¹ In general, though, they were not members of the Jewish proletariat—quite the contrary, which, as Sfard noted, only intensified their Party orthodoxy.²³² The Central Jewish Bureau (CBŻ) of the KPP contentedly announced in its reports: “The group, although not yet politically mature, is nevertheless a healthy precursor to a group of proletarian writers. [...] The merit of this group is that it is aware of its defects and demonstrates great ambition regarding its Marxist development. Several attempts have been made to bring them closer to the workers. [...] This group reflects the serious success of our ideas in the Jewish milieu.” In its conclusion, the report affirms that the Bureau must keep in close contact with the left-wing writers and reinforce their “proletarian-Marxist education.”²³³

The group’s informal organ was the magazine *Literaryshe tribune* (Literary Tribune). It was founded in 1930 by two employees of the Łódź branch of the Warsaw bookstore “Książka” (Book): Jakub Eisenman (Ajzenman), known as “Janek” (a member of the KPP) and Itsik Markowicz (or Markiewicz).²³⁴ Eisenman played the role of managing editor and publisher. The editorial offices were located in Łódź. After a few issues, the magazine came under the auspices of the CBŻ of the KPP; its administration remained in Łódź, but the editorial offices moved to Warsaw.

230 To the best of my knowledge, no monograph has yet been written about the “left-wing writers’ group”; the only source on the subject is the memoirs of former members (especially Mark’s article, “*Literaryshe Trybune* i Thomackie 13,” in: *Księga wspomnień 1919–1939*, Warsaw 1960, p. 223–251), as well as Perla Zelman’s master’s thesis, “Ideologiczne oblicze pisma *Literaryshe Trybune* (Żydowskiego czasopisma społeczno-literackiego, wychodzącego w Polsce w latach 1930–1934),” written in 1951 under the direction of Żanna Kormanowa (AAN, Papers of Żanna Kormanowa, call no. 361).

231 Zelman, “Ideologiczne oblicze,” p. 19.

232 E.g., “[...M]ost of them came from bourgeois families, whether poor or wealthy; the coherence of their Party stance and their degree of zealotry about the Party did not always go hand in hand with their roots” (*Mit zikh*, p. 53).

233 AAN, KPP, CBŻ, call no. 158/X-2, vol. 30, p. 11, “Information on the state of the work among Jews in Warsaw,” September–December 1931.

234 Zelman employs both spellings of his name (“Ideologiczne oblicze,” pp. 21–23).

The editorial secretary was Isaac Deutscher, who wrote under the pseudonym “Krakowski”; Hersh Mendel supervised the magazine of behalf of the CBŻ.²³⁵ The *Literarische tribune* began as a monthly magazine, but by January 1933 it became a biweekly publication with a length of 16–20 pages. It contained political and sociopolitical columns, literary criticism, poetry, short stories and field reports. The editors characterized the magazine as follows:

This is the only magazine—among Jews—that addresses cultural and literary questions from a proletarian, class-conscious point of view, the only tribune for bold Marxist thought that sheds light on the aforementioned questions in a manner closely tied to the general struggle of the working class. Our magazine wages ceaseless, uncompromising battle against the fascisization of culture, against general Jewish bourgeois ideology, with which the bourgeois and ‘socialist’ literature and press are trying to poison the working masses. The *Literarische tribune* is also the only rallying point for young proletarian writers who serve the oppressed, battling class with their work.²³⁶

The Jewish literary milieu was quite critical of the new magazine. In May 1932, well-known writer Aaron Zeitlin stated in a private letter: “Warsaw has become the seat of scribblers now that the parties—the Bund, the Communists—have taken, or decided to take, control of literature in Poland. Their publications—*Vokhnskrift*, *Literarische tribune*—are real refuges of ignorance, irresponsibility and verbal extortion.”²³⁷

The *Literarische tribune* emerged at a time when the role of the Soviet Union’s Russian Proletarian Writers’ Union (RAPP) was under discussion. In theory, the RAPP was supposed to apply Party policy to literature, but in practice it created a climate of terror. As Mark recalled, under the influence of RAPP ideology, attempts to divide writers into those closer to the proletariat (so-called proletarian) and further from it (so-called revolutionary) edged toward absurdity: “It got to the point where we were deliberating whether Heller was a proletarian writer or just a revolutionary one.”²³⁸ The absurdity of this question rested on the fact that Binem Heller, a talented poet, was one of the few in the “left-wing writers’ group” who, as a child of a poor Warsaw Jewish family and a glovemaker by profession, could boast of “the right” class background from the Party’s perspective.

235 Ibid., p. 24; Mendel, *Mémoires d’un révolutionnaire juif*, p. 309.

236 “Tsu di lezer un fraynt fun der *Literarisher tribune!*”, *Literarische tribune* no. 3, 1932, p. 1.

237 Letter from A. Zeitlin to A. Liesin, May 6, 1932, reprinted in: Y. Szeintuch, *Be-reshut ha-rabim uve-reshut ha-yahid*: Aaron Zeitlin ve-sifrut yidish, ed. C. Friedman-Cohen, Jerusalem 2000, p. 165.

238 Mark, “*Literarysze Trybune*,” pp. 242–243.

At the same time, a conflict flared up between Party authorities and Isaac Deutscher, who was becoming more and more critical of Stalin.²³⁹ The ultimate battlefield was the *Literarische tribune*. In order to mislead the censors, the *Literarische tribune* was typeset in the city of Piotrków Trybunalski, but printed in Łódź. Some copies were squirreled away as soon as they emerged from the printing press, so that even if the print run was confiscated, a portion of it would evade disposal.²⁴⁰ Jakub Eisenman was present at the typesetting of every issue. Once, when Eisenman had gone back to Łódź after an issue was prepared, one of Deutscher's colleagues, Yoshke Rabinowicz, went to Piotrków Trybunalski, tossed out a portion of the type that had already been set, and inserted an article by Deutscher entitled "Di gefar fun kultur-barbarizm in Daytshland" (The Danger of Cultural Barbarism in Germany).²⁴¹ In this article, Deutscher recommended that Communist and social-democratic movements in Germany join forces against the threat of fascism. In the next issue, a rebuttal by Moyshe Levin was published in which it was categorically stated that "the entire article and conception of A. Krakowski [i.e., Deutscher] are thoroughly false, harmful and anti-proletarian." This rebuttal was necessary because at this time, the theory of so-called social fascism was obligatory in the KPP. The theory stated that only the KPP represented the interests of the proletariat, whereas all other parties were actually in cahoots with fascism and the bourgeoisie. The rebuttal stressed that Deutscher's article was published behind the backs of the editors and that the author alone was responsible for its content.²⁴² A resolution in the same spirit as Levin's rebuttal was adopted by the CBŻ on the subject of Deutscher's article.²⁴³ Deutscher, Rabinowicz and Mendel were expelled from the Party on charges of Trotskyism.²⁴⁴

239 On Deutscher's ideological transformation, see D. Singer, "Armed with a Pen: Notes for a Political Portrait of Isaac Deutscher," in: *Isaac Deutscher: The Man and His Work*, ed. D. Horowitz, London 1971, pp. 27–30.

240 Zelman, "Ideologiczne oblicze," p. 31.

241 A. Krakowski [Isaac Deutscher], "Di gefar fun kultur-barbarizm in Daytshland," *Literarische tribune* no. 7, 1932, pp. 1–4.

242 M. Levi [Moyshe Levin], "Tsu der frage fun 'kultur-barbarizm in Daytshland' (oyfn rand fun kh. Krakovskis artikl in forikn num. *Lit. tribune*)," *Literarische tribune* no. 8, 1932, pp. 3–8.

243 AAN, KPP, CBŻ, call no. 158/X-2, vol. 6, p. 47–50.

244 Zelman, "Ideologiczne oblicze," p. 26. For more on the so-called Trotskyist opposition within the Party, see J. Jacobs, "Communist Questions, Jewish Answers: Polish Jewish Dissident Communists of the Inter-War Era," *Polin* 18, 2005, pp. 369–379.

In the wake of this conflict, Moyshe Levin and Dovid Richter took control of the *Literarische tribune* on behalf of the Party, and Bernard Mark became the editorial secretary. In addition, Michał Mirski, Hersh Zolotov and Binem Heller joined the editorial board. Ideological and theoretical articles were vetted by the CBŻ; in purely literary matters, the editors had a free hand.²⁴⁵

The KPP exploited the magazine as a “legal theoretical publication, from time to time inserting both fragments of works by Lenin and other renowned theoreticians of the movement (obviously, under a wide range of pseudonyms) and long new theoretical articles on Zionism, Bundism, the history of the labor movement, the essence of fascism, etc.”²⁴⁶ The leading authors of the theoretical articles were Levin and Richter. Both Sfard and Mark recalled years later that Levin was usually gruff, unapproachable and gloomy.²⁴⁷ However, he did have a phenomenal memory. One of the contributors to the *Literarische tribune*, Jan Man, related: “Moyshe Levin arrived, and we went to see a typesetter who lived adjacent to the same courtyard as I did. On the way there, I asked him if he had brought the material, as I assumed he had—and he sat down [at the typesetter’s] and wrote out the entire issue from memory. He had not brought a physical copy, because he was afraid to carry the material on his person. I thought that the result would be a mess, since after all, every issue of the newspaper included articles, notices, and reports from various cities, but in the end, what he came up with [was diverse in style and] did not at all look like the work of one single person. Phenomenal. He read over the proofs, said goodbye, and left.”²⁴⁸

Sfard recalled that Levin’s chilly temperament thawed only when someone managed to persuade him to reminisce about Palestine, where he had lived for a few years: “He spoke of the landscape [there] sentimentally, even tenderly; he described its specific beauty, and yet he could not stand to live there, because he had missed the green Polish meadows.”²⁴⁹

245 Zelman, “Ideologiczne oblicze,” p. 28.

246 Mark, “*Literarysze Trybune*,” p. 240.

247 Ibid.; D. Sfard, “Eynike zikhroynes un kharakter-shtrikhn,” in: *Unter der fon fun KPP: Zamlbukh*, ed. H. Goldfinger et al., Warsaw 1959, p. 125.

248 Testimony of Jan Man, April 30, 1964, AŻIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 187, unpaginated. According to Mark, Levin “could quote Marx and Lenin by heart for hours” (“*Literarysze Trybune*,” p. 240).

249 Sfard, “Eynike zikhroynes,” p. 127.

Dovid Richter, a member of the Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania as of 1915, had a completely different personality. As Mark writes: “He stood out for his great intelligence, quick wit and sense of humor. At the same time, he was not a bad writer at all. [...] He had in him much of the charm of a bohemian artist.”²⁵⁰ Indeed, the artistically talented Richter amused himself during long Party meetings by drawing flowers, landscapes and portraits of famous Marxists. He also displayed erudition in traditional Jewish genres—Szymon Zachariasz remembered him quoting whole passages from Maimonides’s commentaries from memory.²⁵¹

Other writers for the *Literarische tribune* included Khlavne Kagan, Moyshe Shulshteyn, Dovid Mitsmakher, Leon Baumgarten, Jakub Waserman, Zalmen Elbirt and Dovid Sfard, who published there under the pseudonyms “Ander” and “Ashkenazi.”²⁵² As A. Ander, he published, e.g., an article about Chaim Nachman Bialik as the “class ideologue of the Jewish bourgeoisie.”²⁵³ His belletristic works from that time period are more difficult to find. In the *Literarische tribune* I found only a single short story published under his real name, entitled “Zakhar.” It is less naturalistic and more didactic than the short story published in *Shprotsungen*. Here is a characteristic fragment:

“Now you see,” Grinka became even more heated, “like this, we’ll all perish [...] We can only resist together.”

A shadow passed over Zakhar’s face.

“And the Yids too?”—he asked.

Grinka’s voice suddenly became remonstrative.

“Don’t talk that way, Zakhar, you shouldn’t talk that way. You’ll see later how they’ve fooled us. Among the Jews, there are also the same Dmitris, Zakhars and Grinkas. Don’t judge them all based on one of them. [...] You’ll see later how the priests [...] have tricked you and others.”²⁵⁴

250 Mark, “*Literarysze Trybune*,” p. 240.

251 S. Zachariasz, *Mentshn fun KPP*, Warsaw 1964, pp. 13–14.

252 Testimony of Dovid Sfard, April 24, 1964, AŽIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 193, unpaginated. The choice of a pseudonym like “Ashkenazi” is unsurprising: many writers for the *Literarische tribune*, and later for *Fraynd*, used widespread Jewish family names as pseudonyms, and it is intended, perhaps, to hint at Sfard’s identity insofar as it offers a parallel to his real name (Sfard, = Sephardi). In contrast, “Ander” (meaning “other” in Yiddish) suggests an eagerness to argue a non-Orthodox position or to refuse to submit to public opinion – or at least, that was how Moyshe Levin interpreted it; see: *Mit zikh*, p. 53.

253 A. Ander [D. Sfard], “Khayem Nakhmen Bialik: Der ‘meshoyrer’ un ‘novi’ fun der yidisher burzhuazye,” *Literarische tribune* no. 4, 1933, pp. 1–3.

254 A.D. Sfard, “Zakhar,” *Literarische tribune* no. 3, 1932, p. 10.

Judging from the surviving issues, the editors aspired to teach their readers what true proletarian literature was and how to recognize it. Traces of this aim can be spied in responses (printed in the magazine) to authors who had submitted work for publication: “Lurkin, Łódź: Your poem ‘Royte fener’ [Red flags] has a rev[olutionary] orientation, but on the whole is very weak. [...] Sh. K., L.: The thing is thoroughly sentimental, although it touches on the Red Army. We will not use it.” One of the letter writers (“a metal worker” from Bialystok) was advised in no uncertain terms: “No, we’ll tell you in a friendly way: don’t write anymore!”²⁵⁵

Much space and attention were devoted to the cultural policy of the Soviet Union. Texts by Soviet authors (Maxim Gorky, Dovid Bergelson, Izi Kharik, Itsik Fefer) were represented. Cultural events in the USSR were carefully noted, e.g., Bergelson’s return to the country.²⁵⁶ After the YIVO conference in Vilna in 1931 on the establishment of a standard orthography for Yiddish, the matter of orthographic reform was heatedly discussed. In the USSR in the 1920s, the obligatory use of the phonetic spelling for Yiddish words of Hebrew origin (unlike in standard Yiddish, where they are spelled in accordance with Hebrew orthography) was introduced. According to the reformers, Hebraisms spelled in the traditional way were an obscurantist expression of the dominance over the Jewish proletariat on the part of the upper classes; moreover, they reflected the influence of centuries-long religious education. The *Literarische tribune* repeated this argument in numerous articles. The “upper classes” meant the Jewish bourgeoisie and “clerics” (i.e., rabbis). M. Levi (Moyshe Levin) called Hebraisms “the class weapon of the bourgeoisie,”²⁵⁷ and Itsik Kapelusznik averred: “Hebrew words are an organic ingredient of ‘holiness,’ and their source is exclusively in Jewish clericalism; [...] likewise they serve to cause the masses to adhere to religion. [...] With the disappearance of religion from the life of Jewish workers, the concepts and expressions connected with it will disappear as well.”²⁵⁸ The Soviet model of Yiddish orthography was used in the *Literarische tribune* (although apparently inconsistently).²⁵⁹

255 *Literarische tribune* no. 2, 1932, p. 16; no. 12, p. 20.

256 “Dovid Bergelson zikh bazetst in Ratn-farband,” *Literarische tribune*, 1931, no. 23, pp. 14–15.

257 M. Levi, “Der hebraizm – a klasn-gever fun der burzhuazye,” *Literarische tribune*, 1931, no. 20, pp. 1–3.

258 Itsik Kapelusznik (Lviv), “Tsi bloyz reformirn dem oysleyg?,” *Literarische tribune*, 1931, no. 18–19, p. 21.

259 It should be noted that the use of phonetic spellings of Hebraisms did not necessarily indicate pro-Communist sympathies and was practiced for other reasons by some poetic schools, including Yung Vilne and Inzikh.

In 1932, a special “Polish” issue of the magazine was published, offering the literary production of left-wing Polish writers (including Leon Kruczkowski, Władysław Broniewski, and Witold Wandurski) in Yiddish translation. This apparently made a great impression on readers, especially those living outside major urban areas, where, according to Jan Man, the issue enabled Jewish Communists to feel that “they were not completely shut up in a ghetto in their towns, that there were Polish comrades who sympathized with our movement, etc.”²⁶⁰

Unfortunately, we do not have any reliable estimates of the circulation of the *Literarische tribune*. The editors themselves supposedly estimated the number of readers to be at least ten thousand.²⁶¹ Mark claims that the circulation was several thousand,²⁶² which would be impressive if true, considering that in 1933, the central Party organ, the illegal *Czerwony Sztandar* [Red Flag], had a circulation of four thousand.²⁶³ The number of readers of the *Literarische tribune* may have been quite a bit larger than the number of subscribers: the editors claimed that each copy was read by at least ten people. As Mark describes, “In almost every city and town, the [Jewish] workers created a press committee. Every day, the editorial offices were inundated with dozens, sometimes even hundreds of letters.”²⁶⁴ It is very possible that both Sfarid and Mark overestimated the popularity of the *Literarische tribune*, idealizing in later years the earliest period of their Party membership. Mark put it lyrically: “The period of the *Literarische tribune*—these were the years of our ‘Sturm und Drang.’ We felt the support and sympathy of the Jewish proletariat. When we went out in the evening into the streets of the northern district [of Warsaw] and saw the [Jewish] workers standing around engaged in discussion—amidst the throngs of people, we felt ourselves to be co-owners of the street, we felt like people to whom the future belonged.”²⁶⁵

260 Testimony of Jan Man, April 30, 1964, AŻIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 187, unpaginated. This reaction suggests that Jews were an emphatic majority in provincial Communist circles, with negligible opportunity for contact with Polish Communists.

261 Testimony of Bernard Mark, April 24, 1964, AŻIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 188, unpaginated.

262 Mark, “*Literarysze Trybune*,” p. 244.

263 M. Meglicka, “Prasa Komunistycznej Partii Polski w latach 1918–1938,” in: *Z dziejów polskiej prasy robotniczej 1879–1948*, ed. J. Myśliński and A. Ślisz, Warsaw 1983, p. 105.

264 Mark, “*Literarysze Trybune*,” p. 244; cf. *Mit zikh*, p. 53.

265 Mark, “*Literarysze Trybune*,” p. 243.

Although perhaps Mark's recollections were rose-tinted by the passage of time, there is no doubt that the "northern district" truly was a haven for Jewish Communists, who generally shared in the modest standard of living that was typical for the district (e.g., Mark lived at 24 Pawia Street, in a two-room apartment owned by a certain tailor, along with seven roommates).²⁶⁶ Richter lived first at 45 Niska and then at 9 (or 11) Franciszkańska.²⁶⁷ In the *Literarische tribune* period, Sfard lived at 34 Nowolipki. By then, he had married Zisl Złotojabłko, a nonpartisan Zionist who worked as a French tutor (the two had met in France).

So many Jewish Communists took up residence in the "Murziel" territory (short for *Muranowska dzielnica*, or "Muranow District," another name for the northern district, which included the neighborhood of Muranów), not only as a conscious decision to live in a proletarian neighborhood, but also because it was simply one of the few neighborhoods open to them. Thus, the granting of apartments in prominent locations in the city—Krakowskie Przedmieście, Marszałkowska, Puławska, Na Rozdrożu Square—presented tangible evidence in the postwar years of Polish (including Polish-Jewish) Communists' upward mobility in the social hierarchy.²⁶⁸

Everything Appeared So Simple

In 1932, Sfard wrote the novella *Vegn tsegeyen zikh* (Roads Diverge), which was published a year later by the Warsaw publisher *Nay-bukh*. His only extended work of fiction, the novella was written at a turning point in the author's life.

The novella is set in a contemporary small town located in eastern Poland. The main character, Beniek, the son of a poor widow, comes home for Passover from the town where he works. Beniek is a class-conscious individual—the word "communism" does not appear in the novella (undoubtedly on account of censorship), but various allusions hint at it. Beniek's first encounter with Marxism is described by the omniscient narrator as follows:

Beniek now recalls his first meeting with the people who had explained everything all around him so marvelously and simply. Every word was a revelation for him, but at the

266 *Ibid.*, p. 228.

267 Zachariasz, *Mentshn fun KPP*, p. 12.

268 This relocation to new neighborhoods also attests to the social revolution that took place in Poland in the initial postwar years—Communists, including Jewish Communists, were given apartments that had undoubtedly belonged to upper-class families before the war.

same time, it was like something completely near, completely his own, something that he had known for a very long time and yet had not known until now. Every meeting with them was a rebirth for Beniek. With every passing day, he began to see the same things differently, hear them differently, feel them differently. [...] He perceived the world as if for the first time, like a blind man who has newly acquired the ability to see. And how did they speak to him? In a way in which no one had ever spoken to him before. Everything appeared so simple, so comprehensible, so near.²⁶⁹

Arriving in his hometown, Beniek shares his knowledge with the local working-class youth with the help of “flyers and brochures,”²⁷⁰ and he becomes their informal leader. In service of his new ideals, he decides to rise above class interests by inviting Sasha, a university student with a shopkeeper for a father, who is also home for Passover and also has leftist views, to a meeting of politically engaged youth.

For a time, Sasha participates in the meetings, relaying the theoretical knowledge that he acquired in the big city to his colleagues (e.g., information about the threat of fascism); however, he later leaves the group due to his father’s objections (an instance of the classic stereotype of the intellectual who is irresolute in his convictions). Meanwhile, “Beniek’s group” draws the attention of the whole town when they cause a storm at a public lecture (judging by the description of the lecture, the lecturer is probably meant to be a Bundist). As a result, the meeting is broken up by the police. On a different occasion, some inhabitants of the town discuss the situation in the USSR, where one of their sons lives, and Beniek has no compunctions about intervening uninvited in a discussion between his elders. He states forcefully that with respect to the USSR, “the newspapers are writing lies.”²⁷¹ The simple, traditional Jews cannot get over their astonishment at the young worker’s boldness and poise, and looking at him, they think: “Such a bastard, such a zero.”²⁷² This group of traditional Jews, actually the largest single group in the novella, plays the role of a peculiar sort of Greek chorus: it is by means of their daily conversations that the narrator informs us of the happenings in the town. Of all the novella’s characters, this group are the best described. And despite their provincialism, they are not caricatured. The resulting impression on the reader is that this was the milieu that the author knew best.

Under Beniek’s influence, the young workers go on strike in order to demand an eight-hour workday and a pay raise. The employers, i.e., the group of

269 D. Sfar, *Vegn tsegeyen zikh*, Warsaw 1933, p. 9.

270 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

271 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

272 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

traditional Jews, are startled, scandalized and shocked. After ineffective attempts to persuade the workers to end their strike, they appeal for help to the last resort—the town rabbi. The rabbi takes the side of the employers and suggests possible responses: “You do not have to have compassion for these godless people in public. It’s all right, you can tell him [= the Polish vice-commandant in the town] that they said that the entire country can go to hell, and that they are not afraid, and that they are the bosses. We have to teach these upstarts a lesson.”²⁷³ He also alludes to the possible financial costs of appealing to the authorities, although the narrator never explicitly uses the word “bribe.” Arrests are made—of, among others, Beniek, as well as several people from the “gentile side.”²⁷⁴ The residents regularly comment amongst themselves on these occurrences. One of these comments, which rings of an ominous prophecy, is also the last sentence of the book: “Eh, it’s lousy—and it has reached us even out here in the boonies.”²⁷⁵

The implications of this last pronouncement are clear—the new ideology is taking the region by storm.

The narrator stresses many times that Beniek and those like him are not isolated, despite all appearances. “Now [Beniek] will not be lonely when he goes home, the way he was when he left here five years ago; now his friends are scattered all over. Wherever he goes, they are there.”²⁷⁶ However, the matter of the relations between Jews and their non-Jewish surroundings is not entirely unambiguous. On the one hand, hints in the text imply that Beniek’s group maintains contact with non-Jewish Marxists as well, for example this description of a conversation conducted during a walk on a hill on the outskirts of the town:

Leyke, who had been lost in thought the entire time, now awoke.
 “Friends,” she said, “do you see? Our comrades live everywhere here.”
 “You got that right,” someone said, “This is right where Lyova lives.”
 “And Stach lives there,” said someone else.
 “And over there—Kirill.”
 “And there...”
 “Where don’t they live?” said Beniek. “Everywhere.”²⁷⁷

The above-mentioned Stach appears several more times later in the novella—his visits to Beniek’s are described as “very secret” and often take place under cover

273 *Ibid.*, p. 101–102.

274 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

275 *Ibid.*, p. 112 (“‘He, shlekht,’ zogt er, ‘paskudne, s’iz shoyrn in undzer hek oykh farforn.’”)

276 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

277 *Ibid.*, p. 76–77.

of darkness, although in fact the whole town knows about them. However, this is all that is known of him. None of the “non-Jewish comrades” speak in their own voices.

But the only representative of the non-Jewish world that all Jews in the town, including Beniek, are in contact with is the vice-commandant of the town, named Żłobek, who is from Poznań and therefore speaks some German; he sometimes takes part in conversations that are conducted in Yiddish. Żłobek’s views on the Jewish problem (which he expresses while observing a Zionist march) are rather uncomplicated: “Poland is not Russia, damn it! In Poland, even our Yids will be equal, you’ll see. In Poland, the Yids are free to do whatever they want. If you want Palestine, you’ll have Palestine. Whatever you want.”²⁷⁸

It is impossible to resist the impression that Żłobek is a flesh-and-blood figure who may have been modeled on someone the author knew, whereas Stach is exclusively a paper fiction created to place a small local group in a broader context. This is the source of the striking “Jewishness” of the book: the action takes place in a (majority) Jewish town, among Jewish characters who are occupied with their own, Jewish matters. There is, however, no reason to suppose that Beniek is a self-portrait of the author—he is more likely a made-up type of the ideal Marxist.

Sfard’s novella did not shock anyone, but it did not go unnoticed either. Mark recalled:

I remember a discussion of Sfard’s novel entitled *Roads Diverge*, which took place during a meeting of the [left-wing writers’] group in an underground location. In his novel, the author boldly took up the subject of the ideological struggles and the ideological variegation of Jewish youth in a small town. One of the members of the group, a prominent Communist columnist, a man of great erudition—Moyshe Levin—claimed that the novel would have been thoroughly good if not for what he called ‘a thick coat of naturalism.’ Those involved in the discussion forgot the content of the work and its characters, as well as the interesting and serious problematics of Sfard’s novel, puzzling over its naturalistic elements alone, which veiled everything worthwhile in the novel.²⁷⁹

Yet despite what Mark wrote, Sfard’s novella does not so much show the variegation of ideological choices of small-town Jewish youth as it does the penetration of Communist ideology into the provinces. The Zionist youth are somewhat caricatured as a bunch of insane pseudo-scouts who dream of raising an army. There is no mention of Orthodox or Bundist youth at all. In his memoirs, Sfard

278 Ibid., p. 42.

279 Mark, “*Literarysze Trybune*,” p. 238.

himself admits that the novella was written with “a strikingly one-sided sympathy for Communist-inclined youth.”²⁸⁰ In reviews of the novella, the naïve vividness of some of the descriptions of the protagonists and folk customs was praised; the schematic approach to the subject and the black-and-white division of characters into heroes and villains was criticized. Among his Communist friends, the one-sidedness of the characters was most vehemently criticized by Moyshe Levin.²⁸¹ The author’s use of Soviet Yiddish orthography (undoubtedly an ideologically motivated choice) was criticized as well.

Alter Kacyzne published an interesting review in the Warsaw newspaper *Fraynd*. He declared that the novella was confirmation of the theory that “rational sympathy” (i.e., the views of the author) and “aesthetic sympathy” (i.e., his literary abilities) do not always go together. He criticized the depiction of the main character: “Beniek is not alive, he only strikes and agitates.” He stressed that the young workers were one-dimensional and bland, but that the small-town society was described splendidly. “This entire simple and naïve story of a strike,” Kacyzne wrote, “comes alive when Sfard introduces into the action the entire town with its authentic, long-standing customs.” The author’s second virtue, said Kacyzne, was “an ear for language,” with the result that the novella included representations of a variety of speech patterns, which the author used to good effect as a tool for characterization.

Kacyzne regretted that Sfard had not chosen for the novel’s protagonist a figure more similar to himself, i.e., a small-town intellectual: “In what way is Sfard, an intellectual, a writer, who comes from a bourgeois family, but who has never had any contempt for workers—in what way is he a worse proletarian than the carpenter Beniek? Unless this is an intellectual’s distrust of himself?”²⁸²

In Melnytsya, where Yehude Leyb Sfard continued to serve as rabbi, the novella was a *succès de scandale*: the residents recognized themselves in the individual characters of the book. Rabbi Sfard came close to losing his position. When Dovid went to Melnytsya to lecture, all the residents attended, and they expressed their disagreement with his claim that a writer has the right to draw as much inspiration as he wants from the reality around him.

We can debate how much the propagandistic and schematic qualities of Sfard’s novella resulted from his technical weaknesses as a writer, versus how much they were a side effect of his efforts to be more Catholic than the Pope from the Party’s

280 *Mit zikh*, p. 56

281 *Ibid.*

282 A. Kacyzne, “Mayn redndiker film,” *Fraynd*, June 8, 1934, p. 3.

point of view. Perhaps, then, the author's intended readership was not so much the masses but rather Moyshe Levin, Dovid Richter and other functionaries of the CBŻ.

Reason for Fingerprinting: Communism

The designation in 1928 by the Soviet authorities of Birobidzhan as a territory for Jewish settlement and territorial autonomy elicited enthusiasm among Jewish Communists outside the USSR, who saw it as further proof of the equal rights that Soviet Jews purportedly enjoyed, as well as of their productivization. Two organizations were founded to encourage and support settlement in this rather pitiful corner of the Far East: Gezerd (Society for Working the Land) and Agroid.²⁸³ As Julian Strykowski recalled: "At first the [Polish] authorities, who were well aware that the matter had a Communist underpinning, tolerated, and even favored, a mass movement in the hope that several hundred thousand Jews would leave Poland."²⁸⁴

The Warsaw organization Gezerd was founded in 1933 or 1934 by the Party (Moyshe Levin was the delegate from the CBŻ); however, membership was not limited to Party members. Among others serving on the presidium were *Moment* journalist Osher Perelman (chairman) and director of the Hebrew gymnasium Abraham Wolfowicz. Sfarđ (vice-chairman) was among the Communist members of the presidium (sent there by Dovid Richter). Later, Józef Goldberg (Róžański), the younger son of Avrom Goldberg, the publisher of the Zionist *Haynt*, was appointed secretary. As Sfarđ writes, Gezerd's assignment was to propagandize not only for Birobidzhan, but for the entire Soviet ethnic policy.²⁸⁵ After only a few months of activity, the organization was discovered.²⁸⁶ This might have been due to an increase in surveillance of Jewish Communist circles—in July 1933, the Ministry of the Interior alerted the governors of the provinces (*województwie*) that the Communist Party was broadening its activities in Jewish circles "by means of lectures, amateur performances, announcements

283 Mark characterized Agroid as a "result of the union of the Communist Gezerd with bourgeois pro-Birobidzhan activists" (Testimony, April 24, 1964, AŻIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 188, unpaginated). For more on Agroid, see I. Piekarski, "Agroid i Birobidżan," *Studia Judaica*, 2007, no. 1, pp. 101–117.

284 *Ocalony na Wschodzie*, pp. 74–75.

285 *Mit zikh*, p. 85.

286 Testimony of Dovid Sfarđ, April 24, 1964, AŻIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 193, unpaginated.

during Jewish revues, book publishing, press organs, etc.” and was exploiting the “ignorance of zhargon [= Yiddish] on the part of the security apparatus and government representatives, as well as the lack of Jewish intelligence officers.”²⁸⁷ The governors of the provinces were ordered to keep an eye on the Jewish milieu and actively counteract Communist agitation. On January 19, 1934, eleven members of the CBŻ were arrested.²⁸⁸ Sfard was probably one of them—in the Warsaw New Records Archives, a card with his fingerprints, taken on January 20, 1934, has been preserved. Under “Reason for Fingerprinting,” it states, laconically: “Communism.”²⁸⁹

After several days in the prison on Daniłowiczowska Street, Sfard was released, but he was placed under police surveillance until his trial and was required to report every week to the police station and to obtain permission if he wished to leave Warsaw. He was also called in several times for interrogation by the examining magistrate, one Stawiński. At the first interrogation session, a conversation developed about Sfard’s recently published novella *Vegn tsegeyen zikh* and his Communist sympathies. Asked about the reasons for his interest in Communism, Sfard supposedly answered: “What intelligent person is not interested in this movement? Being interested in it and even sympathizing with it does not necessarily mean belonging to it. And writers generally do not make for good Party elements. Their moods change often.”²⁹⁰ A long discussion on literature and politics followed—it turned out that the magistrate, a close acquaintance of popular leftist poet Władysław Broniewski, was well versed in matters of literature. This was certainly not the kind of treatment that Sfard had expected. The next interrogation was similar, again concerning politically neutral matters of literature and art. When the series of interrogations reached its end, the materials that had been confiscated when Sfard’s apartment was searched were returned to him. He was evidently not considered especially threatening to state security.²⁹¹ This appears to be further evidence that he did not play a major role in the Communist movement at the time.

287 Ławnik, *Represje policyjne*, p. 220.

288 *Ibid.*, p. 223.

289 Personal file of Dovid Sfard, AAN, no. 5207, pp. 2–3.

290 *Mit zikh*, p. 87.

291 *Ibid.*, pp. 86–88.

When is One of You Going to Prison?

When the authorities shut down the *Literarische tribune* in 1933, the “left-wing writers’ group” migrated to the Communist daily *Fraynd*.²⁹² *Fraynd* was officially managed by the so-called three K’s: editor-in-chief, the writer Alter Kacyzne; administrator Yitskhok Kon; and publisher Boris Kletskin; yet none of them actually had any influence over the political line of the newspaper, which was decided by the KPP Central Jewish Bureau. It was important, however, that the daily newspaper be ostensibly run by people who could not be accused of being Communists. Neither Kacyzne nor Kletskin were Party members, and they were prominent in the Jewish cultural world. Attention was particularly drawn by the eccentric figure of Boris Kletskin:

[He] looked like a typical lord of the manor with his closely-trimmed beard, gold-framed glasses, and wide fur coat, who loved a good joke and delicious food—lost a fortune financing the publication of Jewish and Belarussian books and periodicals. In those difficult years for publishing, he sold his landed estate somewhere in Western Belarus (where he was accustomed to strolling with two bear cubs)—and invested his money in new books and periodicals. Near the end of his life, he said he did some introspection and determined to dedicate the rest of his fortune to the cause of progressive and revolutionary Jewish and Belarussian literature.²⁹³

Kletskin gave money, but he did not interfere in the editorial work. He only joked: “When is one of you going to prison? If people are buying these newspapers and paying ten groschen, [it’s partly because they’re looking forward to the excitement of] seeing all of you put into prison.”²⁹⁴ Aside from *Fraynd*, Boris Kletskin also sponsored, among others, the most popular Yiddish literary magazine, *Literarische bleter*, and the publications of the Vilna writers’ group *Yung Vilne*. “Kletskin financed Yiddish literature—sometimes so generously that it seemed that he was supporting it [singlehandedly],” wrote Melech Ravitch.²⁹⁵ And Alter Kacyzne added: “Boris Arkadevich Kletskin²⁹⁶ raised the neglected

292 It should be noted in passing that Jewish writers generally earned their living by working in journalism (see E. Kellman, “*Dos yidishe bukh alarmirt!* Towards the History of Yiddish Reading in Inter-war Poland,” *Polin* 16, 2003, p. 215).

293 Mark, “*Literarysze Trybune*,” p. 244.

294 Testimony of Dovid Sfard, April 24, 1964, AŽIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 193, unpaginated.

295 *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur*, vol. 8, New York 1981, pp. 225–226.

296 Kacyzne uses Kletskin’s Russian patronymic here as a nod to his Litvak (i.e. Russified) origins and lordly style, as well as in order to express respect for his prodigious contribution to Yiddish publishing.

Jewish book to the rank of Book.”²⁹⁷ Kletskin served as the prototype for the main character of Kacyzne’s novel *Shtarke un shvakhe* (The Strong and the Weak).

Kacyzne was respected in the Yiddish cultural world as a prose writer, playwright, and columnist, as well as a talented photographer with his own studio. He began to write in Yiddish under the influence of Y.L. Peretz. He never joined the Party, but in the 1930s he sympathized with leftist circles, although his relationships with them were not always smooth. Sfard recalled: “Kacyzne was close to us, but he was inconsistent. He had to be led along the entire time. It was always said of him that when he wrote something, both we [i.e., the editors representing the KPP] and they [i.e., the censors] had to confiscate it, that is, we did not like it and they did not approve of it.”²⁹⁸ A certain distance remained between the Communist editors and Kacyzne, which was caused not only by the fact that Kacyzne was not a Party member, but above all by the fact that he was significantly older and held a higher position in the Yiddish literary world.²⁹⁹

The complicated relations with Kacyzne, as well as his difficult role as the nonpartisan editor-in-chief of a Communist daily run in fact by the CBŽ, is best illustrated by a famous incident that followed the death of Chaim Nachman Bialik in 1934. Bialik was the glorious reviver of literary Hebrew and the father of modern Hebrew literature—a cult figure throughout the Jewish literary world. But as the panegyrist of the Land of Israel, he did not fit into the rigid framework of Jewish Communist conceptions. Sfard recalled years later:

Alter Kacyzne, who worshipped Bialik, wrote a deeply moving and inspired article. However, at that time Bialik was the head of the Hebraists in the Land of Israel, who were decried as reactionaries, chauvinists, even fascists by both the Communist and the Bundist press. As the underground overseer of the printing house,³⁰⁰ I was ordered not to publish Kacyzne’s article on Bialik, “because it would stir up all the Jewish workers and the entire Yiddishist intelligentsia.” That Thursday, late at night, when I told the

297 A. Kacyzne, “Boris Arkadevitsh Kletskin,” *Yidishe kultur*, 1997, no. 5/6, p. 28. This is a reprint of Kacyzne’s reminiscences that were published after Kletskin’s death in 1937 in Kacyzne’s own little magazine, *Mayn redndiker film*.

298 Testimony of Dovid Sfard, April 24, 1964, AŽIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 193, unpaginated.

299 M. Shulshteyn, “Alter Kacyzne – vi ikh gedenk im,” in: idem, *Geshtaltn far mayne oygn: Eseyen, portretn, dermonungen*, Paris 1971, p. 209.

300 Sfard was authorized by the KPP to modify the articles, and even to pull them if they were not in keeping with the party line, while they were in the process of being typeset in the printing shop. At an earlier stage, Richter and Levin were the in-house censors. In addition, Sfard served as the liaison between the KPP and Kletskin (see *Mit zikh*, p. 58).

typesetter to pull the article, I felt terrible. Bialik had been my idol as well since my youth. He was my favorite poet [...]. I felt as if all of Jewish literature had been orphaned. But I kept up appearances: a Communist was not permitted to yield to sentiments.³⁰¹

The next day, Sfard came to the editorial office at 5 Orla Street expecting that Kacyzne would make a scene. But the office was strangely quiet. Kacyzne was standing in the corner, facing the wall, sobbing. There was no scene. Sfard left the office and took a long walk around Warsaw, “thinking incessantly about one thing and one thing only—whether I was prepared to pursue my chosen path when every step required that I renounce everything near and dear to me and caused me so much distress and pain.”³⁰² Several weeks passed before Kacyzne began to speak to Sfard again.

The first issue of *Fraynd* was dated April 20, 1934. *Fraynd* appeared every day (including Saturdays and Sundays); the weekly extended edition came out on Fridays and was eight pages long (all the other issues were four pages long). On Fridays, one page was devoted to the printing of poetry and articles about literary and cultural life. Among the authors whose works were included were Kadya Molodowsky, Borekh Olitsky, and Binem Heller. Much of the rest of the space in the Friday issues was occupied by sociopolitical columns, most often authored by Richter, Levin and Mark. The circulation of the Friday edition was supposedly around twelve thousand copies.³⁰³

Communists held the key positions on the *Fraynd* editorial board: Elbirt was editorial secretary, Mark was responsible for domestic correspondence and foreign policy, and the literary department was co-run by Sfard (with Molodowsky, not a Party member). Among other contributors to the daily were Avrom Morewski, Abram Przepiórka, Mark Rakowski, and Zalmen Reyzen, as well as Richter and Levin, who were both delegates of the CBŻ.³⁰⁴ The direction of the

301 Ibid., p. 62. Sfard had evidently forgotten what he had written about Bialik in the *Literarische tribune* (unless someone else also wrote under the pseudonym “Ander”).

302 Ibid. Other members of the “left-wing writers’ group” reacted similarly. At a meeting of the board of the Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists, Binem Heller was the only one present who did not stand up to pay tribute to Bialik’s memory—as stated by a witness to the scene, Melech Ravitch—despite the fact that it was obvious that to stay seated caused him significant pain. See M. Ravitch, *Mayn leksikon*, Montreal 1958, p. 166.

303 Zachariasz, *Mentshn fun KPP*, p. 36. According to Sfard, *Fraynd* had two daily editions, one of which was almost always confiscated. D. Sfard, “Di teglekhe tsaytung *Fraynd*,” in: *Di yidische prese vos iz geven*, ed. D. Flinker et al., Tel Aviv 1975, p. 221.

304 M. Fuks, *Prasa żydowska w Warszawie 1823–1939*, Warsaw 1979, p. 218.

newspaper was decided by the Party: “Every day, the tone and topic for the main article were handed down to us from above. It is true that there was no sharp criticism of Sanacja³⁰⁵ policy, but this was the stance necessary in order for the newspaper to be legal.”³⁰⁶ Everyone hired to work at *Fraynd*, even in the administration department, was cleared with the Party. *Fraynd* was one of two dailies that the KPP succeeded in organizing in the years 1930–1939.³⁰⁷

As I have noted, Sfarid was formally the codirector of the literary department, but he was equally (and perhaps even more) active in contributing sociopolitical articles for publication. He even had his own column, “Notitsn fun a vokh” (Notes from a Week), in which he commented, most often caustically and viciously, on various events in the Zionist and Bundist milieus. Despite having withdrawn from his activity in Gezerd, he devoted particular attention to the conception and realization of the Jewish Autonomous Region in Birobidzhan; however, he cautioned against jumping to the conclusion that the building of Birobidzhan was a simple alternative to the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine: “What does Birobidzhan have to do with Palestine? Birobidzhan—is a necessary, integral part of an ideology that intends to rebuild the world on entirely new foundations, whereas Palestine—is an ideology that intends to . . . transfer Nalewki [the main street in the Jewish neighborhood of Warsaw] and Kasrilevke to a faraway country.”³⁰⁸ He argued with Zionists who considered the founding of Birobidzhan to be further proof of the need for the existence of a separate Jewish state:

This is what we must learn from Birobidzhan: that the entire so-called Jewish problem is a product of economic and political conditions that prevail to this day everywhere outside the Soviet Union. [...] Birobidzhan as an autonomous Jewish unit is the ultimate proof of how illusory, deceptive and hostile to the [Jewish] people are all the Palestines, Angolas and other [conceptions] that attempt to solve the Jewish problem within the same conditions that gave rise to it.³⁰⁹

305 Sanacja (from Latin *sanatio*, healing) – a name commonly given to the Polish government in the years 1926–1939, the government which emerged in the wake of Piłsudski’s 1926 coup d’état.

306 Testimony of Dovid Sfarid, May 18, 1964, AŽIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 193, unpaginated.

307 The other one was the Lviv *Wiadomości*, published in 1931–1932 (Paczkowski, *Prasa*, p. 216).

308 Kasrilevke—a Jewish town from the stories of Sholem Aleichem; symbol of a typical *shtetl*.

309 D. Rovin [D. Sfarid], “Birebidzhan,” *Fraynd*, May 14, 1934, p. 1.

He wrote angrily about the dissension that the founding of Birobidzhan had aroused among declared anti-Semites: “Every week, we are dying to see express trains ‘7, 8, 14’ with the sign ‘Warsaw-Birobidzhan’—oh, how we are dying to see that! [...] But a delicate anti-Semitic, Jew-baiting heart cannot allow it at all. What? Give the Jews their own country? Recognize the Jews as a republic equal to ours? And ‘zhargon’ as an official language?—No, that is too much for a Nowaczyński.”³¹⁰

Judging by these pronouncements, Sfarid stuck to the party line with respect to Birobidzhan, which stressed that the definitive solution to the Jewish problem could be brought about exclusively by means of a social revolution, not by a policy of so-called emigrationism, which was considered an “escapist phenomenon” that could destabilize the local struggle.³¹¹ After all, a Party member with very little seniority was under a lot of pressure to abide by the rules zealously. We will soon see, however, that Sfarid did not always do so.

On the occasion of the publication of the hundredth issue of *Fraynd*, the editors proclaimed that they would do everything in their power to make it the most informative and comprehensive Yiddish newspaper.³¹² This meant an open rivalry with the *Folkstsaytung*, the main organ of the Bund. *Fraynd* and the *Folkstsaytung* fought fiercely over the hearts and minds of the Jewish proletariat. The withdrawal of the KPP from the theory of social fascism and the adoption of the so-called United Front seemed to promise a decrease in interparty conflict³¹³; however, Jewish Communists did not abandon their efforts to discredit the activities of their potential allies—*Fraynd* ceaselessly attacked the Bundists and their organ. As Emanuel Nowogrodzki, a Bund activist, stated at the time, “it brought the distrust between the parties [i.e., the KPP and the Bund] to the highest level.”³¹⁴

310 D. R-n [D. Sfarid], “Adolf Nowatshinski in klem... fun antisemitizm,” *Fraynd*, June 19, 1934, p. 3. Adolf Nowaczyński (1876–1944) was a Polish writer, journalist and political activist, known for his right-wing and anti-Semitic opinions and mocked by Jewish journalists for his own Jewish origin.

311 I. Oppenheim, “Stanowisko Poale Syjon Lewicy, Bundu i partii komunistycznej wobec pionierów ruchu hachszary w Polsce w latach trzydziestych,” *BŽIH*, 1999, no. 1, p. 38.

312 “Tsu di lezer un fraynd fun *Fraynd*,” *Fraynd*, August 14, 1934, p. 1.

313 The first proposals to form a United Front were addressed in 1933 by the KPP to the PPS and the ethnic-minority socialist parties, and thus to the Bund as well.

314 E. Nowogrodzki, *The Jewish Labor Bund in Poland 1915–1939*, transl. and ed. Mark Nowogrodzki, Rockville, MD 2001, p. 130.

Judging by the reports of the CBŻ instructor (the official in charge of ideology) overseeing *Fraynd*—at that time, it was Helena Grudowa—*Fraynd* political columns did not always follow the party line. At least one CBŻ session was devoted to critiques of the publication's political stance.³¹⁵ In the report of the CBŻ for the period from September to November 1934, Grudowa wrote:

I believe that the internal management [of the newspaper] must become better than it is. We have the majority, and we can supposedly accomplish everything we want—but in fact, these are young people in terms of their organizational seniority, and in addition, they have an illegitimate approach to many issues. For example, regarding the matter of the [United] Front, it was necessary to argue with some [comrades to show them] that during negotiations with the Bund, we must not reveal or disseminate all the facts about the conflicts between us and the Bund, and if it is necessary to write something, it must be in suitable United Front language.

As of now, our [comrades] have not yet learned to write in the language of the United Front. Now and then, they compete with the *Folkssaytung* over who can use the shrillest language against the other side. They do not understand one thing: while the *Folkssaytung*, by writing in this manner, is actually aiming to separate its workers from ours, our aim must be the converse: to appeal to Bund workers so that they understand that we want a united front, and with the help of our publication, to attract them to the United Front; we cannot continually compete with the Bund, because they are writing against the United Front and we must write in favor of the [United] Front. Nor have they properly understood how much and in what form they should write against the external enemy, first and foremost the Sanacja.”³¹⁶

Despite Grudowa's suggestion that the main source of the problems was insufficient Party experience on the part of the members of the editorial board, it appears that this was not the only reason. The dramatic conflict with the *Folkssaytung* that erupted in autumn 1934 is evidence that on certain matters, junior members of the Party, like Sfarid and Mark, stubbornly maintained their own opinions.

In October 1934, an editorial appeared in *Fraynd* informing its readership of the “latest provocation” on the part of the *Folkssaytung*, which had accused *Fraynd* of being the “organ of a left-wing movement” and an “organ of the Sanacja,” or even of the military intelligence department (*Defensywa*).³¹⁷ Because the two newspapers were battling for readers and battling with the censors, such an accusation could have severe consequences. A *Fraynd* delegation set out to

315 Testimony of Dovid Sfarid, April 24, 1964, AŻIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 193, unpaginated.

316 AAN, KPP, CBŻ, call no. 158/X-2, vol. 17, p. 6.

317 “Mir shtemplen di nayste provokatsye fun der *Folkssaytung*,” *Fraynd*, October 20, 1934, p. 1. Note that the two accusations contradict one another.

explain this to one of the Bund leaders, Henryk Erlich, and to the editor of the *Folkstsaytung*, Borekh Shefner, but in vain. The meeting did not put an end to the *Folkstsaytung*'s accusations, that the attacks on the Bund in articles by Sh. Jakubowicz (Levin's pseudonym) and B. Aronowicz (Mark's pseudonym) were at the behest of the Polish authorities.

The Bund's evidence for cooperation on the part of *Fraynd* editors with the *Defensywa* was the report which a Communist employed at the *Fraynd* editorial offices deposited with attorney Ludwik Honigwill.³¹⁸ The woman had supposedly witnessed a conversation among the editors on the subject of an instruction to *Fraynd* by the Government Commissariat (Komisariat Rządu)³¹⁹ to publish an article attacking the Bund (with concrete charges) in the near future. Thereafter, she supposedly typed out the article, which would appear in five days. Honigwill repeated this report to Erlich, after which they both wrote it up and transmitted it to attorney Leon Berenson. As Honigwill claimed in his memoirs: "Within the expected timeframe, *Fraynd* came out with an editorial in which all three of the 'ideas' of the Government Commissariat [...] appeared in their entirety. The fact of collaboration between the Communists and the police against the Bund and against the unity of the labor movement has thus been proved beyond a shadow of a doubt."³²⁰

In Bund circles, it was thought—and this was also explained to the delegation from *Fraynd*, namely Sfarad and Kletskin—that the agent working for the *Defensywa* was one of the so-called three K's.³²¹ In order to quash the rumors, the KPP Politburo demanded that all three K's be removed from the editorial board; Mark and Sfarad objected to this. Mark later explained their refusal as follows:

I understand that in looking for a way out, in order to ease the tension [...], the Secretariat of the Party probably, after long sessions and very heated discussions, reached the conclusion that the Party representatives at the *Fraynd* should cut their ties with the three

318 L. Honigwill, "Dlaczego? (Przyczynek do komunistycznej moralności)," *Kultura* (Paris), 1958, no. 4, pp. 117–124. This text is Honigwill's report prepared by order of the Central Committee of the Bund. See also: Nowogrodzki, *The Jewish Labor Bund*, pp. 136–142. Nowogrodzki quotes Honigwill's report in its entirety.

319 The Komisariat Rządu (Government Commissariat) was the highest organ of state administration in Warsaw, immediately under the Ministry of the Interior; its roles included, among other things, censorship of the press and oversight of religious and ethnic minority groups.

320 Honigwill, "Dlaczego?," p. 121.

321 Testimony of Dovid Sfarad, April 24, 1964, AŻIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 193, unpaginated.

K's, [...] or even remove [them altogether] from the newspaper. This was a great blow to us. First of all, this cast a shadow over everyone's mood, and second, Kletskin and Kacyzne worked for the cause for free, expecting no material benefit. Thus we were in the position of being asked to place our best friends at the mercy of public opinion; we could not agree to it [...].³²²

This account is confirmed by a fragment (undated) of another of CBŻ secretary Grudowa's statements. She writes with dissatisfaction:

The newspaper: This arena is limping badly. It could be put into order if our cadre of activists were good, but they're for the birds. A characteristic fact is that when a recommendation arrived from the P[olitburo] to dismiss the publisher or the editor, an inside group of three³²³ objected. One of them even stated that this recommendation was anti-Party, and all three together wrote a statement explaining why they were against this. Among other things, they wrote: 'If we had carried out the recommendation of the P[olitburo], it would have harmed not only the newspaper, but our movement in general.'

In other words, they claim that this instruction was anti-Party. What is even more outrageous is that recently, certain things have come out that further attest to the fact that the editor is problematic, and they are all perfectly aware of this. We would gladly remove all three of them, but since this is not possible, we will remove one of them. It was difficult for us to find people to replace the editor and publisher.

We now have a replacement for the editor and will shortly implement the switch, and we are looking for a replacement for the publisher. The material situation of the newspaper is catastrophic. If things do not rapidly improve at the beginning of the next season, the newspaper will die of natural causes. We must assume that any day now, the newspaper will cease publication. The situation of the newspaper is directly connected to the situation of the Jewish masses, which is downright hopeless. Four or five people buy one issue of the newspaper to share. I think that [the Politburo] must help if the newspaper is not to cease publication: it is necessary to make internal changes and then offer material help.³²⁴

Revisiting this conflict many years later, Grudowa recalled that it was Mark and Sfarid who protested the most vehemently against the decision of the Politburo in the matter of the "three K's," but Richter, on the other hand, was in favor of it.³²⁵ It is unknown whom she had in mind as a replacement for the editor when

322 Testimony of Bernard Mark, April 24, 1964, AŻIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 188, unpaginated; see also *ibid.*

323 This refers to Mark, Sfarid and probably Elbirt.

324 AAN, KPP, CBŻ, call no. 158/X-2, vol. 18, p. 13.

325 Testimony of Helena Grudowa (Gitl Rapaport), April 30, 1964, AŻIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 185, unpaginated.

she wrote her report; in any case, Kacyzne kept his position until *Fraynd* ceased to exist.

In November 1934, at the demand of *Fraynd*, a socio-civil trial (honor court) was organized against the *Folkstsaytung*, with left-wing attorney Waclaw Barcikowski acting as chief arbitrator. However, the trial was never concluded, and no verdict was issued. Bundist circles remained convinced that *Fraynd* was collaborating with the *Defensywa*, and when the Comintern dissolved the KPP a few years later, claiming that it was full of government agents and instigators, Bundists took it as confirmation of their earlier suspicions.³²⁶

Subsequent polemic articles on this issue in the pages of *Fraynd* leave room for doubt about whether its editors were 100 % certain that the accusations broached by the *Folkstsaytung* were unfounded.³²⁷ However, Sfarid believed that the Bund was mainly opposed to *Fraynd* for more prosaic reasons: the decrease in the popularity of the *Folkstsaytung* after *Fraynd* was founded, as well as a pejorative article by Moyshe Levin entitled “Di bundishe galuvke” (The Bund “Gala”).³²⁸ In his article, written on the occasion of the anniversary of the Bund’s founding, Levin accused the Bund of opportunism and nationalism (as an organization of Jewish workers that existed separately from broader socialist organizations). As Sfarid recalled: “Bundists were very traditional. Even those who left the Bund considered it somehow sacrosanct. And an article like this was sacrilege to them...”³²⁹ Today, on the basis of memoirs and press clippings alone, there is no way to ascertain conclusively whether or not there really was an agent of the *Defensywa* at *Fraynd*.

The conflict with the *Folkstsaytung* had the potential to arouse emotions in its participants even many years after the fact; however, it is difficult to judge whether or not this conflict is what drew the attention of the censors and police

326 Honigwill, “Dlaczego?”, p. 124. In February 1935, at a plenary session of the Sejm, a deputy of the PPS claimed that *Fraynd* was forced to print “anti-socialist articles” at the order of “police agents.” (“Provokatorisher oystrit kegn *Fraynd* in Sejm,” *Fraynd*, February 12, 1935, p. 1).

327 These doubts are also apparent in the testimony given by Sfarid at the Institute for the History of the Party (Zakład Historii Partii) and from the questions asked him by Szymon Zachariasz, who was also present in the room at the time of the testimony. These were oral testimonies recorded on audio tape; I consulted the transcripts.

328 Sh. Jakubowicz [M. Levin], “Di bundishe ‘galuvke,’” *Fraynd*, October 12, 1934, p. 4.

329 Testimony of Dovid Sfarid, April 24, 1964, AŻIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 193, unpaginated.

to *Fraynd*.³³⁰ As Andrzej Paczkowski describes, the Jewish press in interwar Poland focused on four main topics: Poland, Jews in Poland, the Jewish Diaspora, and Palestine.³³¹ In the case of *Fraynd*, a fifth topic can be added to the list: the Soviet Union. The paper teemed with texts demonstrating a fascination with the Soviet regime, whether veiled or explicit. As Sfarid said: “We praised what was happening in the Soviet Union as a way of fighting the Sanacja. When we said that [life] was good there, that factories were being built, that workers had this and that, that Jews were developing Jewish culture, that was a way of saying that we did not have any of that here. In that way, we portrayed it as an example from which to learn.”³³² On the other hand, Kletskin’s visits to the Soviet embassy, from which he returned to the editorial offices loaded down with Soviet publications, irritated Party editors, who were afraid that his contact with the embassy would harm the newspaper.

It was probably these overt pro-Soviet sympathies that led the authorities to shut down *Fraynd*. Its last issue was dated March 28, 1935, after several press runs had been confiscated during the preceding month. Kacyzne, Mark and Sfarid were supposedly on the list of “candidates” for imprisonment in the internment camp of Bereza Kartuska (in accordance with the order of April 17, 1934 concerning persons who were a threat to state security, peace and public order³³³), yet ultimately they were not imprisoned.³³⁴

Who Could Have Told Them Not to Come?

When working at *Fraynd*, Sfarid became a member of the Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists. He did this on Party instructions; literary circles were

330 Dealings with the censors were not limited to the left-wing press. Nakhmen Mayzel, editor of *Literarische bleter*, devoted substantial space to this topic in his memoirs.

331 A. Paczkowski, “The Jewish Press in the Political Life of the Second Republic,” *Polin* 8, 1994, p. 182.

332 Testimony of Dovid Sfarid, May 18, 1964, AŻIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 193, unpaginated. The Soviet Union was not exclusively the domain of the Communist or fellow-traveling press; the Bundist press also devoted much attention to the USSR. See G. Pickhan, “Gegen den Strom”: *Der Allgemeine Jüdische Arbeiterbund “Bund” in Polen 1918–1939*, Stuttgart–Munich 2001, p. 378–379.

333 Ławnik, *Represje policyjne*, p. 126.

334 Testimony of Bernard Mark, April 24, 1964, AŻIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 188, unpaginated. In 1935, political prisoners (all Communist) made up 66 % of those imprisoned in Bereza Kartuska (W. Śleszyński, *Obóz odosobnienia w Berezie Kartuskiej 1934–39*, Białystok 2003, p. 96).

an important field of Party activity. The Writers' Association—as it was known in short—was the most important landmark on the cultural map of Jewish Warsaw.³³⁵

The Association was open to writers of all political streams and provided an ideal setting for holding political meetings without drawing attention. The writer Zusman Segalowitch recalled: “The red press was illegal, the Writers' Association was legal. So [the Communists] went into partnership with us. Who could have told them not to come? Who would have impeded them? If we had not permitted them to come, we would have been helping the authorities. [...] And as soon as they had sat down at our tables, they demanded we give them membership cards.”³³⁶

It appears that it was actually Sford, conscientiously carrying out Party instructions, who introduced so many left-wing writers into the Writers' Association—including all the members of the “left-wing writers' group.” This inevitably generated some close calls:

At a session of the presidium of the Writers' Association, when I proposed [that the Association admit] people about whom I could not say much, such as Richter [...] or Levin—when I was asked, ‘What does he do? Where does he work? What does he write?’—I had no choice but to answer, “You have to take my word for it. He is a very important writer, only I cannot tell you what and where he writes.’ Shefner [the chairman of the Association at the time] would then say, ‘You can trust Sford. Admit him.’ [...] Even when I proposed Elbirt, I could not tell them anything about him, because he had not published any books, and the requirement was to have fifty published folios, or something like that. Yet they were all admitted.³³⁷

335 Multiple memoirs were written in Yiddish on the subject of the Writers' Association. See for example Ravitch, *Dos mayse-bukh*; Segalowitch, *Tlomatske 13*; N. Mayzel, *Geven amol a lebn: Dos yidische kultur-lebn in Poyln tsvishn beyde velt-milkhomes*, Buenos Aires 1951; and B. Kuczer, *Geven amol Varshe...: Zikhroynes*, Paris 1955. It is also worth mentioning N. Cohen's comprehensive monograph on Jewish cultural life in Warsaw: *Sefer, sofer ve-iton: Merkaz ha-tarbut ha-yehudi be-Varshah, 1918–1942*, Jerusalem 2003.

336 Segalowitch, *Tlomatske 13*, pp. 233–234.

337 Testimony of Dovid Sford, April 24, 1964, AŽIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 193, unpaginated. According to Ravitch's memoirs, anyone who had published ten works (poems, short stories, essays) under his own name or a habitual pen name in the Yiddish or Hebrew press could become a member of the Union. An author who had published at least one book of recognized literary value or a translation of a work at least three hundred pages long could also become a member (*Dos mayse-bukh*, pp. 321–322).

The politicization of the Writers' Association did not evoke positive reactions among its longstanding members. Sfarad admitted years later that "in the Writers' Association, we were always frowned upon. We were kept at arm's length."³³⁸ Nevertheless, the Writers' Association did turn out to be a viable smokescreen for the "left-wing writers' group" in the second half of the 1930s, thanks to the use of "United Front" tactics in the elections for Association officers. Every year, there were two lists on the ballot: one—Right Poale Zion, the other—a joint list of Communists, Bundists and Left Poale Zion. The latter always won six of nine seats, which were divided equally among the parties. For the most part, the Bundist Borekh Shefner was elected as chairman, and as vice-chairman—the Communist Dovid Sfarad. For a time, the Communists were also represented on the board by Bernard Mark and Binem Heller.³³⁹

The "left-wing writers' group" was quite active in the Writers' Association, organizing literary evenings, lectures and discussions. Mark recalled: "We organized unemployed writers, we tried to find them work, we conducted economic campaigns, such as supporting a political strike at the great Yiddish daily [*Der moment* [...] as well as a sit-down strike at the Polish-language Jewish daily *Nasz Głos*."³⁴⁰ After the pogrom in Przytyk on March 17, 1936, a Communist-organized meeting of Jewish writers took place at the Writer's Association headquarters, Tłomackie 13. Mark gave a speech on behalf of the "left-wing writers' group."³⁴¹

A representative of the "other side," Zusman Segalowitch, remembered this period less enthusiastically:

Instead of discussions on literary matters, we now began to hear lectures on other subjects. The speakers were different, the audience was different and the style of discussion was characterized by rancor, causticity and a lack of tolerance. The discussions often ended in scuffles. One day, walking up the staircase into the building, in which a lecture 'smelling of red paint' was taking place, I witnessed a fist- and stick-fight. Fighting was

338 Testimony of Dovid Sfarad, April 24, 1964, AŻIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 193, unpaginated.

339 Mark, "*Literarysze Trybune*," pp. 247–248; testimony of Bernard Mark, April 24, 1964, AŻIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 188, unpaginated. The sources vary on the number of board members – according to Melech Ravitch, the board of the Association was made up of twelve people elected at a general membership meeting at the beginning of each calendar year (Ravitch, *Dos mayse-bukh*, p. 316).

340 Mark, "*Literarysze Trybune*," p. 248.

341 Testimony of Bernard Mark, May 31, 1960, AŻIH, Papers of Bernard Mark (unsorted portion), call no. 350, p. 3.

underway on the stairs and inside the premises. Chairs were broken and windows were smashed. [...] Only later did I find out that it was Stalinists fighting with Trotskyists.³⁴²

Melech Ravitch recalled that along with leftists, there were also police informers in the Association. However, at Tłomackie 13, a peculiar principle of extraterritoriality prevailed: the activities of the “left-wing writers’ group” might not have aroused enthusiasm, but its members were not expelled from the Association, and discretion was exercised when the police came snooping.³⁴³ There is no doubt (at least according to Sfar’s memoirs) that Communist writers felt safe there. However, their participation put an end to the apolitical reputation of the Association that had been so carefully cultivated for many years by its members.³⁴⁴

The Association of Jewish Writers and Journalists was quite a self-contained milieu. Even the admission of the “left-wing writers’ group” to the Association did not strengthen ties between Jewish and non-Jewish Polish writers, as might be expected considering that Jewish leftists generally had closer ties to non-Jewish Poles than other Jews did.³⁴⁵ To be sure, a few non-Jewish Polish writers occasionally visited their friends at Tłomackie 13, but there was no other significant contact between the circles.³⁴⁶ Sfar recalled: “Our contact with [non-Jewish] Polish circles was very weak. From time to time, when we invited them, left-wing Jewish writers [of Polish] such as [Leon] Pasternak and [Stanisław] Wygodzki would come to the Writers’ Association, but they did not take part in our work. With [non-Jewish] Polish writers, however, we had no contact. Perhaps some of us had personal contact with them, but no literary contact. In my time there, we did not organize even one meeting with leftist [non-Jewish] Polish writers. I myself do not know why, but that’s how it was.”³⁴⁷

342 Segalowitch, *Tłomackie 13*, p. 234.

343 Ravitch, *Dos mayse-bukh*, p. 330–331.

344 N. Cohen, “Tłomackie 13: The Heart and Soul of Jewish Literary Warsaw,” in: *Żydzi Warszawy: Materiały konferencji w Żydowskim Instytucie Historycznym w 100. rocznicę urodzin Emanuela Ringelbluma*, ed. E. Bergman, and O. Zienkiewicz, Warsaw 2000, p. 95.

345 Amidst this talk of relations with non-Jewish Polish writers, it must be remembered that the Association did count among its members *Jewish* writers of Polish (mainly journalists at Polish-language Jewish newspapers). According to Ravitch, thirty to forty members of the Association wrote primarily in Polish, out of a total of three hundred members (*Dos mayse-bukh*, p. 328).

346 Mark, “*Literarysze Trybune*,” p. 249.

347 Testimony of Dovid Sfar, April 24, 1964, AŻIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 193, unpaginated.

The Communists managed to form a so-called Kultur-Front (Cultural Front) within the Writer's Association in 1936. The Kultur-Front brought together representatives of the three workers' parties—the KPP, the Bund and Left Poale Zion—as well as Folkists and members who did not belong to any party. The board of the Kultur-Front included Emanuel Ringelblum, Raphael Mahler, Adolf Berman, Michał Mirski, Dovid Sfard, Noyekh Prylucki, Alter Kacyzne, and Yitskhok Giterman, among others. The main goal of the Kultur-Front was to form a “United Front” in the struggle against fascism. It was also intended to be a hub for other cultural and educational activities, including—as Ringelblum constantly demanded—the organization of evening classes to teach illiterate Jews how to read and write.

The board meetings of the Kultur-Front were conducted at Alter Kacyzne's house at 14 Nowolipie Street. At one of them, the board decided to publish a biweekly magazine entitled *Farmest* (Challenge), under the leadership of Kacyzne (editor-in-chief), Sfard (secretary) and Moyshe Grosman (managing editor). It seems that the only published issue, a double issue that appeared in 1936, was confiscated in its entirety.³⁴⁸

In 1935, at the YIVO conference in Vilna, the activists of the Kultur-Front appealed to YIVO to join forces with them to defend Jewish culture, which was under threat from fascism and anti-Semitism. Among other things, the Kultur-Front demanded that YIVO work together with Jewish institutions in the Soviet Union.³⁴⁹ Nakhmen Mayzel recalled how difficult it was to convince the YIVO board to allow the appeal to be read aloud during the conference. The Bund and the PPS also boycotted the Kultur-Front, which they considered to be a camouflaged Communist initiative.³⁵⁰

The Kultur-Front was one of many efforts on the part of left-wing Jewish intellectuals at that time to build various “united fronts.” The most significant instance of this was the Congress for Jewish Culture in Paris in September of 1937. Two hundred delegates from twenty-three countries, representing 677

348 *Mit zikh*, pp. 88–89; c.f. also *Preliminary Inventory of Yiddish Dailies and Periodicals Published in Poland between the Two World Wars*, Y. Szeintuch and V. Solomon (Jerusalem 1986), p. 145; M. Fuks, “Materiały do bibliografii żydowskiej prasy robotniczej i socjalistycznej wydawanej w Polsce w latach 1918–1939: Prasa komunistyczna,” *BŻIH*, 1977, no. 3, p. 96.

349 For the text of the appeal see: Mayzel, *Geven a mol a lebn*, pp. 373–376.

350 *Ibid.*, p. 377. About the Kultur-Front see also: B. Mark, “Tsvishn lebn un toyt: Dos yidishe lebn un di yidishe literatur in Poyln in di yorn 1937–1957,” *IKUF – Almanakh*, 1961, p. 70.

organizations, participated.³⁵¹ In his inaugural speech, author and columnist Chaim Sloves stated: “If we want Jewish culture to live, if we want to transform apathy into hope, despair into courage, dejection into creative energy, then we have to unite.”³⁵² In turn, Moyshe Olgin, the editor of the newspaper *Morgn-frayhayt* and one of the leading Jewish Communists in the United States, said: “We want to see Jews who will not be strangers in the country where they live, Jews who will know how to join the progressive forces of the Jewish people with the progressive forces of other ethnic groups in the same country or in other countries in the struggle for a better, more humane world, and who simultaneously will remain Jews, sons of their people, fighters for the future of their people.”³⁵³

For Sfar, the 1930s were a period of intense sociopolitical activity not limited to the Communist press. He published numerous articles and reviews in *Literarische bleter* and elsewhere. In 1935, he coedited (with Mirski and Kacyzne) five issues of a literary biweekly titled *Literatur*. The only surviving issue of which I am aware, edited and published by A.L. Taff, is reminiscent of *Literarische tribune*, albeit less partisan. It includes poetry, book reviews, reports on the international writers’ conference in Paris and reflections on the tenth anniversary of YIVO in Vilna.

The Writers’ Association declined during the second half of the 1930s, among other factors due to the politicization of the Association by the “left-wing writers’ group.” It was an era when it was impossible to avoid taking a political stand. Segalowitch summed up the atmosphere: “Instead of having leisurely conversations, hostile groups now sat at every table and whispered secrets. [...] Are we saving the world from ruin, or are we ruining it?”³⁵⁴

We are Adherents of the Comintern

The second half of the 1930s was a particularly trying time for Polish Jews. After the death in 1935 of Marshal Józef Piłsudski, who had enjoyed great authority and popularity, nationalist tendencies began to dominate the government camp.

351 S. Cukier et al., *Juifs révolutionnaires: Une page d’histoire du Yidichland en France* (Paris 1987), p. 112.

352 Ibid., p. 114. At this congress, the *Yidisher kultur-farband*, a left-wing cultural organization known by the acronym IKUF, was established.

353 Quoted in: P.C. Mishler, “Red Finns, Red Jews: Ethnic Variation in Communist Political Culture During the 1920s and 1930s,” *YIVO Annual* 22, 1995, p. 142.

354 Segalowitch, *Tlomatske* 13, p. 235.

As Jerzy Tomaszewski writes, Premier Felicjan Sławoj-Składkowski's programmatic speech in 1936 communicated a symbolic change in government policy toward the Jews. Among other things, in his speech he stated: "According to my government, it is forbidden to harm anyone in Poland: a just society does not allow anyone to be harmed in its own house. Economic warfare—all right, but no harm."³⁵⁵ This ambiguous "all right" (*owszem*) was interpreted by many people to mean that the government consented to a boycott of Jews. Tomaszewski notes another unfortunate formulation in this speech: "The designation 'just society' suggested—in keeping with the propaganda of the so-called nationalists (*narodowcy*)—that Jews were only guests of the Polish Republic whose presence was being tolerated, and thus they had no standing to claim equal civil rights."³⁵⁶

The Camp of National Unity (*Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego*, or OZON for short), founded in 1937—a new incorporation of the governing *Sanacja* stream—announced an explicitly nationalist program which included the claim that Polish culture was being threatened by the Jews and had to be defended; the proposed strategy was the Polonization of industry, handicrafts and commerce. The program opposed explicit anti-Semitic excesses—but, in general, only in theory. In practice, the late 1930s were studded with anti-Jewish incidents, including the infamous pogroms in Przytyk (March 1936) and Mińsk Mazowiecki (June 1936).³⁵⁷ There was unrest in the universities over the creation of the so-called ghetto benches and the demand for a *numerus clausus* and *numerus nullus* for Jews.³⁵⁸ Jews began to feel a growing sense of threat. "What seemed implausible before Hitler took power in Germany," writes Anna Landau-Czajka, "i.e., the Jewish problem being 'taken care of' by state authorities, suddenly now seemed likely to happen in Poland too [...]."³⁵⁹

Anti-Semitic government policies naturally provoked a counterreaction, in the form of an increased identification with Jewish ethnicity, especially among

355 J. Tomaszewski, "Niepodległa Rzeczpospolita," in: *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce w zarysie (do 1950 roku)*, ed. J. Tomaszewski, Warsaw 1993, p. 209.

356 *Ibid.*, p. 210.

357 For more on anti-Jewish incidents of that time, see: J. Żyndul, *Zajścia antyżydowskie w Polsce w latach 1935–1937*, Warsaw 1994. For more recent scholarship see G. Aly, *Europa gegen die Juden: 1880–1945*, Frankfurt am Main 2017, pp. 114–118.

358 For more on this subject see: M. Natkowska, *Numerus clausus, getto ławkowe, numerus nullus, "paragraf aryjski": Antysemityzm na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim 1931–1939*, Warsaw 1999.

359 A. Landau-Czajka, *W jednym stali domu...: Koncepcje rozwiązania kwestii żydowskiej w publicystyce polskiej lat 1933–1939*, Warsaw 1998, p. 274.

young people.³⁶⁰ The Zionists and the Bund benefited from this trend the most. Abraham Rotfarb, previously a Communist, began to lean toward Zionism due to the events of the 1930s. In his autobiography, he wrote:

Someone told me, rightly, that as a citizen of the world, i.e. in caring for all humanity, for all peoples, I had forgotten about my own people and neglected my own hardship. And today, when organizations are being dissolved and the fervor of ideas has cooled, I look around and see that [he was right:] Poland—is not mine... And freedom in Poland is not mine either. And the gardens, boulevards and other places to catch one's breath are not mine either, nay... As a guest I cannot even show my face there because I am not wanted [...]³⁶¹

International developments, especially in Germany and Spain, were interpreted by the Communist movement as an omen that world revolution was nigh. The news of the first Moscow Trials was treated either as anti-Soviet propaganda or as evidence of an intensifying battle with the class enemy. Meanwhile, under the slogan of doing battle with Trotskyist deviation, the purges were being carried out, mainly among old Bolsheviks. Many high-ranking Party members were shot or exiled to camps, among them the main representatives of the Yevsektzia, i.e., the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs of the Soviet Communist Party.³⁶² However, Polish Communists did not yet know about the corruption driving the Trials, and if they did—they either did not believe it or insisted that the accused were undoubtedly guilty.

Shortly before the outbreak of World War II, Polish Communists suffered two severe, unexpected blows. In mid-December 1937, the lines of communication were cut between the national leadership of the KPP and the Party office in Praha. The incumbent Party leaders were recalled to Moscow and never heard

360 This can be seen, e.g., in the youth autobiographies submitted to the YIVO competition in the 1930s. See: *Ostatnie pokolenie: Autobiografie polskiej młodzieży żydowskiej okresu międzywojennego ze zbiorów YIVO Institute for Jewish Research w Nowym Jorku*, ed. A. Cała, Warsaw 2003, and *Awakening Lives: Autobiographies of Jewish Youth in Poland before the Holocaust*, ed. J. Shandler, New Haven and London 2002.

361 A. Rotfarb, "Pamiętnik żydowskiego młodzieńca," [Diary of a Jewish youth] in: *Ostatnie pokolenie*, p. 120. This autobiography was not included in the English anthology.

362 M. Keßler, "Der Stalinsche Terror gegen jüdische Kommunisten 1937/1938," in: *Kommunisten verfolgen Kommunisten: Stalinsche Terror und "Säuberungen" in den kommunistischen Parteien Europas seit den dreißiger Jahren*, ed. H. Weber and D. Staritz, Berlin 1993, pp. 97–98.

from again.³⁶³ During the “interregnum,” an informal Provisional Leadership of the KPP was installed.³⁶⁴ The air grew thick around the KPP: “The mood in the Party was very heavy—it appeared that everyone was overwhelmed by some sort of mania or psychosis of suspicion. Caution was taken to insane extremes.”³⁶⁵ Rumors circulating about the execution of the KPP leaders as provocateurs were stubbornly denied. But then they were confirmed in an article published in *Kommunisticheskiy Internatsional*, the official organ of the Comintern. KPP member Felicja Kalicka recalled:

Most KPP members in the country, albeit grudgingly, believed the [charges against the KPP leaders mentioned in the] article—first of all, because of their profound confidence in the Soviet authorities and the Comintern, as well as their conviction that if such serious charges had been made, they must have been based on absolutely irrefutable evidence. Without this trust [in the Soviet Party leadership], it is impossible to imagine that such a difficult revolutionary struggle [would have been sustainable], especially in Poland, where it was illegal—a struggle that demanded absolute discipline, fortitude, self-sacrifice and self-denial. Moreover, members of the KPP had no way to verify the accuracy of the charges leveled, and they took them on faith because most Communist activists did not know any of the accused leaders personally, and were not even familiar with their biographies.³⁶⁶

In late 1938, the news officially reached the country that on August 16, in accordance with a resolution of the presidium of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, the KPP had been dissolved on charges of treason and provocation. All the memoirs and reports of then-members of the KPP mention the profound shock experienced at hearing the news of the dissolution of the party. Sford wrote years later:

A strange feeling of combined pain and shame overcame me, as if someone I was very close to had died suddenly, someone without whom my whole life would become hollow

363 According to Lucjan Kieżczyński, 69 % of the leading KPP cadres perished in the 1930s purges. L. Kieżczyński, “Represje wobec kadry kierowniczej KPP,” in: *Tragedia Komunistycznej Partii Polski*, ed. J. Maciszewski, Warsaw 1989, p. 198.

364 H. Cimek, *Komuniści a Polska (1918–1939)*, Warsaw 1989, p. 178.

365 F. Kalicka, *Dwa czterdziestolecia mojego życia: Wspomnienia 1904–1984*, Warsaw 1989, p. 160.

366 *Ibid.*, p. 161. Activists probably also believed the accusations because to do so reduced cognitive dissonance. “Trusting the Party, allowing oneself to be convinced—this was a typical and *anti-intellectual attitude of Party intellectuals* [emphasis in original], which sought a sense of harmony with the Party and simultaneously harmony with oneself, with one’s own conscience” (Tulli, “Przesłanki adaptacji intelektualisty partyjnego,” p. 91).

and pointless, but [as if] before dying, this person had unexpectedly denigrated me horribly in front of everyone, and my pain at his death, complicated by resentment and shame, could not be freely exclaimed. I walled myself off in Otwock,³⁶⁷ did not want to see any of my comrades, did not want to talk about it. It seemed to me that everyone was having the same experience [...].³⁶⁸

In addition to the rumors about the Moscow Trials, the dissolution of the KPP was a second serious warning sign for Polish Communists. In fact, contrary to Kalicka's recollections, many of them did not believe the charges against the KPP leaders; they suspected some tragic mistake. KPP member Julian Łazebnik recalled:

I personally did not know a single longtime Communist who could have ever believed that the leadership of the KPP was made up mostly of provocateurs. After all, these were the people who had raised us, we had known them for many years [...]. More than once, we demonstrated alongside them in the streets, where we were all equally targeted by punches and kicks. And thus the 'dissolution' of the KPP was unbelievable.³⁶⁹

As Felicja Kalicka herself admitted, "It was particularly incomprehensible that the decision of the Communist International would be announced at such a complicated time, considering the rise of the Hitler government."³⁷⁰ Yet it was no coincidence, for another blow soon followed. On August 23, 1939, the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact was signed in Moscow. Unbeknownst to Poland, attached to the Pact was a secret additional protocol setting the future border between Germany and the Soviet Union on the line demarcated by the Narew, Vistula and San Rivers.

The dissolution of the KPP pulled the rug out from under the "left-wing writers" in the Writers' Association. Their membership in the Association no longer had a purpose. Some of them apparently withdrew. Among those who remained, Michał Mirski and Dovid Richter decided to fight through to the finish. Before what were probably the Association's last board elections, they went to speak to Borekh Shefner in order to establish the stipulations under which the Communists would vote for the Bund list. The communiqué announcing

367 Otwock, a town located 23 kilometers (14 miles) southeast of Warsaw, on the eastern bank of the Vistula river, a popular resort in the interwar period.

368 *Mit zikh*, p. 90.

369 Testimony of Julian Łazebnik, April 22, 1967, AŻIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 255, unpaginated.

370 Kalicka, *Dwa czterdziestolecia*, p. 162.

the dissolution of the KPP had warned that anyone who thereafter claimed to represent the KPP would be treated by the Comintern as a provocateur; thus, at first they did not know how to answer Shefner's ironic question: "So whom do you represent?" Mirski found a Solomonic solution: "We are adherents of the Comintern." Shefner was impressed by his answer, and as a result, Mark was elected to the board of the Association.³⁷¹

In the meantime, Sfard was compelled to go underground (or, as Party jargon would have it, he "crossed over into illegality"). His cousin Moyshe Levartov's house, which served as Sfard's official address, was visited by the police in 1937 (Sfard was in Otwock at the time). The police also searched for him at the Writers' Association. Through Noyekh Pryłucki, a lawyer, Sfard learned that he was the object of an investigation that in Pryłucki's opinion put him at risk of decades of imprisonment. This may or may not have been true, considering Sfard's earlier, rather friendly experiences with the judicial system. On the other hand, his involvement on so many fronts—the Writers' Association, the KPP, the press, the Kultur-Front, Gezerd—could have revised the authorities' opinion of him from "naïve intellectual" to "dangerous instigator."

Sfard spent the last period before the war in Otwock, in a house at 2 Prosta Street.³⁷² He lived there with his wife and mother; his mother had come to live with him after his father's death in 1936.³⁷³ He most likely supported himself by translating for hire; in addition, he continued to publish in the Yiddish press.³⁷⁴ According to a family story, during a certain period in his life he published

371 Testimony of Michał Mirski, April 22, 1967, AŻIH, Ruch Robotniczy, call no. 255, unpaginated.

372 Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej [henceforth: AIPN], call no. 0722/1, vol. 4, p. 30, Materials for the years 1967–1971, with respect to persons who took a pro-Israeli stance during the period of aggression in the Middle East and the March events, and who emigrated to Israel.

373 At his father's funeral, which took place in Melnytsya, Sfard was supposed to have said Kaddish (the prayer for the dead), in keeping with religious custom and in defiance of the expectations of his Party comrades (Y. Kerler, "Dovid Sfard un zayn dikhtung," *Yerusholaymer almanakh*, 1982, no. 13, p. 15).

374 For example, in March 1939, he took part in a discussion on the current situation facing the Jews (A.D. Sfard, "Khezhbn-hanefesh," *Literarische bleter* 16, no. 10, March 27, 1939, pp. 133–134).

serialized novels in Yiddish newspapers under a pseudonym—perhaps this was that period.³⁷⁵ He later wrote that in light of the threat from Hitler’s Germany, “the Soviet Union had become the only alternative for Polish Jews, and upon it we pinned all our hopes.”³⁷⁶

375 As told by Leon Sfard, personal communication.

376 *Mit zikh*, p. 90.

Chapter Three: “Liberated Brother Writers” (1939–1941)

Fleeing Toward a Myth

After the war broke out, Sfard and his friend the Yiddish writer Leyb Olitsky decided to flee to the Soviet Union. However, their attempt to cross the border near Volodymyr Volynskiy in November 1939 ended in failure: the entire group of refugees (about three hundred strong) was interned on the Soviet side, after which they were deported.³⁷⁷ Sfard was not discouraged by the cold reception on the part of the “fatherland of the world proletariat,” and back in Warsaw, he set about planning a second attempt to get into the USSR, i.e., to arrange—as the historian Evgeny Rozenblat has called it—“a flight from reality to myth.”³⁷⁸ This time, he aimed for Białystok, where his wife’s uncle lived. His wife, Zisl, and his mother, who were supposed to join him later, stayed behind in Warsaw. He never saw either of them again.³⁷⁹

At the time, Białystok was known as the “Manchester of the North.” By the interwar period, Jews were no longer the most numerous ethnic group in the city, mostly due to emigration; however, they remained about 42 % of the total population, estimated in 1936 to be 100,000, which put them in second place behind

377 D. Sfard, *Mit zikh un mit andere. Oytobiografye un literarishe eseyen*, Jerusalem 1984 [henceforth: *Mit zikh*], pp. 94–99; Oral History Division [henceforth: OHD], call no. (160)4a, pp. 14–15.

378 E.S. Rozenblat, “‘Chuzhdyy element’: Evreiskie bezhentsy v zapadnoi Belorussii (1939–1941)”, in: *Istoria i kultura rossiysskogo i vostochnoevropeiskogo evreistva: Novye istochniki, novye podkhody*, ed. O.V. Budnitskii et al., Moscow 2004, p. 335.

379 Both women left Warsaw shortly after he did, and, along with thousands of other refugees, got stuck in Zaręby Kościelne, near Malkinia, at the closed Soviet-German border. Sfard turned for help to, among others, Alexander Fadeyev, the head of the Soviet Writers’ Union, but he was unable to get permission for them to cross the border before the outbreak of the German-Soviet war (OHD, call no. (160)4a, p. 15). The Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names managed by the Yad Vashem Institute contains two pages of testimony attesting to the death of Zisl Sfard in the Holocaust. The testimony was provided by acquaintances of hers in 1956; one describes the scene of her death as the “extermination of the Warsaw ghetto” in 1942, which most likely refers to the Great Deportation in the summer of 1942 (Daf-ed Zisl Sfard, Yad Vashem, no. 758464 and no. 846181).

Poles, ahead of Germans and Russians.³⁸⁰ The Jewish population of Białystok was under greater cultural and political influence from Vilna than from Warsaw, which meant on the one hand less assimilation into Polish culture and thus the continued prevalence of Yiddish culture, and on the other—a greater connection to Russian-language culture. Jews made up an absolute majority in the local Communist Party structures, but after the dissolution of the KPP, many of them joined the ranks of the Bund. In the estimation of the Polish authorities, they were an untrustworthy, disloyal element: “Jews will [...] always go where they feel that their own interests and profits lie. This originates from their statelessness, connections to world Jewry and extremely materialistic attitude,” in the view of voivode Henryk Ostaszewski in April 1939.³⁸¹

Soviet-occupied Białystok became the destination for thousands of refugees from the territory of the General Government; Jews made up a large percentage of them. As of November 25, 1939, 43,449 refugees had registered.³⁸² From the other direction, from the USSR, the new rulers arrived, ecstatic over the city and its abundance. Some of the officials who were sent from parts east to take posts in the occupied provinces were Jews, including Hershl Weinrauch, who described the city as follows:

Białystok is a beautiful modern city, with newly built European houses, with many textile factories, and there is as much bread, butter, sugar and meat as you want, and prices are five hundred percent lower than in Soviet Russia, and you do not have to wait in line for butter or sugar... Workers and intellectuals live in beautiful, comfortable apartments with beautiful modern furniture, and in the stores everything is sold for practically nothing: splendid clothing, coats and shoes—of a sort not seen at all in Russia.³⁸³

380 Z. Landau, “Ludność,” in: *Encyklopedia historii Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Warsaw 1999, p. 202; c.f. also P. Wróbel, “Na równi pochyłej: Żydzi Białegostoku w latach 1918–1939: demografia, ekonomika, dezintegracja, konflikty z Polakami,” *Przegląd Historyczny* 79, no. 2, 1988, p. 288, table 4.

381 Wróbel, *Na równi pochyłej*, p. 286. In the next part of the letter, addressed to the Ministry of the Interior, the voivode demanded that Polish industry be strengthened by, among other things, introducing ethnic quotas in all areas of the economy.

382 D. Boćkowski, *Na zawsze razem: Białostoczczyzna i Łomżyńskie w polityce radzieckiej w czasie II wojny światowej (IX 1939 – VIII 1944)*, Warsaw 2005, p. 68. However, we do not know how many refugees failed to register.

383 H. Weinrauch, *Blut oyf der zun: Yidn in Sovet-Rusland*, New York 1950, p. 85. It is interesting to contrast Weinrauch’s impressions with those of the popular Polish novelist Maria Dąbrowska, who, when describing downtown Białystok in 1924, noted the existence of “hideous three-story tenements” and “damp, poisoned, useless” apartments; it is telling that she entitled her account “An Ugly City” (M. Dąbrowska, “Brzydkie miasto,” in: idem, *Pisma rozproszone*, vol. 1, Krakow 1964, p. 274).

Białystok's permanent residents had a different perspective: they perceived above all extreme overpopulation (in April 1940, Białystok had 107,660 inhabitants: 54,907 Poles, 45,217 Jews and 6,460 Belarussians),³⁸⁴ the decline of commerce (most stores were stripped bare by the arrivals from the East after the ruble was made equal to the zloty), an absence of basic foodstuffs, drinking water and fuel, and a rapid increase in dirt and grime.³⁸⁵ "We spent the nights in the synagogues, at the railroad station and up against fences, and during the day the streets swarmed with people," recalled one of the refugees. "There were long lines in front of the Jewish community offices for ration cards for dinner and bread."³⁸⁶

When Sfarid arrived in Białystok (in November or December 1939), the Soviet authorities were already in control. On October 22, 1939, elections were held for the People's Assembly of Western Belarus. The election results were a foregone conclusion: "The Bolsheviks [...] forced everyone to vote, even people at the train station who had just arrived. Fearing repercussions if I didn't, I also voted, I do not really know for whom, and tossed the voting card I had been given into the ballot box," a refugee from Łódź later related.³⁸⁷ The People's Assembly next requested the unification of Belarussian territories within the borders of the Soviet Union (the same happened in Western Ukraine). The request was granted, and on November 12, 1939, at the Third Special Session of the Supreme Soviet of the Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic, a resolution was adopted annexing Western Belarus.³⁸⁸

Taking control of the new territories required a change in the extant administrative structure. Poles, who had played primary administrative roles in the region before the war, were removed from their positions (even in ethnic Polish territory, where they made up a solid majority) and replaced with minority representatives, i.e., Belarussians, Jews, and arrivals from the east (so-called *vostochniks*). The latter were supposed to represent the vanguard of the proletariat and be

384 K. Jasiewicz, *Pierwsi po diable: Elity sowieckie w okupowanej Polsce 1939–1941 (Białostoczczyzna, Nowogródzczyzna, Polesie, Wileńszczyzna)*, Warsaw 2001, p. 1126.

385 D. Boćkowski, "Losy żydowskich uchodźców z centralnej i zachodniej Polski przebywających na Kresach Północno-Wschodnich w latach 1939–1941," in: *Świat NIEpożegnany: Żydzi na dawnych ziemiach wschodnich Rzeczypospolitej w XVIII–XX wieku*, ed. K. Jasiewicz, Warsaw 2004, p. 95.

386 *Widziałem Anioła Śmierci: Losy deportowanych Żydów polskich w ZSRR w latach II wojny światowej*, ed. and with an introduction by M. Siekierski and F. Tych, Warsaw 2006, p. 73 (testimony of Leon Klajman).

387 *Ibid.*, p. 88 (testimony of Shlomo Zdrojowicz).

388 Boćkowski, *Na zawsze razem*, p. 57.

model Bolshevik activists, yet in the haste to put together the list of candidates, some people who did not meet the requirements were included.³⁸⁹

A consequence of the annexation of Western Belarus to the Soviet Union was so-called “passportization” (*paszportyzacja*): the granting of Soviet citizenship to the local population, as well as to those who had arrived in the Soviet Union on the basis of the German-Soviet agreement of November 16, 1939.³⁹⁰ Refugees from the General Government were also subject to “passportization.”

The attitude of the Jewish minority in the territories occupied by the Soviet Union in 1939 continues to arouse strong emotions to this day. The stereotype held by Poles who experienced the occupation is that Jews were adherents of the new regime who enthusiastically welcomed the Red Army and helped build the new order—including by actively helping the Soviets to track down the “enemies of the revolution,” i.e., turning in friends and neighbors to the authorities. Historians have argued that the Jewish enthusiasm for the occupation was not due only to Communist sympathies, but also to relief that the occupying power was not Hitler’s army.³⁹¹ Refugees from the General Government certainly took comfort for this reason: “You can walk freely on the street, Soviet orchestras play cheerful marches. No one tears out Jewish beards on the street; there are no pale, quaking people in sight.”³⁹² It is also worth noting that the new order was attractive to Jews, among other reasons, because it opened up new pathways to social advancement, including higher education without numerus clausus. On the other hand, as historian Daniel Boćkowski notes, the absence of Jews in prewar state administrative structures made their sudden appearance in the new system all the more striking. Moreover, “the situation was complicated by the fact that Yiddish was granted a status that had been reserved exclusively for Polish before the war.”³⁹³ This is reminiscent of the situation during the Polish-Bolshevik War,

389 Ibid., pp. 80–81.

390 A. Głowacki, *Sowieci wobec Polaków na ziemiach wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej 1939–1941*, Łódź 1998, p. 78.

391 See, e.g. W. Śleszyński, *Okupacja sowiecka na Białostocczyźnie 1939–1941: Propaganda i indoktrynacja*, Białystok 2001, p. 263; J.T. Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia*, Princeton–Oxford 2002, p. 32.

392 *Widziałem Anioła Śmierci*, pp. 200–201 (testimony of Róża Hirsz).

393 D. Boćkowski, “‘Żydokomuna’ – mit czy rzeczywistość? Żydzi polscy na Białostocczyźnie pod okupacją radziecką 1939–1941,” in: *Europa Środkowa i Wschodnia w XX wieku. Studia ofiarowane Wiesławowi Balcerakowi w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, ed. A. Koryn and P. Lossowski, Warsaw–Łowicz 2004, p. 265. For recent research see

when the Provisional Polish Revolutionary Committee in Białystok granted Yiddish equal status as an official language alongside Polish and Russian.³⁹⁴

After analyzing many testimonies and memoirs of Poles and Jews, historian Andrzej Żbikowski concluded that enthusiasm for the Soviet authorities was present only on the margins of the Jewish community, mainly among the revolutionarily inclined youth. He estimates that the number of Jews who truly collaborated with the new regime was 7–10 % of the local Jewish population,³⁹⁵ and argues that the Polish perception that Jews uncritically supported the new regime was merely an outgrowth of the a priori expectation that Jews would jump at the chance to betray their loyalty to the Polish state.³⁹⁶ The aforementioned opinion of the prewar voivode of Białystok illustrates this prejudice. Żbikowski's hypothesis, taken together with Boćkowski's observation about the shift in the demographics of those holding administrative roles, could help to explain why Jews were stereotyped as traitors and Soviet flunkies, despite the fact that, logically speaking, Belarussians could easily been perceived in the same terms, considering that the Soviets eagerly pushed them into prominent positions. However, most of the Belarussians newly appointed to public posts were imports from the East, because local Belarussians frequently lacked the necessary qualifications³⁹⁷—and the fact of strangers taking over posts, even prominent ones, was less noticeable than the granting of positions to neighbors whom one had known for years. The prominence of the stereotype of Jews as collaborators, and the failure to focus on the pro-Soviet attitudes of some Belarussians, may also be a consequence of the fact that in parts of Western Belarus, e.g., in the Białystok and Łomża regions, there was no significant concentration of Belarussians, so Jews were the visible, scapegoated minority.

G. Estraiikh, "The Missing Years: Yiddish Writers in Soviet Białystok, 1939–41," *East European Jewish Affairs* 46, no. 2, 2016, pp. 176–191.

394 Wróbel, *Na równi pochylej*, p. 270.

395 Boćkowski estimates 6–8 % at most ("Żydokomuna," p. 267).

396 In Żbikowski's opinion, this expectation "was transformed into the stereotype of 'Jewish treason' and supposed widespread collaboration because the observations and experiences of a large group of people simply confirmed their earlier, subconscious expectations. If the groundwork had not been laid by prewar anti-Semitism, these new experiences would not have been so easily and widely generalized" (A. Żbikowski, *U genezy Jedwabnego: Żydzi na Kresach Północno-Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej (wrzesień 1939 – lipiec 1941)*, Warsaw 2006, p. 235).

397 Boćkowski, "Żydokomuna," p. 265.

The overwhelming majority of the Jewish population in these areas, however, was traditional, religious and unassimilated. The economic situation in the region was improving, because nationalized industry was operating on all cylinders, and in spite of low wages, universal employment ensured economic stabilization.³⁹⁸ The Jewish proletariat and semi-proletariat benefited from the improvement; however, Jewish religious institutions paid artificially higher rates for services, for example for electricity (5 rubles per kilowatt compared to the usual charge of 35 kopecks per kilowatt). The most religious Jews, committed to maintaining traditional observance in spite of the changed living conditions, founded a carpenters’ cooperative in Białystok that was closed on Saturdays and holidays, and in the apartment of one of its members, a private ritual bath was set up (since the ritual bath that had existed until then at the municipal baths was closed down when the latter was nationalized).³⁹⁹

Could the actions of a group of Jewish refugees in Białystok who had been Communists even before the war have helped to establish the stereotype of “Judeo-Communism”? Theoretically, yes. However, they were a very small group—if one reads the sources and memoirs, the same names come up again and again. What’s more, it appears that their presence made less of an impression on their Polish neighbors than the putative pro-Soviet attitudes of the local Jews. Even in the testimonies and memoirs of other Polish Jewish refugees from the General Government region, Jewish Communists are not very prominent, although they are certainly mentioned. Thus, it seems that the reaction of the prewar Jewish Communists in Białystok to the incoming Soviet authorities did not attract particular notice from the general public—at least, not the sort of notice that would have contributed significantly to the “żydokomuna” stereotype.

Articles That They Themselves Would Not Have Endorsed

By 1939, there were three daily Yiddish newspapers in the USSR (*Der shtern* in Kiev, *Oktiabr* in Minsk, and *Birobidzhaner shtern* in Birobidzhan), four Yiddish literary magazines (*Sovetish* in Moscow, *Sovetishe literatur* in Kiev, *Der shtern* in Minsk, and *Forpost* in Birobidzhan), and a Yiddish children’s newspaper in Kiev, *Zay greyt*.⁴⁰⁰ This was actually a relatively small number of publications,

398 P. Korzec, “Fragmentsy wspomnień,” in: *Białostoccy Żydzi*, vol. 1, ed. A. Dobroński, Białystok 1993, p. 26.

399 *Der byalistoker yizker-bukh*, ed. Y. Shmulevitsh et al., New York 1982, p. 115.

400 D. Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils: Eastern European Jewry Under Soviet Rule 1939–1941*, Philadelphia–Jerusalem 1995, p. 116.

considering the three million-strong Jewish population. The Soviet annexation of Western Belarus, a region with a high percentage of Jews (about 10 % of the entire population, or 440,000, in 1939), as well as the wave of Jewish refugees into Bialystok, led the authorities to establish a new Yiddish publication, which was intended by the Central Committee of the Belarussian Communist Party to be an additional vehicle for agitation among the Jewish population.

The *Byalistoker shtern* (Bialystok Star), probably the only Yiddish newspaper in Western Belarus at the time, opened in October 1939. It was printed using the presses from the prewar Bialystok newspaper *Undzer lebn* by Zelig Axelrod, editor of the Minsk *Oktiabr* and secretary of the Yiddish section of the Soviet Writers' Union of the Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic.⁴⁰¹ Axelrod was non-partisan, and he was far from being an uncritical enthusiast of the USSR, which made him more approachable from the perspective of the Polish writers.⁴⁰² Hersh Smolar, a former activist in the Communist Party of Western Belarus (the KPZB, which, as an autonomous member organization of the KPP, had been dissolved along with it) who had just been released from prison, was appointed as his assistant. However, neither of them was named editor-in-chief. That position was held by I. Tevelev, Beynish Shulman and B.L. Gantman, consecutively. All three were Soviet Jews who had come to Bialystok from points east, in contrast to Smolar.⁴⁰³ When Shulman was editor, Hersh Weinrauch was cultural editor and Smolar was secretary, meaning that his main job was to prepare the newspaper for publication. According to Weinrauch, the refugee contributors were more Catholic than the Pope in their pro-Soviet sentiments.⁴⁰⁴ Of the refugees, important positions were held by Binem Heller (literary editor), Bernard Mark (cultural and educational editor), Dovid Sfard (opinion columns) and Dovid Mitsmakher (reportage).⁴⁰⁵

401 H. Smolar, "Ha-haim ha-yehudi'im be-ma'arav Belorusiah ha-sovietit 1939–1941: Prihah ve-shkiyah," *Shvut* 4, 1976, p. 128. In his memoirs, Weinrauch attributes the founding of *Byalistoker shtern* to the printer Beynish Shulman from Minsk, claiming that the latter acted entirely on his own initiative and presented the Party authorities with a fait accompli. However, this seems very unlikely (*Blut oyf der zun*, p. 88).

402 A. Zak, *Knekht zenen mir geven*, vol. 1 (Buenos Aires 1956), p. 25; *Mit zikh*, p. 111.

403 Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, p. 117; S. Bender, *Mul mavet orev: Yehudei Bialistok be-milhemet ha-olam ha-shniah 1939–1943*, Tel Aviv 1997, p. 87.

404 Weinrauch, *Blut oyf der zun*, p. 89–90.

405 H. Smolar, "Ha-haim ha-yehudi'im," p. 129; D. Levin, "Itonut yehudit aduma: Le-korotthem shel shnei itonim yehudi'im ba-shtahim she-suphu le-brit ha-moatsot be-1939/40," *Kesher*, 1989, no. 6, p. 77.

The *Byalistoker shtern* appeared three times a week, and its circulation hovered at around 5,000 (compare the only Polish-language newspaper in the region, *Sztandar Wolności*, which had a circulation of 30,000).⁴⁰⁶ The newspaper was barely four pages long. Much of the space in the newspaper was devoted to reprints from the Soviet press, such as articles from *Pravda* translated into Yiddish. The newspaper was designed to agitate among the Jewish population, in part by battling the “relics of Zionism and Bundism.”⁴⁰⁷ The newspaper attacked the Bund more harshly than it did Zionist organizations. Hersh Smolar recalled that when an interview with a worker described as a “former Bundist” was published, a reprimand came down from Minsk criticizing the editors for failing to include a line defining the Bund as a fascist organization.⁴⁰⁸

It appears that none of the refugees had any illusions about the strictly propagandistic character of the *Byalistoker shtern*. They probably read it mainly in order to maintain at least some sort of contact with the printed Yiddish word. The exaggerated apologetics for the Soviet Union left a bad taste in the mouths of some readers—Moyshe Broderzon dubbed the newspaper’s contributors a *shraybarnye* [factory of hacks].⁴⁰⁹ One anonymous refugee from Łódź, who managed to reach Warsaw after the outbreak of the Soviet-German war and gave an interview to a representative of the Ringelblum Archive, gave a crushing review of the newspaper:

The newspaper itself was chaotic—it mostly reported on factory assemblies—and its main subject was gratitude and praise for the great leader of humanity [Stalin], for example a report in which the former Trotskyist [Moyshe] Grosman wrote: ‘I longed for Stalin!’ [...] Or the provincial [Yisroel] Emiot, who sent in a poem for Stalin’s birthday in which he expressed his slavish, excessive adoration; everyone was shocked by it. When that sort of thing was done by a Communist scribbler—Leyzer Volf—everyone understood, but those who voluntarily became adulators—the Trotskyist Grosman, who only yesterday fulminated against all the Stalinists, or a religious adolescent like Emiot? [...] People who only yesterday were writing articles unfriendly to workers in the bourgeois press on orders from Zionist or religious circles very quickly took on a new role, adapted

406 Śleszyński, *Okupacja sowiecka*, p. 390.

407 Official note of Gantman, managing editor of the *Byalistoker shtern*, Natsionalny Archiv Respubliki Belarus (National Archives of the Republic of Belarus), f. 4p, op. 21, d. 1957, p. 3–4.

408 Smolar, “Ha-haim ha-yehudi’im,” p. 129.

409 S.M. Broderzon, *Mayn laydns-veg mit Moyshe Broderzon: Di milkhome hot gedoyert far undz zibetsn yor*, Buenos Aires 1960, p. 21.

to the current requirements and wrote articles full of pathos that they themselves would not have endorsed.⁴¹⁰

According to Weinrauch—a Soviet Jew—the *Byalistoker shtern* was the only Jewish publication in the Soviet Union which was reminiscent of Jewish newspapers abroad.⁴¹¹ This is a startling claim, since even a reader unfamiliar with the political leanings of some of the contributors could not have had any illusions about the propagandistic character of their articles. Generally speaking, the *Byalistoker shtern* had three main thrusts: apologetics for the Soviet Union, deprecations of “feudal Poland” (or, as it was dubbed, “white Poland”), and critiques of obstacles to the establishment of the new order (most often, the anti-Soviet attitude of members of the bourgeoisie). Many articles included all three. Letters from readers were an especially effective genre for stigmatizing anti-Soviet attitudes and modeling the party line. In one such letter, Motl Lewin from the community of Suchowola complained about the poor selection of books in the local library, which had previously been “in the hands of Revisionists and Poale Zionists,” and consequently was full of “nationalistic” literature.⁴¹² The editors themselves often played the role of “social factor” by penning reproaches based on problems pointed out in reader letters. In a short bulletin signed D.S. (perhaps Sfarad himself?), the author took the side of a certain Yankelevski, who complained of poor treatment at the hands of employees of the Sholem Aleichem Library; the note scolded the library administration for its improper attitude toward readers of Yiddish literature.⁴¹³ However, aside from these “exposés,” the newspaper was full of descriptions of the real problems facing the inhabitants of the western territories: difficulties in accessing adequate housing, food, and hygiene.

One of the goals of the *Byalistoker shtern* was to conduct battle with “Jewish clericalism,” particularly before major Jewish holidays. For example, around the

410 Written in Warsaw on July 15, 1941 and preserved in the Ringelblum Archives. See *Archiwum Ringelbluma*, vol. 3: *Relacje z Kresów*, ed. A. Żbikowski, Warsaw 2000, p. 82.

411 Weinrauch, *Blut oyf der zun*, p. 90.

412 “Farbesern di kultur-arbet (a briv fun Sukhovolye),” *Byalistoker shtern*, February 6, 1940, p. 3. Libraries which stocked “unorthodox” literature were subjected to purges of their collections. Among those to whom this task was delegated was Weinrauch; as he wrote years later, in this way, he was able for the first time in his life to acquire familiarity with authentic Bundist and Zionist literature (*Blut oyf der zun*, p. 94). Similar purges were also performed in Polish libraries (Boćkowski, *Na zawsze razem*, pp. 123–124).

413 D.S., “‘Daj jemu żydowską książkę’ (Vegn der umderlozbarer arbet in der Sholem-Aleichem-bibliotek in Byalistok),” *Byalistoker shtern*, June 24, 1940, p. 3.

time of Passover, the newspaper published scholarly articles on the origins of the holiday as well as letters from Jewish workers describing how “factory owners” had forced them to celebrate the holiday (i.e., prevented them from coming to work) in Poland. These texts, which presented themselves as “scholarly” texts intended for propagandists and agitators, relied almost exclusively on (supposedly self-contradictory) quotations from the Torah, and not, for example, on quotations from contemporary historians or theologians.⁴¹⁴

Hitler’s policy toward the Jews in Poland was a taboo subject in the *Byalistoker shtern*, considering that Germany was at the time an official ally of the Soviet Union. No articles were published on this subject, and the editors even interfered with literary texts which made mention of Nazi Germany. For example, in two poems that Avrom Zak submitted for publication, the editors took exception to the use of the word “Jude” and to a mention of Jews who were forced to dig their own graves. In the end, the poems were not published.⁴¹⁵ This editorial censorship exasperated Jewish refugees.⁴¹⁶ However, it was most likely based on orders from above, which the editors had no authority to defy.

Dovid Sfarid contributed to the *Byalistoker shtern*, first as a Russian translator and later as the literary director. The surviving issues of the newspaper from 1940 to 1941 include strikingly few texts published under his name or initials (although perhaps he wrote under a pseudonym). One of his texts is the poem “Mayn bruder der royt armeyer” (My brother the Red Army Soldier)—a classic example of propagandistic poetry.⁴¹⁷ It is possible that at that time, Sfarid was concentrating mostly on his translation work; it is also possible that, in view of his experiences of Soviet rule in Melnytsya, he decided to fly under the radar and wait for further developments.

Writers Have it Good Here

Dovid Sfarid was one of many Jewish writers and artists in Białystok at the time. Others included Efraim Kaganowski, Bernard Mark, Binem Heller, Leyzer Volf,

414 “Vegn dem yidishn religiezn yontev Peysekh,” *Byalistoker shtern*, April 6, 1941, pp. 2 and 4; F. Skrande, “Peysekh veln mir arbetn vi a gants yor,” *ibid.*, p. 2; V. Ciechanowiecki, “Undzer friling-yontev iz der ershter may,” *ibid.*, p. 2. The Soviet Yiddish press had conducted a similar campaign against the Jewish holidays in the 1920s. See D. Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture, 1918–1930*, Cambridge 2004, p. 113.

415 Zak, *Knekht zenen mir geven*, pp. 30–31.

416 Broderzon, *Mayn laydns-veg*, p. 31.

417 *Byalistoker shtern*, February 25, 1940, p. 3.

Meyer Halpern, Yitskhok Yanasovitch, Yoysef Rubinshteyn, Yosef Okrutny, Peysekh Binecki, Nakhmen Rapp, Khayem Siemiatycki, Shmul Dreyer, Moyshe Grosman, Moyshe Knapheys, and Shmerke Kaczerginski.⁴¹⁸ Jews dominated the Białystok literary circles; among the few Polish writers on the scene, the best known was Janina Broniewska.

Yiddish writers gathered at two addresses: the editorial offices of the *Byalistoker shtern* at 23 Soviet (formerly Piłsudski) Street and the Writer's House at 42 Lenin (formerly Sienkiewicz) Street. The latter was a former dance hall that looked like a barracks; iron beds and wooden plank beds had been placed along the walls. The windows were curtained with the refugees' clothing, hung from the window handles.⁴¹⁹ Those writers who could not find anywhere else to stay in Białystok sojourned or even resided there. According to the refugee from Łódź, relations at the Writer's House were far from harmonious:

At the club [i.e., Writer's House] there was a committee and an office where everyone had to register in order to receive ration cards for food, which had to be picked up every day [...]. The committee was taken over by a bunch of young whippersnappers with no literary talent or seniority; it was only thanks to their powerful patronage that they were allowed to run everything. Someone was constantly being expelled from the committee for failing to toe the political line. People mistrusted each other.⁴²⁰

It is not clear what the interviewee was referring to with these descriptions of the “committee” at the Writer's House (he named Yanasovitch, Knapheys and B. Pomeranc as members of the committee); other memoirs make no mention of any such body. The interviewee also claimed that the director of the House was originally N. Rubinsztajn—he might have meant the writer Yoysef Rubinshteyn, but this information is not confirmed by other sources either. According to other sources, the first director of the Writer's House was Zishe Bagisz. After Bagisz, Sfard took over the role. At the same juncture, he was also elected vice-chairman of the Soviet Writers' Union of the Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic (in his memoirs, unfortunately, Sfard does not give any detail about these elections). As the director of the Writer's House, he organized individual receptions for the writers on a weekly basis. Each reception provided an occasion to discuss the works of one of the writers, including from an ideological and social perspective.⁴²¹ Sfard was assisted in his work as director by the secretary of the Writers'

418 *Mit zikh*, p. 101.

419 Broderzon, *Mayn laydns-veg*, p. 18; Zak, *Knekht zenen mir geven*, p. 18.

420 *Archiwum Ringelbluma*, vol. 3, p. 81.

421 *Mit zikh*, p. 103.

Union, Regina (Rive) Dreyer from Vilna, wife of columnist Shmul Dreyer. Regina Dreyer published proceedings of Writers’ Union meetings in the pages of the *Byalistoker shtern*. From the proceedings it is clear that sharp words were sometimes spoken. For example, it was once suggested to Meyer Halpern that “the only course [for him] was to face Soviet reality.”⁴²²

As noted above, not all refugee writers in Białystok were Party members or fellow travelers. In December 1939, Mikhail Lynkov, the chairman of the Board of Directors of the Soviet Writers’ Union of the BSSR (Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic), noted in a letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus that there were “dark spots” in some of their biographies.⁴²³ He urged:

All these circumstances suggest that it is necessary to examine their political profiles. We can check up on them on the basis of the ideological-artistic character of their work. But that is not enough. In the absence of detailed verification, it is difficult to decide whether to publish their work and whether to employ them. So we either have to check up [on them] as soon as possible or give instructions to the State Publishing House of the BSSR and the [individual] editorial boards [to disregard this concern], so that this lack of verification does not present an insurmountable obstacle to publication and hiring processes. It is particularly necessary to check on those [writers] who are current or former members of the PPS or the Bund.⁴²⁴

The new authorities were also suspicious of former members of the KPP, which had, after all, been dissolved by Stalin. As Felicja Kalicka recalls: “Soviet citizens were sometimes unfamiliar with the illegal conditions under which Polish Communists had operated, and thus, when hiring the latter, demanded that they produce a Party ID card; they interpreted the fact of not possessing such a card as proof of never having belonged to the KPP, and identifying oneself as a Communist for the sake of convenience or even for insidious reasons.”⁴²⁵ As a

422 R. Dreyer, “Untern tseykhn fun sheferisher arbet (in Byalistoker shrayberhoyz),” *Byalistoker shtern*, February 9, 1941, p. 3.

423 E.g., Efraim Kaganowski, a former Red Army soldier who was captured by the Poles during the Polish-Bolshevik war and did not return to the USSR; Polish writers descended from the “landowning class”; as well as former members of the KPZB and Young Communist League (Komsomol) who had broken off their membership in those organizations.

424 Note of M. Lynkov to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus, December 10, 1939, in: *Wydarzenia i losy ludzkie: Rok 1939*, ed. B. Gronek, G. Knatko, and M. Kupiecka, Warsaw 1998, p. 418.

425 F. Kalicka, *Dwa czterdziestolecia mojego życia: Wspomnienia 1904–1984*, Warsaw 1989, p. 173.

result, former members of the KPP found themselves in a double bind and were forced to accept any job they were offered. Thus, Moyshe Levin worked as a railroad official,⁴²⁶ and Moyshe Knapheys, who had been imprisoned in Poland for having Communist sympathies, shoveled snow off of the streets during that first winter in Białystok.⁴²⁷ In March 1941, the instructor of the Białystok District Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus informed his superiors that over 500 members of the former KPP and KPZB in the city were demanding that they be allowed entry into the Soviet Communist Party in such a way that would allow them to hold onto their former levels of seniority and become Party officials. He named Szymon Zachariasz and Alfred Lampe as among those who were making these demands. “Considering that they have not been offered these possibilities,” he explained further, “individual comrades are not demonstrating any particular desire to join the Party as ordinary members. [...] They are dissatisfied with their work and with the situation in the district. [...] It is impossible to talk to them or get them involved in political life, in political education.”⁴²⁸ Dovid Richter was among the first few Polish Communists to be readmitted to the Party. Sfard called Richter’s presence on the editorial board of the *Byalistoker shtern* a blessing for Jewish writers.⁴²⁹ Readmission to the Party was treated as a big event, “because in a certain sense, it meant the rehabilitation of the KPP.”⁴³⁰

Sfard himself was one of the few who were accepted back into the Party with open arms. A list drawn up in 1940 by Smolar, secretary of the Organizational Bureau of the Białystok Division of the Soviet Writers’ Union, attests to this. Smolar’s task was to “verify” the ideology of the writers and prepare them to become members of the Soviet Writers’ Union of Belarus. He divided the writers into four categories according to their literary skill and the degree to which they needed further political education:

Group A (those who can become full members of the Union without delay): Binem Heller, Moyshe Knapheys, Dovid Sfard, Yoysef Rubinshteyn, Yosef Okrutny, Michal Bursztyn, Dovid Mitsmakher, Dovid Richter.

426 *Mit zikh*, p. 101.

427 Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, p. 127.

428 Jasiewicz, *Pierwsi po diable*, pp. 185–186. Former KPP members in occupied Lviv found themselves in a similar situation. See: “Wspomnienia Wandy Wasilewskiej (1939–1944),” *Archiwum Ruchu Robotniczego*, 1982, vol. 7, p. 356.

429 *Mit zikh*, p. 103.

430 Kalicka, *Dwa czterdziestolecia mojego życia*, p. 174.

Group B (those who require further active political education): Efraim Kaganowski, Janina Broniewska, Shloyme Berlinski, Yisroel Emiot, Khayem Siemiatycki, Khayem[-Leyb] Fuks, Moyshe Zylburg, Moyshe Broderzon, Meyer Halpern, S. Szejnberg.

Group C (capable, but require further vocational education): Peysekh Binecki, Sholem Żyman, Shloyme Burshteyn, Yankev Gordon, Walentyna Najdus, I. Szirwindt, Yitskhok Yanasovitsh, Yitskhok Guterman.

Group D (insufficient literary skill and in need of further political education): A. Berezinski, Bernard Mark, Helena Selm, A. Ruskolienkier and A. Szacki.⁴³¹

The reward for adequate “self-improvement” was acceptance into the Soviet Writers’ Union of the BSSR. In September 1940, fifteen candidates attained this honor: two Poles, two Belarussians and eleven Jews. Those were fateful days, as Sfard recalled. He and Bernard Mark were asked to present the refugee writers at a general meeting of Belarussian writers.⁴³² Aside from Sfard, among the writers then accepted into the Union were Heller, Yanasovitsh, Kaganowski, Knapheys, Mitsmakher, Okrutny and Rubinshteyn. Belarussian poet Filip Pestrak was named chairman and Hersh Smolar was named secretary of the Białystok Division of the Soviet Writers’ Union of the BSSR.⁴³³

It appears that among the refugee writers, Binem Heller received the most recognition, from the authorities as well. Dovid Richter wrote an enthusiastic review of Heller’s volume *Lider* (Poems), which he published in Minsk in 1940 and which included works written in Poland, Paris and Białystok. “Heller’s newest poems—are those of a Soviet poet,” Richter wrote, and he called Heller an important addition to Soviet Jewish literature.⁴³⁴ In the first 1941 issue of the *Byalistoker shtern*, Heller shared his plans with his readers, mentioning, among others, a poem which he planned to write about the life of Polish political emigres in Paris in the 1930s. He also wrote: “If in my works before I arrived in the Soviet Union, the feeling of hatred of everything evil, of enslavement and exploitation, was dominant—now, under the Soviets, the time has come for love,

431 W. Śleszyński, “Białostockie środowisko pisarzy sowieckich (1939–1941),” *Białoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne*, 2000, no. 13, pp. 105–117; idem, *Okupacja sowiecka*, pp. 417–418. .

432 *Mit zikh*, p. 110.

433 Śleszyński, *Okupacja sowiecka*, p. 418.

434 D. Richter, “A vikhtiker tsushtayer undzer yidisher sovetisher literatur,” *Byalistoker shtern*, February 16, 1941, p. 3. As Chone Shmeruk observes, the volume *Lider* was later included in its entirety in Heller’s collection *Durkh shotn un shayn* (Łódź 1948), with the addition of more of his poems from the Białystok period (“Yiddish Publications in the USSR: From the Late Thirties to 1948,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 4, 1960, p. 116).

for everything good and beautiful in people, because only a socialist society can create the opportunity for people to reveal what is best and most beautiful in themselves.”⁴³⁵

Sfard writes in his memoirs about what fate awaited authors who were considered “unreliable.” Bernard Mark, who had locked horns with the Party even before the war,⁴³⁶ and who had then experienced a period of depression in reaction to the 1930s trials, was accused of Trotskyism. This accusation, unusually dangerous under the current conditions, was ultimately declared groundless, partially thanks to an attestation, signed jointly by Sfard and Richter, that Mark was a loyal Communist.⁴³⁷ On another occasion, Sfard and Mark, who was now back in the Party’s good graces, interceded with the head of the Białystok branch of the Soviet People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) in response to their threat to arrest Moyshe Grosman for registering to return to Poland.⁴³⁸ Smolar also claimed in his memoirs that the NKVD tried to recruit one of the employees of the printing house (to act as an informer about the activities of the editorial board of the *Byalistoker shtern*, among other things).⁴³⁹

Zelig Axelrod suffered the most tragic fate. Axelrod’s affirmation of parents’ right to choose the language of instruction for their children was risky, in view of the recent closing of Yiddish-language schools in the Soviet Union.⁴⁴⁰ His views were considered “nationalist propaganda,” and he was arrested in 1941. He was shot two days before the outbreak of the Soviet-German war. As Smolar recalled, further arrests were threatened, particularly arrests of refugee writers, but fortunately they ultimately did not take place.⁴⁴¹

Not everyone was ready to follow the dictates of the new regime. Sfard recalled a conversation that he had had with the Bundist writer Leo Finkelstein, who had been a member of the Warsaw Jewish community board before the war: “While I was working at the newspaper [*Byalistoker shtern*], I asked him many times to contribute an article about any subject at all. But he always answered me frankly

435 B. Heller, “Baym shvel fun nayem yor,” *Byalistoker shtern*, January 1, 1941, p. 3.

436 Mark was suspended from Party activities for half a year for violating the prohibition on publishing in the non-Communist press (Personal file of Bernard Mark, AAN, call no. 3840, p. 5).

437 *Mit zikh*, pp. 104–105.

438 *Ibid.*, pp. 105–106.

439 Smolar, “Ha-haim ha-yehudi’im,” p. 131.

440 See, e.g., Axelrod’s article printed under the pseudonym “Lior”: “Der ovnt lekoved dem 15-yorikn yubiley funem zhurnal *Shtern*,” *Byalistoker shtern*, June 28, 1940, p. 4.

441 Smolar, “Ha-haim ha-yehudi’im,” p. 135.

and with dignity: ‘I am an opponent of historical materialism and I cannot change my skin.’ ‘Who said anything about changing your skin?’ I retorted. ‘So don’t write on any subjects that would require you to refer to that, write about something neutral.’ I knew that he was depressed, since he did not have a job, and that he needed the few rubles. But he only smiled [...] and answered sadly: ‘I appreciate your intentions, but I cannot.’⁴⁴²

Writers fought for the opportunity to publish in the *Byalistoker shtern*’s modest pages. However, an objectionable political past was not the only obstacle. The refugee from Łódź recalled:

[In the Writer’s House] one December morning, after a night when the old writer Shloyme Zilberg kept interrupting our sleep with his constant, non-stop asthmatic coughing, I listened to the writers complaining that they had become impotent and talentless here, and that they were in no condition to write a single word. Each of them had imagined that under the new conditions, they would be able to write effortlessly, but in an atmosphere of suspicion and kowtowing, each had shut himself off from the outside world and felt incapable of writing anything.⁴⁴³

The frequent demands to enlarge the newspaper or open a new, strictly literary publication went unheeded.⁴⁴⁴ The refugee writers could, however, publish in Minsk and Moscow—during the years 1940–1941, the Moscow publishing house Der Emes published eight of their books, and Binem Heller and Dovid Richter were admitted to the editorial board of the Minsk newspaper *Shtern*. Their books’ average print run hovered around 3,000 copies—quite impressive, considering that, e.g., Peretz Markish’s work published in 1938 was printed in runs of half that size.⁴⁴⁵ The granting of government permission to print such a large run was undoubtedly a gesture calculated to encourage the refugee writers in believing that great professional opportunities awaited them in the Soviet Union.

During the period when they were forced to enroll for Soviet passports, the writers (or at least some of them) found themselves in a privileged position—they were permitted to live permanently in Białystok in spite of the fact that as refugees, they had no formal right to be in the entire Białystok district, as

442 *Mit zikh*, p. 107.

443 *Archiwum Ringelbluma*, vol. 3, p. 81. By “Shloyme Zilberg” the refugee probably meant the writer Moyshe Zylburg.

444 M. Lynkov had also requested this in his note of December 1939 (*Wydarzenia i losy ludzkie*, p. 420).

445 Levin, *The Lesser of Two Evils*, p. 134; Shmeruk, “Yiddish Publications,” pp. 113–115.

it was a border zone (as was stipulated in the so-called paragraph 11 of their passports).⁴⁴⁶

Yet the Soviet authorities did not give out privileges for free. From time to time, they reminded the writers that they were “engineers of the human soul,” and that it was their obligation to influence society in the Soviet spirit. For example, during the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the BSSR in March 1940, forty-one writers were designated agitators, and they were given to understand that this was an opportunity to prove their “civic maturity.” Three representatives of the Writers’ Union served in the electoral commissions; two of them were Jews, Hersh Smolar and Binem Heller.⁴⁴⁷

Practically none of the Jewish writers who were in Białystok at the time, including Sford, expressed any emotional tie to Poland as a homeland in their memoirs. To be sure, they frequently recalled Jewish Warsaw and the Tłomackie Street Writers’ Association; they also commented often that what was possible in capitalist (or “semi-fascist”) Poland turned out to be impossible in Communist Russia, yet they expressed no sentiment of “us” (Poles) versus “them” (Soviets), nor did they express any emotional attachment to the Polish state. This is the case even when discussing the occupation of Poland by the Germans: the writers mentioned only their relief at having been able to flee the Nazis and their concern for the fate of the Jews who stayed behind. Avrom Zak recalled a day when a group of Jewish refugees listened to a Polish broadcast from London in a private apartment. The president of the Polish Republic in exile, Władysław Raczkiewicz, delivered his Christmas wishes and appealed to the listeners to remember their countrymen suffering under the Soviet and Nazi occupations. It was a solemn speech, full of pathos. After the broadcast, the following conversation took place among those present:

“The Poles strike a romantic tone,” remarked Leo Finkelstein, “Raczkiewicz’s speech reminds me a little of the Polish emigres in Paris in Mickiewicz’s time...”

“The Poles become brotherly and romantic only when they are oppressed,” someone commented, “but when they are independent, they become brutal, pusillanimous, arrogant in their megalomania...”⁴⁴⁸

The absence of grief at the downfall of Poland is easiest to understand among members of the former KPP, who saw in the Soviet occupation the hope of a

446 Głowacki, *Sowieci wobec Polaków*, p. 81.

447 R. Dreyer, “Di byalistoker shrayber tsu di valn,” *Byalistoker shtern*, February 4, 1940, p. 2.

448 Zak, *Knekht zenen mir geven*, p. 66.

Communist future for Poland. Julian Strykowski recalled his thought process at the time: “The fact of Soviet forces crossing the border does not yet mean the partition of Poland. A new, Communist Poland will arise; Stalin will lend us a helping hand and protect us from the Nazi Germans.”⁴⁴⁹ But some former KPP members had no illusions: “Did we like it [in the USSR]?” Teofila Weintraub asked rhetorically. “We all liked it, because in Poland, we might not have survived.”⁴⁵⁰

The memoirs of non-Communist writers, such as Avrom Zak, give the impression that for them, finding themselves in territories annexed by the USSR was nothing more than a peculiar change of scenery—from Polish to Soviet. Yet this was not necessarily an expression of absence of loyalty to the Polish state, but rather of a typical Jewish awareness of their diaspora status. The experience of diaspora could be better or worse—all the writers nostalgically recalled their time in Warsaw, and particularly the freedom of the press that they had enjoyed there—but that too was an experience of diaspora. Never “at home,” always “abroad.”

On the other hand, here and there a certain expression of loyalty to Poland surfaces in the memoirs. For example, the actor Dovid Lederman recalled that during preparations for a cabaret program of sketches and songs, the ensemble was informed that political jokes at the expense of Poland, the US, England or France would not only be permitted, but welcomed. Only one actor (Władysław Godik) took advantage of this proposition; while emceeding, he joked about the Polish authorities’ flight abroad.⁴⁵¹

Something odd also took place among the writers and columnists. It was brought to the attention of the editors of the *Byalistoker shtern* that in the mess hall for the intellectuals, which was run by Catholic nuns and where the refugee writers also ate, only meatless, salt-free dishes would be served on particular days. On those days, when they were asked for salt, the nuns would answer: “Today is a fast day.” The editors wanted to publish a “biting feature article” on the subject. Hersh Weinrauch recalled: “We asked everyone, [...] but none of the writers, even though they so badly wanted to earn a few rubles, were willing to perform the proposed task”⁴⁵²—perhaps because a criticism of the Polish nuns felt to them too much like a criticism of Poland and Polishness.

449 *Ocalony na Wschodzie: Z Julianem Strykowskim rozmawia Piotr Szewc*, Montricher 1991, p. 92.

450 R. Pragier, *Żydzi czy Polacy*, Warsaw 1992, p. 88.

451 D. Lederman, *Fun yener zayt forhang*, Buenos Aires 1960, p. 102.

452 Weinrauch, *Blut oyf der zun*, p. 91.

It appears that writers like Sfard or Mark, whose Communist sympathies were known even before the war, had better relationships with the other, non-Communist refugees than did those who had recently “found” Communism. The presence of the former in the ranks of the Writers’ Union or on the pages of *Byalistoker shtern* surprised no one. On the other hand, the behavior of the writer and new Communist Shloyme Łastik was met with general condemnation. Sheyne Miryem Broderzon wrote: “S. Łastik circulates shamelessly, haranguing us like a character in Chekhov’s story ‘The Man in a Case’: ‘So you want to be Soviet Jewish writers? Let’s see what the authorities have to say about that.’ Besides, he accused everyone of ‘Bundist sins.’”⁴⁵³ At a meeting between refugee writers and Soviet Yiddish writers, Łastik openly attacked several colleagues, enumerating who was a Zionist and who was a Bund sympathizer. Even the guests from Moscow were shocked, and only Itsik Fefer’s categorical statement put a stop to it: “We are not interested in what happened in Poland!”⁴⁵⁴ By way of contrast, Dovid Lederman describes Mark’s speech at a general assembly of refugee actors prior to the opening of a Jewish theater in Białystok as “relaxed and humane.”⁴⁵⁵

In his memoirs, Sfard relates the following story:

A large group of former Communists from Otwock and environs invited me to speak with them. It was like an illegal Communist meeting in prewar Poland. A poor apartment in a narrow, dark alley filled with people, some of whom had managed to find work or were already working in various factories in Białystok itself, and some of whom had been contracted to work in the far corners of the USSR and had fled from there. The atmosphere was tense, nervous. The former KPP members, many of whom had spent years in prison for Communist activities, wanted to learn from me, because I occupied an official position as vice-chairman of the Writers’ Union, whether all this was really socialism? Communism? Judging by the working conditions in the factories, by the relations of the bosses and their aides to the workers, this was one hundred-percent serfdom. They understood that there was a war on, that material conditions were bad, extremely bad—depending on for whom, not for the bosses, [of course,]—but what did that have to do with the bosses lording it over the workers? After all, in capitalist Poland,

453 Broderzon, *Mayn laydns-veg*, p. 21.

454 Zak, *Knekht zenen mir geven*, p. 63; Lederman, *Fun yener zayt forhang*, p. 106. Łastik’s public denunciations reverberated widely in the Jewish milieu, although most of the memoirists discreetly avoid mentioning his name, and Sfard does not mention this incident at all. In 1946, a collegial court of the Jewish Writers’ and Journalists’ Union in Łódź excluded Łastik for half a year from its ranks for “unethical conduct” in Białystok (Minutes of the collegial trial of S. Łastik AŻIH, CKŻP, Culture and Propaganda Department, call no. 202, unpaginated).

455 Lederman, *Fun yener zayt forhang*, p. 94.

it was not like this. Compared to here, a worker felt like a duke there. Of course, this was an exaggeration. A worker in Poland did not feel like a duke. Yet they categorically rejected my weak attempts to answer their complaints: ‘You are an intellectual, a writer, and writers have it good here. You cannot understand us. You are well-respected here, and we feel more demeaned here than we did there. This is a land for bureaucrats, not workers.’ Most of them registered to return to Poland.⁴⁵⁶

This scene suggests something important about Sfard himself: these workers, who probably knew him back in Otwock, were not afraid to share their doubts with him, although at the time, expressing doubts like these meant running the risk of being denounced for “disseminating anti-Soviet propaganda.” In other words, the workers were not afraid that Sfard, despite occupying a very high position in the social hierarchy—and accordingly enjoying the confidence of the new authorities—would use this conversation against them. Is it possible that he could have both kept the workers’ confidence and maintained the trust of the Soviet authorities? If so, he was playing a dangerous game—dangerous, but not impossible.

It appears that many writers, both Communist and not, adopted a wait-and-see attitude. Those who survived, like Avrom Zak, Yitskhok Yanasovitch, and Sfard himself, did not describe in their memoirs any reflections at the time about their own futures in the USSR. It is hard to imagine that they were not making plans—and yet, in their portrayal, Białystok appears to be suspended in a temporal void, with no future looming.

The Jewish writers from Poland were visited in February by a delegation of Soviet Yiddish writers, among them Peretz Markish, Dovid Bergelson, Itsik Fefer, Arn Kushnirov, Yitskhok Nusinov, Leyb Kvitko, and Shmuel Halkin. The task of the delegation was to help integrate the refugees into their new homeland, and to assist in the campaigns for the elections for the Supreme Soviet of the BSSR.⁴⁵⁷ The *Byalistoker shtern* described their stay extensively and reported on their meetings with Białystok workers and with their fellow writers; characterizations of their literary work were also published.⁴⁵⁸ Many of them had consciously chosen to live in Soviet Russia, often after many years abroad. Chone Shmeruk remarked that for most of them, the magnet drawing them to the USSR was the state patronage of Yiddish culture: public financial support of

456 *Mit zikh*, p. 106.

457 A.D. Miral [Yitskhok Katsenelson], “Moskver yidishe shrayber forn keyn Byalistok,” *Byalistoker shtern*, February 2, 1940, p. 3.

458 B. Mark, “Di boyer fun der sovetisher yidisher literatur,” *Byalistoker shtern*, February 18, 1940, pp. 3–4.

Yiddish schools, publishing, institutions.⁴⁵⁹ The star of Soviet Yiddish literature, the renowned prose writer and poet Peretz Markish, had lived in Warsaw in the early 1920s, where he was one of the founders of the avant-garde literary group *Khalyastre*. Bergelson and Kvitko had spent years in Germany, mainly in Berlin. Bergelson settled in the Soviet Union in 1933. Kvitko arrived in 1925; in 1929, he was attacked by the Proletarian Jewish Writers' Organization after he dared to criticize publicly some Party functionaries involved with Yiddish culture. All these names were well-known to Jewish refugees from Poland—especially Markish, whom many remembered from their time in Warsaw.

Yitskhok Yanasovitch writes in his memoirs that the mood of that first meeting in Bialystok, especially with regard to Markish and the writers from Poland, reminded him of the biblical story of the reunion of Joseph and his brothers. On one side—"liberated brother writers," refugees deprived of their homes, often with an uncertain political past; on the other—"engineers of the human soul," including one of the most renowned Yiddish authors of the time. To be sure, Moyshe Broderzon made fun of the "respect" that Jewish writers enjoyed in the USSR, citing as evidence the following remark that he had supposedly heard from an average reader: "Did you know? We have a writer who is called Fefer in Yiddish, Peretz in Russian, who has written a book called *Bay nakht oyfn altn... Markish...*"⁴⁶⁰ However, what they heard about the Soviet authorities' attitude toward literary work still made a very positive impression on the refugee writers.

The Soviet Yiddish writers, who had not been in touch with fellow Yiddish writers from outside the USSR for many years, were impressed by this meeting. No less of an impression was made by the unassimilated, Yiddish-speaking Jewish community in Western Belarus—a segment of the readership of Soviet Yiddish literature.⁴⁶¹ At the time, Yiddish culture in the USSR was in retreat, both because

459 Ch. Shmeruk, "Yiddish literature in the USSR," in: *The Jews in Soviet Russia since 1917*, ed. L. Kochan, Oxford-London-New York 1978, p. 254.

460 A play on words: Yiddish *fefer* and Russian *peretz* both mean 'pepper'; "Bay nakht oyfn altn Markish" is a distortion of the title of the well-known Y.L. Peretz drama *Bay nakht oyfn altn mark* (At Night at the Old Marketplace). With this joke, Broderzon was implying that it could not be too difficult to attain popularity among uneducated readers, who had no idea what they were reading in any case (Y. Yanasovitch, *Mit yidishe shrayber in Rusland*, Buenos Aires 1959, pp. 297–298).

461 After the annexation of parts of Poland, Romania and the Baltic states, the Soviet Union's Jewish population increased by 63 % (and by 13 % as a proportion of the entire Soviet population). See M. Altshuler, *Soviet Jewry on the Eve of the Holocaust: A Social and Demographic Profile*, Jerusalem 1998, p. 8.

of decisions from on high to homogenize the Soviet population (which led, e.g., to the closing of Jewish schools) and because of spontaneous processes of assimilation and acculturation. It had even been officially proposed that instead of maintaining Yiddish publishing houses, it would be better to translate Yiddish manuscripts directly into Russian and Ukrainian for publication.⁴⁶² Thus, it is not surprising that—as Markish declared later at the trial of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, using language characteristic of his accusers—upon seeing Polish Jews in Białystok, the Soviet Yiddish writers felt hope, imagining that among the new Soviet citizens, there would be a renewed “real basis for the development of nationalist activities.”⁴⁶³

However, if we consult an eyewitness account, rather than the official minutes of the hearings, we discover that the Soviet Yiddish writers were not nursing any great illusions. During a reception in honor of the guests from Moscow, Markish caught a moment alone with Smolar. Supposedly, he said to him: “What has happened to us will happen to you too.”⁴⁶⁴

462 Shmeruk, “Yiddish Publications,” pp. 106–107.

463 *Gosudarstvennyy antisemitizm v SSSR: Od nachala do kulminatsii 1938–1953*, ed. G.V. Kostyrchenko, Moscow 2005, p. 22.

464 Smolar, “Ha-haim ha-yehudi'im,” p. 134.

Chapter Four: “Druzhba evreiskih narodov”— Friendship of the Jewish Peoples (1941–1946)

They Don’t Like Anything Soviet

For the inhabitants of the border territories, Germany’s attack on the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 meant a hurried, chaotic evacuation deep into the USSR. The chairman of the Writers’ Union, Filip Pestrak, was away in Grodno for a few days, so it was up to Sfard as vice-chairman to order all the authors to gather at the Writers’ Union headquarters and await instructions from the authorities. He himself managed to get to the district Party office together with Mark and the Belarussian poet Maksim Tank. The only municipal official on duty gave them a document ensuring the writers’ admission on board the evacuating trains, and he advised them to report to the train station immediately. Once there, Sfard called the Writers’ Union to instruct the authors living there to join him as soon as possible. Except for the local Białystok writers, nearly all of them showed up, including the Union’s secretary, Regina Dreyer, and her four-year-old son.⁴⁶⁵

Smolar and Richter pasted pages of the last issues of the *Byalistoker shtern* on the walls of panicked, abandoned Białystok.⁴⁶⁶

At first, the writers were to be evacuated to Minsk, but the city had already been bombed, as had Smolensk. After being strafed by German planes, the train reached its destination of Saratov in early July. According to Jacob Dreyer, that was the last time the circle of Jewish writers from Białystok existed as a group. From Saratov, the refugees began to scatter. At the end of August or the beginning of September 1941, some of them, including Dovid Sfard and Regina Dreyer with her child, were taken by truck to the hamlet of Novouzhensk in the Saratov district.⁴⁶⁷ According to Sfard’s recollections, the refugees were received kindly there, and, when word got out that they were from Poland, even with a certain special sympathy: they were allowed to skip the line for some foodstuffs based on the (mistaken) belief that, e.g., sugar had been absolutely unavailable in prewar

465 Her husband, Shmul Dreyer, was then on business in Kovno (Kaunas). He perished in the war (letter from Jacob S. Dreyer dated June 15, 2006, personal communication).

466 H. Smolar, “Ha-haim ha-yehudi'im be-ma'arav Belorusiah ha-sovietit 1939–1941: Prihah ve-shkiah,” *Shvut* 4, 1976, p. 135.

467 Letter from Jacob S. Dreyer dated June 15, 2006, personal communication.

Poland. As time passed and food supplies became scarcer, however, people began to look upon the refugees with distaste.⁴⁶⁸

Sfard and Heller were sent together to work in a kolkhoz, where they shared conversations about “literature, comrades and the Soviet Union”: “Neither of us yet knew that even best friends, who did not want to lie to each other and at the same time were afraid to tell the truth, should not talk about the latter subject.”⁴⁶⁹ Unfortunately, based on Sfard’s memoirs, it is difficult to evaluate which of his doubts about Communism and the Soviet Union arose while he was still in the USSR and which arose only much later. Did the two years in Bialystok and then the time spent on the Soviet steppes disabuse him of his idealized vision of the “country of social justice”? We have no way of knowing. We do, however, know that at least a few former members of the KPP did not give up their political activities. Two of the first things that Moyshe Levin did on the steppes were to put together a bulletin board for disseminating news and to initiate political chats with the Kazakhs in which he shared his commentary on the character of the war.⁴⁷⁰

The front drew nearer, and most of the writers decided to retreat deeper into the USSR. In November 1941, some of them arrived in Almaty, Kazakhstan, whose peace and beauty enchanted the wanderers. Years later, Polish-Jewish poet Aleksander Wat recalled his arrival there in the wintertime: “It was winter; the poplars there are marvelous, especially the young ones; they’re like a young girl’s braids. Covered with ice, of course, so they looked as if they were strewn with diamonds. There was no snow on the street, but the mountains, the enormous mountains, the outer wall of the Pamirs, marvelous contours, were very close. It seemed that if you just walked a little ways, you’d be up there in those snowy mountains. There’s no snow that white anywhere else. [...] And that whiteness, the line and contour of that whiteness, silhouetted like a fine Chinese drawing against a beautiful Italian sky.”⁴⁷¹

468 D. Sfard, *Mit zikh un mit andere: Oytobiografye un literarishe eseyen* (Jerusalem 1984), [henceforth: *Mit zikh*], pp. 123–124. Jacob Dreyer recalls that during their three-month stay in Novouzhensk, “food was obviously not plentiful, but there was no famine either” (letter from Jacob S. Dreyer dated June 15, 2006, personal communication).

469 *Mit zikh*, p. 124.

470 D. Sfard, “Eynike zikhroynes un kharakter-shtrikh,” in: *Unter der fon fun KPP: Zamlbukh*, ed. H. Goldfinger et al., Warsaw 1959, p. 130.

471 A. Wat, *My Century: The Odyssey of a Polish Intellectual*, ed. and transl. Richard Lourie, Berkeley 1988, p. 313.

Sfard also remembered Almaty enthusiastically, if less poetically: “From the high blue sky, vast warmth and light poured down. At the stations women sold various exotic fruits and enormous red apples. [...] In this warm and bright calm, it was incredible to think that in the same country, a horrific war was going on in which so many people were perishing and so many towns were being destroyed.”⁴⁷²

Yet this first impression soon yielded to another, worse one. The arriving Yiddish writers were housed on the outskirts of the city (as Sfard mentions in his memoirs, Jewish writers from Russian territories were given apartments in town). On rainy days, the road that led to their neighborhood turned into a muddy swamp that was difficult to navigate.⁴⁷³ Jacob Dreyer did not recall the housing assignments as unambiguously unfavorable:

With respect to our residences, it is true that they were allotted by the authorities, but I am not sure that our initial assignment to the suburbs (Tsentralnaia Street) was exclusively a result of discrimination or favoritism. Municipal transport was limited to irregularly running buses and trucks, so those people who worked in town were given rooms close to downtown. On the other hand, the living conditions in the suburbs (e.g., the size of the allotted rooms) were somewhat better. In the suburbs, we (three adults⁴⁷⁴ and one child—me) lived in a room measuring about 25 square meters, in a house with apple trees in the garden, with a view of the mountains, running water and plumbing. After we moved closer to town (Korokolskaia Street) sometime in the fall of 1942, we moved into a room half that size in an apartment building with a sink in the hallway and a toilet that was out of order. But from the suburbs, Dovid often (whenever it rained or snowed) could not get to the Writers' Union at all to meet with people or to take meals; whereas, after he got a room closer to downtown, he went there every day.⁴⁷⁵

The food supply, which had initially seemed so abundant to the new arrivals, declined considerably over the next few months. To be sure, it was possible to buy cantaloupes, watermelons and apples at the marketplace, but by December 1941, the ruble was worth little, so people preferred to barter. Food provisions, the so-called *payki*, which consisted of bread, lard and beet marmalade, became indispensable. Regina Dreyer, who was employed in “Mosfilm” (at that time, Almaty was the seat of many major organizations and institutions that had been evacuated from Moscow or Leningrad), and the nanny Anka, who had gotten work as a seamstress in a factory, were entitled to these provisions, whereas

472 *Mit zikh*, pp. 127–128.

473 *Ibid.*, pp. 128.

474 The third adult was Anka, who had been Jacob's nanny since before the war.

475 Letter from Jacob S. Dreyer dated June 15, 2006, personal communication.

Dovid, being unemployed, was forced to go without provisions for a time. Jacob Dreyer remembered that in early 1942, hunger became prevalent in the city: “On the black market, it was possible to exchange a Swiss watch for a chicken.”⁴⁷⁶ Lack of fuel was a constant problem. According to Wat’s memoirs, the climate was simultaneously subtropical and continental, with an early spring, scorching summer and very frosty winter.⁴⁷⁷ However, the greatest shock was the attitude of the local and newly arrived Russians—according to Sfarid, they were decidedly anti-Semitic. Their attitude was undoubtedly influenced by their belief that men should be at the battlefield, not in Kazakhstan. However, “they didn’t want to take us into the military because we were ‘Westerners’ and could not be trusted [...]”⁴⁷⁸ We couldn’t be incorporated into the labor battalions [...] because we belonged to the Writers’ Union [and thus were considered members of a more privileged class].⁴⁷⁹ A Yiddish writer from Lithuania, Hirsh Osherovich, recalled that the evacuated writers had no work prospects aside from writing. At most, they occasionally found per diem work, such as serving as extras in Mosfilm’s war productions.⁴⁸⁰ Literary and social life took place in two settings: at the Kazakhstan locale of the Writers’ Union and in the mess hall for intellectuals, where the writers were served breakfast and dinner.

The Yiddish writers’ milieu in Almaty had about twenty participants and was not always harmonious. Regina and Dovid (who by then had apparently become a couple) interacted mainly with Chaim Grade (a friend of Regina’s from her years in prewar Vilna) and Efraim Kaganowski.⁴⁸¹ The main division among the writers was between “Westerners” (i.e., those from Poland and the Baltic States)

476 Ibid.

477 A. Wat, *Mój wiek: Pamiętnik mówiony*, vol. 2, Warsaw 1990, p. 250.

478 As Głowacki describes, “Westerners” from Ukrainian and Belarussian territories who were already in the ranks of the Red Army were demobilized and sent to join labor battalions. They were not trusted and were treated as second-class citizens (among other things, they were not allowed to work in munitions factories). A. Głowacki, “Sytuacja prawna obywateli polskich w ZSRR w latach 1939–1945,” in: *Położenie ludności polskiej na terytorium ZSRR i wschodnich ziemiach II Rzeczypospolitej w czasie II wojny światowej*, ed. A. Marszałek, Toruń 1990, p. 34.

479 *Mit zikh*, p. 132. Jacob Dreyer claims that Sfarid tried to enlist in a labor battalion, but he was rejected, ostensibly because of his extreme nearsightedness; however, he himself suspected anti-Semitic motives for the rejection (letter from Jacob S. Dreyer, dated June 15, 2006, personal communication).

480 H. Osherovich, “Plitim yehudi’im be-Alma-Ata be-et milhemet ha-olam ha-shnih,” *Shvut*, 1987, no. 12, p. 154.

481 Letter from Jacob S. Dreyer dated June 15, 2006, personal communication.

and writers who had been evacuated from locations in the heart of the USSR, including Moscow and Leningrad. Moyshe Aronski, who belonged to the latter group, bore particular animosity toward the “Westerners”:

‘They don’t like anything Soviet,’ he claimed, although this claim was not supported by any evidence. This does not mean that he was hostile to us. Absolutely not! But deep down, he felt that we were not Soviet enough. This feeling surfaced more than once, and he “uncovered” a wide range of anti-Soviet sins committed by the ‘Westerners.’ These sins were a figment of his imagination. He was particularly prejudiced against Kaganowski and his wife. They were next-door neighbors in the Writers’ Union building. [...] Kaganowski and his wife were used to speaking in a certain way [...] that was not very complimentary toward the Soviet lifestyle, which opened them up to criticism. Aronski behaved similarly toward Dovid Sfarid. He dubbed him the ‘ringleader’ of the writers from Poland. It got to the point where he refused to stand next to Sfarid, even in a line.⁴⁸²

Admittedly, as Osherovich writes, “Aronski’s Soviet patriotism reached the point of fanaticism.” However, it is interesting to contrast Aronski’s reaction to that of Aleksander Wat, who recalled that Kaganowski and his family gave “a terrible impression [...] of being great opportunists.”⁴⁸³ Wat seems to have meant his statement, by extension, as a characterization of the entire group of Yiddish writers from Poland, who (from his perspective) were poised to take advantage of the Soviet system however they could. In any case, from this example we see that one family’s attitude could simultaneously be perceived as anti-Soviet (in the eyes of a law-abiding Soviet Jew) and also pro-Soviet as to seem sycophantic (in the eyes of someone who had been “cured” of Communism by his earlier experiences).

Writing Tomorrow’s Poems

The refugees from Poland first came into contact with representatives of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAC) during their stay in Almaty. In general, historians agree that the JAC was founded for a purely pragmatic purpose—to mobilize world Jewry to provide moral and material support to the Soviet Union during the war.⁴⁸⁴ This goal would be best served by convening high-profile

482 Osherovich, “Plitim yehudi’im,” p. 151.

483 A. Wat, *Mój wiek*, p. 246. Wat’s critical remarks regarding Polish Jews were omitted in the English edition of his memoirs.

484 Israeli historian Shimon Redlich pioneered the study of the JAC with his books *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia: The Jewish Antifascist Committee in the USSR 1941–1948*, Boulder 1982 and *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism: A Documented Study of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in the USSR*, London and New York 1995.

Jewish cultural figures to endorse every proclamation with their names and faces. In early autumn 1941, Soviet leaders considered taking advantage of the popularity of Bund leaders Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter for this purpose, and even released them from prison so that they could lead the effort. Ultimately, however, Erlich's and Alter's plans were too daring for the Soviet authorities—rather than simply leveraging their cachet in order to rake in support from world Jewry for the USSR, they began to develop plans to found an independent international Jewish organization that would command respect both in the Soviet Union and in the West. They also wanted to support Jewish refugees arriving in the USSR and ease their mobilization into General Władysław Anders's army made up of Polish citizens released from Soviet camps and prisons after the Polish-Soviet Treaty of July 30, 1941.⁴⁸⁵ With these goals in mind, they made contact with the Polish embassy in Kuibyshev, as well as with the Kuibyshev representatives (Delegatura) of the Polish government-in-exile in London. As acting Polish ambassador to the USSR, Stanisław Kot stated with satisfaction in a letter to Polish prime minister-in-exile Władysław Sikorski, “They are completely loyal to the Polish government.”⁴⁸⁶ In December 1941, they were rearrested and imprisoned in the NKVD prison in Kuibyshev. In another letter to Sikorski, Kot accurately surmised the reasons for their imprisonment: “There are substantiated suspicions that the arrest of Erlich and Alter was a reaction to their contact with international Jewish organizations and their view of the role that they could play as the local arm of those organizations.”⁴⁸⁷ Despite attempts at intercession on the part of the Polish embassy, the Bund leaders did not leave prison alive.⁴⁸⁸

Meanwhile, an informal circle of Soviet Jews had been summoned by the authorities a few months earlier, in August 1941, to a radio rally to call upon “our

Gennady Kostyrchenko devotes much space to the JAC in his monographs *Out of the Red Shadows: Anti-Semitism in Stalin's Russia*, Amherst 1995 and *Tainaia politika Stalina: Vlast' i antisemitizm*, Moscow 2003. See also *Evreiskiy Antifashistskiy Komitet v SSSR 1941–1948: Dokumentirovannaya istoriya*, ed. S. Redlich and G. Kostyrchenko, Moscow 1996. Documents from the JAC trial were published as *Stalin's Secret Pogrom: The Postwar Inquisition of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee*, ed. J. Rubenstein and V.P. Naumov, New Haven 2001. On the JAC archives see V. Dubson, “The Archive of the Jewish Antifascist Committee,” *Jews and Jewish Topics in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, 1991, no. 3 (16), pp. 64–77.

485 Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, p. 12.

486 S. Kot, *Listy z Rosji do gen. Sikorskiego*, London 1956, p. 130 (letter dated October 10, 1941).

487 *Ibid.*, p. 303 (letter dated April 10, 1942).

488 Erlich committed suicide in May 1942; Alter was shot in February 1943.

brother Jews throughout the whole world" (*"brider yidn oyf der gantser velt"*) to support the USSR. In late 1941, this circle began to operate more formally under the name "The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee." The committee included greats from the Soviet Jewish literary world (Peretz Markish, Ilya Ehrenburg, Dovid Bergelson, Itsik Fefer, Leyb Kvitko, Shmuel Halkin), as well as prominent Soviet Jews from the theater and film worlds (Sergei Eisenstein), the military (Gen. Aron Katz), art (the painter Natan Altman), and science (the biologist Lina Shtern). Over the course of the years 1941–1948, over 100 people participated in the committee. Eventually, the committee came to include representatives of Polish and Lithuanian Jewry as well, such as Rokhl Korn, Efraim Kaganowski, Binem Heller and Ida Kamińska, as well as the Vilna poets Chaim Grade and Avrom Sutskever. The JAC was headed by actor Shloyme Mikhoels, the director of the Moscow State Yiddish Theater (known as GOSET).

It is difficult to determine exactly when the Polish Yiddish writers established contact with the JAC, but this certainly took place soon after its founding. Even those who did not formally become members of the Committee quickly joined in its activities, mainly by contributing to its organ, *Eynikayt* (Unity). In early 1943, the JAC brought Bernard Mark and his wife to Kuibyshev for the purpose of gathering materials on the ongoing Nazi genocide.⁴⁸⁹ In April 1943, Mikhoels and Committee secretary Shakhne Epshteyn asked the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party to grant material aid to Jewish writers who had been evacuated from Western Ukraine and Belarus, Moldavia, and the Baltic states to Central Asia. The letter was accompanied by a list of thirty names. Included were the names of about a dozen writers from Poland, including Kaganowski, Korn, Heller, Knapheys and Broderzon.⁴⁹⁰ Sfar'd's name was not on the list, a sign, perhaps, that his material situation was not that severe.

The JAC quickly began to draw attention both abroad and within the USSR as the national organization representing Soviet Jews. The GOSET with Mikhoels as star, the newspaper *Eynikayt*, and the Moscow publishing house Der Emes all functioned as lively, active loci of Yiddish culture. Avrom Sutskever, the Vilna poet-partisan, called this short period "a chance to catch our breath."⁴⁹¹ From 1941 to 1945, Der Emes published 79 Yiddish books and brochures, including the anthology *Tsum zig* (Towards Victory), edited by Peretz Markish, which

489 Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism*, p. 63.

490 Letter from Mikhoels and Epshteyn to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, April 1943, *Evreiskiy Antifashistskiy Komitet*, pp. 143–145.

491 A. Sutskever, "Peretz Markish un zayn svive," *Yidishe kultur*, 2002, no. 5/7, p. 15.

comprised over 300 pages of poetry and prose.⁴⁹² All of Der Emes’s Yiddish publications, as well as their translations into Russian, enjoyed an enormous circulation. In a report on the activities of the publishing house in 1946, its directors stated that a Russian brochure about Sholem Aleichem, published on the thirtieth anniversary of his death, sold 100,000 copies within only a few days.⁴⁹³ The readers of *Eynikayt* constantly complained about the difficulty of obtaining a copy of the newspaper, which could be purchased almost exclusively by subscription, with a maximum number of subscribers imposed from above.⁴⁹⁴ The JAC requested many times to be allowed to increase the newspaper’s circulation (up to as many as 50,000 subscribers) and to convert it into a daily newspaper, but these requests were systematically rejected.⁴⁹⁵

The first issue of *Eynikayt* was published in Kuibyshev on June 7, 1942. At first, the newspaper was only four pages long and came out every ten days; in 1945 its frequency increased to thrice weekly. It was published entirely in Yiddish and employed the Soviet variant of Yiddish orthography.⁴⁹⁶ The managing editor was Shakhne Epshteyn; the editorial board included Dovid Bergelson, Yekhezkl Dobrushin, Shmuel Halkin, Shloyme Mikhoels, Leyb Strongin, Itsik Fefer, Leyb Kvitko and Arn Kushnirov. The first issue of *Eynikayt* was filled almost entirely with fiery calls to battle. The top headline of the eighth issue read:

Our Soviet peoples are experiencing horrible times.
Our despicable enemy wants to capture the fertile fields and industrial centers
in the south.
“Fight until the last drop of blood, spare no lives!
Die, but do not retreat!” is the command of our homeland.
Jews! Whatever your position may have been, remember:

492 Ch. Shmeruk, “Yiddish Publications in the USSR from the Late Thirties to 1948,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 4, 1960, p. 121.

493 “Di arbet funem moskver *Emes*-farlag,” GARE, JAC, op. 1, call no. 45, p. 314.

494 In 1943, barely two thousand copies were available for retail sale in the entire Soviet Union (Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism*, p. 48). On *Eynikayt* see also Dov-Ber Kerler, “The Soviet Yiddish Press: *Eynikayt* During the War,” in: *Why Didn’t the Press Shout? American & International Journalism During the Holocaust*, ed. R. M. Shapiro, Jersey City 2003, pp. 221–249.

495 See, e.g., the note from the *Eynikayt* editorial board to Stalin from spring 1946, in: *Evreiskiy Antifashistskiy Komitet*, pp. 145–147, as well as the one from the editor G. Zhits on October 5, 1948, to the Department of Propaganda and Agitation of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, *ibid.*, p. 152.

496 See Gennady Estraiikh’s analysis of the Yiddish used in *Eynikayt* in *ibidem*, *Soviet Yiddish: Language Planning and Linguistic Development*, Oxford 1999, pp. 98–101.

The fate of our homeland and our people is being decided!
The enemy must be stopped and annihilated!⁴⁹⁷

Much space was devoted to presentations of specific Jewish soldiers and their successes at the front. The titles of Mark's articles for *Eynikayt* are telling: "Jewish Writers at the Front," "Jewish Red Army Soldiers Distinguish Themselves in the Battles for Kuban," "Major Finkel and His Cadets Witness the Heroic Stalingrad Epic," "The Victory of Captain Glinshteyn over the Italians," etc.⁴⁹⁸ Under the heading "Our Sons and Daughters," they published photographs of fighters, and under "Our Heroes"—a list of those cited for courage at the front. Entire articles were devoted to units that distinguished themselves especially. The purpose of all this, evidently, was to construct and disseminate a model of the patriotic Soviet Jew. No attempt was made to omit the specifically Jewish aspects of featured soldiers' backgrounds; for example, Itsik Fefer's sketch of a certain Yisroel Fisanovich, a submarine captain, reads as follows:

Neither his father, the bookkeeper Hillel Fisanovich, nor his mother Malka ever dreamed that their son Yisrolik would even possess his own fishing boat, let alone a big ship that travels underwater. It is quite a shame that Fisanovich's grandfather, [...] a *melamed* [traditional Jewish teacher] and a wit, is already in the next world. If he were still with us, he would declare proudly: "My Yisrolik is traveling around underwater just like the prophet Jonah did in the fish's belly."⁴⁹⁹

As the Red Army advanced at the front and organizations and institutions which had been evacuated began to return to Moscow, the tone of the articles in *Eynikayt* became calmer, although increasingly more attention was dedicated to military operations and the genocide underway in Eastern Europe.⁵⁰⁰ In October 1943, there was a short note about the uprising in Treblinka, the liquidation of the Będzin ghetto and the end of the "Jerusalem of Lithuania," i.e., Vilna; it was also reported that, based on information gleaned from "underground Polish radio stations," 250,000 Jews remained alive in Poland. In December 1943 an article appeared about the very positive reception in Moscow of the poem "Kol nidre," which had been written in the Vilna Ghetto by an unnamed poet.⁵⁰¹ In

497 *Eynikayt*, August 15, 1942, p. 1.

498 GARE, JAC, op. 1, call no. 270.

499 I. Fefer, "Yisroel Fisanovitsh, der held fun Sovetn-farband," *Eynikayt*, June 28, 1942, p. 3.

500 "Di yidishe getos in Poyln un Lite 'likvidirt,'" *Eynikayt*, October 14, 1943, p. 2.

501 "A poeme vegn vilner geto," *Eynikayt*, December 16, 1943, p. 4. The author of the poem was Avrom Sutskever, who was airlifted by the JAC from the Naroch Forest to Moscow

other articles Fefer and Mikhoels shared their impressions of their trip to the United States, during which they met with Albert Einstein and American Jewish leaders. In August 1944, *Eynikayt* also published an official Yiddish translation of the Soviet national anthem. The translators were six renowned poets: Dovid Hofshsteyn, Shmuel Halkin, Peretz Markish, Leyb Kvitko, Itsik Fefer and Ezra Fininberg. The first stanza of their translation reads as follows: “A bund republikn, a festn, a frayen / Oyf eybik baheft hot dos groys rusish land. / Zol lebn di shafung fun felker getraye—/ Der eynheytlekh-shtarker Sovetn-farband.”⁵⁰²

In 1944, general Soviet issues dominated the front page of *Eynikayt*, and the space previously occupied by reports from the front was slowly taken over by news from the liberated territories, especially those where a rich Jewish life had existed before the war (Ukraine, Lithuania). In 1944, writes Redlich, hopes were high among JAC members, due to the “Crimea project” (the idea of establishing a Jewish district in Crimea, which would have stood much greater chances of success than the Jewish district in far-off Birobidzhan), the prospect of publishing the *Black Book*,⁵⁰³ and finally the feeling of triumph that resulted from Mikhoels and Fefer’s trip to America.⁵⁰⁴

The JAC quickly gained popularity in Jewish circles, especially in reaction to news of the genocide that was underway. However, this popularity carried with it a serious danger. As Redlich writes, “There was a growing feeling among the Soviet Jewish cultural elite that Jewish suffering, Soviet Jewry’s loyalty to the regime and Jewish support abroad for the Soviet Union would result in far-reaching concessions to Jewish national interests in the USSR.”⁵⁰⁵ This expectation obviously did not please the authorities, who in time began to sense that the activities of the JAC could get out of hand. Ester Markish, wife of poet Peretz

in 1944. For recent research see D.E. Fishman, *The Book Smugglers: Partisans, Poets, and the Race to Save Jewish Treasures from the Nazis*, Lebanon, NH 2017.

502 *Eynikayt*, August 17, 1944, p. 1.

503 The *Black Book*, also known as *The Black Book of Soviet Jewry*, was compiled for publication by Ilya Erenburg and Vassily Grossman in 1944 to document the Holocaust and the participation of Jews in the anti-Nazi resistance movement. Its Russian edition, published in 1948, was heavily censored, and its first unabridged edition appeared in 1980 in Jerusalem. For the most recent edition see *Chernaya Kniga: O zlodeyskom povsemestnom ubiystve evreev nemecko-fashistskimi zahvatchikami vo vremenno okkupirovannyh rayonah Sovetskogo Soyuzu i v gitlerovskikh lagerjakh unichtozhenija na territorii Polshi vo vremia vojny 1941–1945 gg.*, ed. V. Grossman, I. Erenburg, Moscow 2015.

504 Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, p. 159.

505 Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism*, p. 50.

Markish, soberly remarked: “What is called patriotism when demonstrated by Russians is called nationalism when Jews demonstrate it, and very often even bourgeois nationalism.”⁵⁰⁶

On the other hand, some JAC members took it upon themselves to ensure that the Committee would stay within bounds. It is generally accepted that Itsik Fefer was working for the NKVD, and that this was the reason that he, rather than Markish (as was originally planned), accompanied Mikhoels to the US in 1943.⁵⁰⁷ Years later, Avrom Sutskever wrote about him: “It seemed to Fefer that he was a prophet. He could read the dictator’s thoughts. He even knew what [the dictator] would desire tomorrow. He set about to write tomorrow’s poems.”⁵⁰⁸ Meanwhile, in 1943, *Eynikayt* editor Shakhne Epshteyn fired Mark for demonstrating “nationalistic tendencies”⁵⁰⁹—while editing an article for the foreign Jewish press, Mark had listed exclusively the names of Jewish soldiers who had distinguished themselves in battle, omitting any non-Jewish names.⁵¹⁰ The legendary internal solidarity of the Jewish community once again turned out to be a myth.

In the Footsteps of Berek Joselewicz and Ber Meisels

In response to the emergence of a milieu of Polish citizens loyal to the government-in-exile after the conclusion of the Polish-Soviet Treaty of July 30, 1941, a Polish Communist milieu also arose, headed by Wanda Wasilewska and Alfred Lampe. Its organ was the monthly *Nowe Widnokreği* (New Vistas), whose first issue appeared in May 1942. In January 1943, in a letter to Viacheslav Molotov, the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, the Polish Communists proposed the founding of a formal Polish Communist association in the USSR. In light of the Soviet Union’s severing of diplomatic relations with the Polish government-in-exile in the wake of the discovery of the mass graves at Katyń in April 1943,

506 Interview with Ester Markish, OHD, call no. 5(93), p. 8.

507 Redlich, *War, Holocaust, and Stalinism*, p. 75.

508 Sutskever, “Peretz Markish un zayn svive,” p. 16.

509 This is not the only example of Jews disciplining or informing on one another for “nationalistic tendencies.” Back in 1941, N. A. Belilovsky, the director of GOSET, reported to Andrei Zhdanov on “nationalistic tendencies” in the works of Mikhoels and other Jewish cultural activists. See N. A. Belilovsky’s letter to A. Zhdanov dated November 25, 1941, in: *Gosudarstvennyy antisemitizm v SSSR: Od nachala do kulminacii 1938–1953*, ed. G.V. Kostyrchenko, Moscow 2005, pp. 17–20.

510 “EAK i vlast,” in: *Evreiskiy Antifashistskiy Komitet*, pp. 165–166. See also Mark’s “self-criticism,” *ibid.*, pp. 171–172.

the Soviet authorities decided to encourage the development of a Polish body in the USSR that would be independent of the Polish government. On June 9–10, 1943, the organization’s first conference took place; its name, the Union of Polish Patriots (Związek Patriotów Polskich, or ZPP), was suggested by Stalin.⁵¹¹

For the Polish Jewish Communists, membership in the ZPP was an attractive prospect, a way to maintain a Polish, non-Soviet identity while avoiding having to navigate the anti-Semitism that periodically surfaced in the circle loyal to the government-in-exile as well as in General Anders’s army.⁵¹² In addition, those who, like Sfarid, had taken part in the Communist opposition in interwar Poland, were natural supporters of the ZPP.

As the organizations and institutions that had been evacuated returned to their Moscow offices, Moscow regained its status as a center of activity and people who had the potential to be useful there were recruited and relocated. Filip Pestrak, the chairman of the Soviet Writers’ Union of the BSSR and Minister of Culture in the Belarussian government, arranged for a permit for Sfarid to go to Moscow. This was in 1944.⁵¹³ In that same year, Sfarid was admitted to the Polish Labor Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR), with the same Party rank as he had held in the KPP.⁵¹⁴

In June 1944, Efraim Kaganowski, Moyshe Broderzon, Dovid Sfarid, Avrom Morewski and Bernard Mark addressed a memorandum to the board of the ZPP in which they asserted the necessity of establishing a separate organ for Jewish refugees from Poland. They argued that this gap was not being filled by either *Eynikayt* (“The educational and organizational work that needs to be done among Polish Jews does not fall under the umbrella of and often does not interest

511 For more on the political program of the ZPP, see: Z. Kumoś, *Związek Patriotów Polskich: Założenia programowo-ideowe*, Warsaw 1983; S. Ciesielski, *Mysł polityczna polskich komunistów w latach 1939–1944*, Wrocław 1990; “Wspomnienia Wandy Wasilewskiej (1939–1944),” *Archiwum Ruchu Robotniczego* 7, 1982, pp. 339–432.

512 On the problems connected to Jewish participation in the Polish armed forces in the USSR, see K. Kersten, “Problem Żydów w Polskich Siłach Zbrojnych w ZSRR i na Wschodzie w kontekście stosunków polsko-żydowskich w czasie II wojny światowej,” in: idem, *Polacy – Żydzi – komunizm: Anatomia półprawd 1939–68*, Warsaw 1992, pp. 15–75.

513 OHD, call no. (160)4a, p. 4. Jacob Dreyer believes that it was more likely November 1943. Letter from Jacob S. Dreyer dated June 15, 2006, personal communication).

514 Personal file of David Lvovich Sfarid, Rossiyskiy Gosudarstvennyy Arkhiv Sotsialno-Politicheskoy Istorii (RGASPI), Komintern, d. 9088, unpaginated. In this same file, a note is preserved with Sfarid’s biographical data, addressed to the Central Bureau of the Communists of Poland, dated August 30, 1944, unpaginated.

the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, which affirms that the problems of Polish Jewry are an internal matter of Poland and Soviet Polonia in which, as a Soviet organization, [the JAC] cannot and does not want to get involved”⁵¹⁵) or *Wolna Polska* and *Nowe Widnokregi*, ZPP publications which, aside from the fact that they appeared in Polish, a language which not all Jewish refugees could read, did not focus on Jewish concerns. Additionally, they argued, Polish Jewish circles in the West had numerous press organs at their disposal, which served among other things to spread propaganda harmful to the ZPP and the USSR.

The authors of the memorandum proposed that the new publication be “based on the ideological platform of the ZPP and [...] include Polish Jews [...] ranging from Orthodox to progressive who take the position of the ZPP. [...] This publication must—either directly or indirectly—tackle the problem of rebuilding Jewish social and occupational structures in a future Poland, improving Jews’ economic status, productivizing them and reducing their participation in business to a minimum. This publication must adhere to the tradition of Berek Joselewicz and Ber Meisels⁵¹⁶; it must become the central address for Polish Jews in the Soviet Union and a bridge to those foreign Jews who understand the struggle of the Polish people and want to help them. Not only the catastrophe of Polish Jewry must find expression in this publication, but even more so—the struggle of the ghetto rebels and the work of Jewish-Polish emigres behind Soviet lines for the front, for victory.”⁵¹⁷

It is unknown whether this memorandum helped to prompt the establishment in the ZPP one month later, in July 1944, of a special committee charged with dealing with Jewish refugee concerns: the Organizational Committee of Polish Jews (Komitet Organizacyjny Żydów Polskich, KOŻP). Either way, the Committee’s sphere of activity coincided precisely with the goals of the proposed publication; however, it is certain that the KOŻP was also founded partly as a vehicle for attracting material aid from foreign organizations. As Sfarid wrote in his memoirs: “It was already known then that American and English Jews were prepared to send Polish-Jewish refugees food and clothing, as long as they could send it to a Jewish address.”⁵¹⁸

515 Memorandum to the Board of the ZPP, AAN, ZPP, call no. 216/65, p. 29a.

516 The reference to Colonel Berek Joselewicz and Rabbi Ber Meisels is rather ambiguous in this context. While it is true that they demonstrated their (and symbolically, Jewish) investment in Poland and Polishness by participating in battles for Polish independence, the authors of the memorandum took a risk by alluding to battles fought by Poland against Russia.

517 Memorandum to the Board of the ZPP, AAN, ZPP, call no. 216/65, p. 32.

518 *Mit zikh*, p. 142.

Polish historians have hypothesized that the Committee was established at the initiative of Jakub Berman, the leader of the Central Bureau of Communists of Poland⁵¹⁹ at the time.⁵²⁰ In an interview in 1977 conducted by the Israeli historian Yosef Litvak, Sfard confirmed this opinion: “After the death in 1943 of Alfred Lampe, one of the most important and influential figures in the ZPP, Jakub Berman positioned himself as the number-one activist. He had an in with the Central Committee [...] A proposal for a Jewish Committee in the ZPP came up during a meeting with Ber [Bernard] Mark and me. This idea had doubtless already been discussed by the appropriate Soviet authorities, and Berman only began to act after he had received their permission.”⁵²¹

In an undated, unsigned declaration preserved in the Central Archives of Modern Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych, AAN) in Warsaw, the KOŻP articulated the following goals:

1. To unite the efforts of Polish Jews living on Soviet territory with the struggles of Jews who have remained in Poland and the struggles of the Polish military and the entire Polish people to liberate the Fatherland—by enlisting en masse in the ranks of the Polish Army. [...]
2. The full participation of Jews in the economic reconstruction of Poland. The economic and professional restructuring of Jewish society in a free and independent Poland; the productivization of the Jewish masses and the liquidation of backwards, traditional reactionary policies that did not allow Jews to be productive in industry and agriculture, thus forcing them into petty, unhealthy and abnormal commercial roles. [...]

519 The Central Bureau of Communists of Poland (*Centralne Biuro Komunistów Polski*), convened in 1944 by a decree issued by the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, was a group of selected Polish Communists whose task was to help the Soviet authorities to assume power in Poland.

520 See, e.g., A. Głowacki, “Czy i dokąd wracać? Dylematy repatriacyjne Żydów polskich w ZSRR (1944–1946),” in: *Świat NIEpożegnany: Żydzi na dawnych ziemiach wschodnich Rzeczypospolitej w XVIII–XX wieku*, ed. K. Jasiewicz, Warsaw 2004, p. 167. On Jakub Berman see A. Sobór, “Jakub Berman – organizator Centralnego Biura Komunistów Polski w ZSRR (styczeń – lipiec 1944 roku),” *Studia Historyczne*, 2002, no. 1 (176), pp. 41–55; M. Shore, “Children of the Revolution: Communism, Zionism, and the Berman Brothers,” *Jewish Social Studies* 10, no. 3 (2004), pp. 23–86.

521 Interview with Dovid Sfard, OHD, call no. (160)4 a, p. 1. In the same interview, Sfard stressed that Berman never joined the KOŻP; however, he did dub him “our protector” (p. 5).

3. The free development of Jewish culture, the reconstruction of the Jewish press, the revival of Jewish literature, science, art and theater in a free Poland.⁵²²

In order to achieve these goals, they planned to agitate among Polish Jews in the USSR, as well as to gather together the most prominent surviving representatives of Polish Jewish culture (including writers, scientists, artists and activists). They also planned to send a delegation to Poland to take stock of the situation facing survivors, to make contact with Jewish organizations in allied countries, and to publish a regular informational bulletin.⁵²³

The establishment of the KOŻP, which was announced on the pages of *Eynikayt*, immediately evoked a response among Polish Jews in the USSR. As Mark wrote in an article for *Eynikayt*:

Day after day the Committee receives bundles of letters and telegrams with best wishes for fruitful work [...]. The response is pouring in from everywhere: from Moscow and from the Urals, from Kazakhstan and the Saratov region, from Gorky and Uzbekistan, from recently-liberated cities and from the front. We are hearing from Jews of all types: Orthodox and free-thinking, working people and intellectuals. The letters are written in Yiddish and Hebrew, in Polish and Russian. They are all in the same spirit: great satisfaction with the establishment of the Committee. From the very beginning, a long line of prominent social and cultural leaders who were well known in prewar Poland have joined the Committee. Well-known Warsaw Zionist leader *Dr. Jakob Zineman*, author of the work *The History of Zionism*, who is now in Dzhambul (Kazakhstan) has joined. *Sholem Fraynd*, former long-time chairman of the caucus of Jewish councilmen in the Krakow City Council and chairman of the Krakow Society for Jewish Culture, has joined. *Rabbi Moyshe Borensztajn*, a well-known Orthodox leader, has joined [...]; he is now the secretary of the Jewish community in Tashkent. *Rabbi Moyshe Rubin*, former rabbi of Nowy Sącz, who is now in Dzhambul, has expressed a willingness to work with the Committee. [...] The former chairman of the Poznań Jewish community and Bund leaders from various Polish cities, *Burko, Zylberminc, Mordkhe Bernshteyn* [...] have joined. *Yitskhok Wassersztrum, Shmuel Lazebnik* and other leaders of the Warsaw labor movement have announced that they are joining.

Polish Jews in the Soviet Union, united around one pan-Jewish platform, believe very strongly that a joint effort will lead to good results.⁵²⁴

As Mark indicated, all political currents were represented among the members of the KOŻP—from Zionists to Bundists, from Orthodox Jews to, of course,

522 AAN, ZPP, call no. 216/65, p. 44, KOŻP.

523 *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45.

524 “Der breyter opklang fun der antshteyung fun dem organizir-komitet fun poylishe yidn in di yishuvim fun poylishe yidn in Sovetn-farband,” GARE, JAC, op. 1, call no. 270, p. 17. Emphasis in original.

Communists. There is no doubt that Mark intended his article to serve at least partly as an advertisement for the KOŻP. However, it appears that the KOŻP did actually enjoy the support of the broad masses of refugees, if only because it was the one organization whose main purpose was to take care of Polish Jews.

Initially the Committee included: as chairman, Dr. Emil Sommerstein, recently released from Soviet captivity;⁵²⁵ Communist leader Szymon Zachariasz; actors Ida Kamińska and her husband, Marian (Meir) Melman; Major Leon Finkelstein of the Polish Army;⁵²⁶ as well as a large group of authors and journalists: Leo Finkelstein, Bernard Mark, Moyshe Broderzon, Dovid Sfard, Efraim Kaganowski, Yoysel Rubinshteyn, Leyb Olitsky, Rokhl Korn and Avrom Zak.⁵²⁷

After the prompt nomination of Sommerstein to membership in the Polish Committee for National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego, or PKWN) and his departure for the already-liberated Lublin, Mark took over the leadership of the presidium; he was responsible for general political matters, contact with Jewish organizations based in foreign countries, and the editing of the bulletin with Zachariasz's help. Sfard and Leo Finkelstein were responsible for correspondence, coordination of aid, and office management. Finkelstein also directed the Commission for Aid Coordination, in which Broderzon, Rubinshteyn and Rabbi Elkhonen Soroczkin also participated; the Commission was responsible for composing reports to foreign aid organizations. Finally, Mark, Olitsky and Melman were members of the Cultural-Literary Commission.

The Committee had at its disposition space in the ZPP Board building in Moscow, at 5 Pushechnaia Street. Mark, Sfard, Leo Finkelstein and Moyshe Burko (the representative of the KOŻP in the Department of Social Welfare of the ZPP) worked there daily.⁵²⁸

525 Emil Sommerstein (1883–1957), attorney, Zionist leader, deputy to the Sejm from 1922 to 1939 (with a break from 1927 to 1929). From 1939 to 1944 he was imprisoned in the Soviet Union. Beginning in 1944 he was a member of the ZPP Administration and the PKWN. From 1944 to 1946 he served as the chairman of the CKŻP, representing the Ihud party. In 1946, he traveled with a CKŻP delegation to the United States, where he remained.

526 In other sources his rank is listed as Lieutenant Colonel.

527 AAN, ZPP, call no. 216/65, p. 46. Sfard claims that some KOŻP members were members in name only and did not play an active role in the Committee's work (OHD, call no. (160)4a, p. 3).

528 OHD, call no. (160)4b, p. 1.

The department of correspondence, directed by Sfar, had particular significance because the KOŻP had no branches around the country, so all matters were settled directly through Moscow. Dozens of letters of all kinds arrived every day:

Searches for relatives, questions about the possibility of returning home, about the possibility of emigrating to Palestine or elsewhere, requests for aid, matters concerning prisoners and amnesty; people share with us their views on the Jewish problem [...] At first, we received many letters containing requests to join the Polish Army; letters from the front with descriptions of the results of Nazi crimes and of the heroism of our soldiers.⁵²⁹

The KOŻP was granted permission to publish a Yiddish-language bulletin, the demand for which was several times greater than the practical capacity of the editorial board. Even though Kaganowski et al. proposed a circulation of 10–15,000 copies in their original memorandum proposing an organ for Jewish Polish refugees in June 1944,⁵³⁰ and even though the Committee enjoyed the support of Wanda Wasilewska (writing to Alexander Shcherbakov, the secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, in October of that year, she requested an allotment of paper in accordance with a circulation of 500 copies),⁵³¹ in the end, the maximum circulation of the bulletin was barely 200. In order to increase the reach of the bulletin, some local ZPP offices hung it on their walls or read it aloud in public. The bulletin was particularly geared toward attracting support from abroad; thus, it devoted space to lists of donations received and the projects for which they had been used, as well as to discussions about the rebuilding of Jewish life in liberated Poland.

A detailed description of KOŻP activity can be found in a report authored by Mark and submitted to the ZPP authorities in September 1945. Mark wrote that “The Committee is made up of [motivated] activists, not [merely] delegates of the various parties [representing their own narrow partisan interests].”⁵³² The Committee’s purpose, from the perspective of the ZPP and the PKWN, was to elicit sympathy and aid for the newly established Polish Communist system among Jewish communities abroad (first and foremost, among Jews originally from Poland). Mark stressed that the “KOŻP was founded not because Jewish democrats wanted to isolate themselves from Polish society, because they wanted to separate the Jewish masses from broader Polish issues, but quite the

529 Report of B. Mark on the activity of the KOŻP, AAN, ZPP, call no. 216/10, p. 117.

530 Memorandum to the Board of the ZPP, AAN, ZPP, call no. 216/65, p. 32.

531 AAN, ZPP, call no. 216/30; call no. 216/65, p. 47–48.

532 Report of B. Mark on the activity of the KOŻP AAN, ZPP, call no. 216/10, p. 114.

contrary—it was founded to help the democratic government of independent Poland to realize the declarations of the PKWN Manifesto with respect to the Jews.⁵³³

The most essential element of the Committee’s work was making and maintaining contact with Jewish organizations in other countries, particularly the United States, Canada, Great Britain and Palestine: the World Federation of Polish Jews, the American Jewish Committee,⁵³⁴ the World Jewish Congress⁵³⁵ and the Jewish Agency,⁵³⁶ as well as with the main Jewish charitable organization, the American Joint Distribution Committee.⁵³⁷ Mark’s report implies that this correspondence was not always easy: “Some of those organizations, even after expressing basic agreement, have decided to send contributions via the Soviet Red Cross in order to avoid the ZPP—that’s how far-reaching the hostile propaganda abroad has been. At a certain point, the Joint proposed an increase in the number of individual packages to 10,000 per month, and asked us to send them

533 Ibid., p. 113. See discussion of the PKWN Manifesto in Chapter 5.

534 The American Jewish Committee was founded in 1906 to provide support and aid to Jews in the Russian Empire after the wave of pogroms at the beginning of the 20th century; it is headquartered in New York.

535 The World Jewish Congress is an international organization headquartered in New York. It was founded in 1936 in light of the worsening situation of Jews in Germany; it was intended to promote the survival and development, as well as the unity, of the Jewish people. During the period discussed in this chapter, its executive chairman was Stephen S. Wise.

536 The Jewish Agency—an international non-governmental institution headquartered in Jerusalem, the executive division of the World Zionist Organization, founded in 1922. It was intended to support Jewish settlement in Palestine and represent Jews to the mandate authorities—the British government and the League of Nations. In Poland, it was active as of 1929. After the founding of Israel, many of its functions were taken over by the Israeli government, and it concentrated thereafter on organizing the immigration of Jews into Israel from the Diaspora.

537 The American Joint Distribution Committee, or the Joint for short—a charitable organization founded in 1914 in the United States in light of the tragic situation of Jews in war-torn Europe; as of 1920, it was also active in Poland, where in addition to immediate relief actions, it also invested in long-term infrastructure by founding loan associations and aiding various social institutions; it continued its activity in the Warsaw Ghetto. After the war, it aided in the rebuilding of Jewish life in Poland. On the Joint’s aid to Polish Jews during this time period see: Y. Litvak, “The American Joint Distribution Committee and Polish Jewry, 1944–1949,” in: *Organizing Rescue: National Jewish Solidarity in the Modern Period*, ed. S.I. Troen, B. Pinkus, London 1992, pp. 269–312.

lists of addresses; they were ready to do whatever it took not to send aid through the ZPP and our committee.”⁵³⁸

Aside from the lack of international confidence in the KOŻP due to the fact that it was led by Communists, other tensions interfered also. Most Jewish organizations demanded assurances that the aid they sent would be distributed to Jews only. This condition was unacceptable to the ZPP. The KOŻP took an intermediate position; it proposed that transports of clothing, food and medicine delivered through its channels to Poland would be distributed only to Jewish survivors, whereas transports intended for refugees in the USSR would be distributed to all refugees without regard for their nationality or religion. Since not all aid organizations were pleased with this, the KOŻP endeavored to split the difference by directing their transports to branches of the ZPP located in areas where Jews made up a significant proportion of the Polish refugees.⁵³⁹

By the time Mark made his report, the KOŻP had received about ninety tons of clothing, about five thousand food packages, and a transport of footwear and soap.⁵⁴⁰ However, Mark did not mention the problems of loss and theft which dogged the transports, unsurprising in a country starved and impoverished by the war. In June 1945, writing to the Central Committee of Polish Jews (Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce, CKŻP) in liberated Poland, the KOŻP sounded the alarm:

Please inform us if you know anything about or if you have received food packages sent by the Federation of Polish Jews of America. The Federation sent 10,000 individual food packages. We have been looking for the transport for a long time; recently we discovered that 2,800 of the packages are at the Moscow freight station in lamentable condition, torn open with much of their contents missing. It is impossible to repack them, load them and send them to you; thus, we have had to keep the packages. We have distributed them to Polish Jews and invalids, members of work battalions, orphans, etc. We have also asked the relevant Soviet transport organizations to ship the rest of the transport (7,200 packages) directly to you. [...]

[...T]he transports ought to be guarded on their way from Baku westward, watched closely, transported more quickly, etc. We are helping with this and are keeping our eyes open. But continuous involvement of the [Polish] embassy is required. Please call the embassy's attention to the importance of taking care of this matter, so that

538 Report of B. Mark on the activity of the KOŻP AAN, ZPP, call no. 216/10, p. 116.

539 OHD, call no. (160)4a, p. 7.

540 Report of B. Mark on the activity of the KOŻP AAN, ZPP, call no. 216/10, p. 116.

unpleasantness, like what happened with the food transport from the Federation of American Jews, need not be repeated.⁵⁴¹

Some of the aid shipments were intercepted in Moscow and distributed within the framework of the “presidium’s fund”⁵⁴² to renowned representatives of Polish Jewry—authors, scholars, rabbis and veterans of the ghetto and partisan resistance movements. The goal was not only to guarantee aid to these specific people, but also, via publicity directed toward observers abroad, to reduce the repeated accusations that aid by Jews for Jews was ending up in the wrong hands. Mark praised the cooperation between the KOŻP and the Social Welfare Division of the ZPP: “To a great extent, this [cooperation] is thanks to citizen [Irena] Kuczyńska [a ZPP activist] on the one hand and citizens Dr. Sfarid and Burko on the other, who have put their heart and soul into this job and work together as a team, cordially and skillfully with our common troubles fully in mind.”⁵⁴³

However, the relations between the ZPP and the KOŻP did not remain harmonious. At one session of the Presidium of the ZPP Board, it was decided—based on a motion by Sfarid—that “members of the Jewish Committee should be treated the same as employees of the ZPP,” a sign that this was not always the case up until then.⁵⁴⁴ In his report, Mark also notes certain ongoing problems, for example, “We often get the impression that even though we invest great effort in soliciting shipments of aid, and even though we distribute that aid for the public good, it is nevertheless considered to be our private matter by some activists at ZPP headquarters,”⁵⁴⁵ and “ZPP policies are much more sectarian [i.e., strict] toward the Jewish population than toward the general Polish population,”⁵⁴⁶

541 Note of the Presidium of the KOŻP of the ZPP to the CKŻP, AŻIH, CKŻP, Organizational Department 64, unpaginated. On problems of transport, see also Litvak, “The American Joint Distribution Committee,” pp. 272–273.

542 On the establishment of this fund, see minutes of the KOŻP meeting of May 23, 1945, AŻIH, Papers of Bernard Mark (unsorted portion), call no. 152, unpaginated.

543 Report of B. Mark on the activity of the KOŻP, AAN, ZPP, call no. 216/10, p. 117. Mark most likely presented these relations in an overly optimistic light. At a session of the KOŻP Presidium, Moyshe Burko complained that misunderstandings between the KOŻP and the Social Welfare Division take place “very often”; at the same session, it was resolved to remind the Division that Burko was not a hired clerk, but a member with full rights (Minutes no. 6 of October 9, 1945, AŻIH, Papers of Bernard Mark (unsorted portion), call no. 152, unpaginated).

544 Minutes no. 7, AAN, ZPP, call no. 6, p. 98.

545 Report of B. Mark on the activity of the KOŻP, AAN, ZPP, call no. 216/10, p. 120.

546 *Ibid.*, p. 121.

a tendency that presumably stemmed from the ZPP's desire to avoid being subjected to accusations of undue philo-Semitism. In a report compiled years later, Sfard stated that tensions were in fact highest in interactions with ZPP officials of Jewish origin who identified primarily as Polish Communists rather than as Jews. "They continually demanded that we increase the number of transports to [ZPP] outposts populated by only or mostly Poles. Sometimes they got carried away in their aspirations to be more Catholic than the Pope when it came to Polish patriotism [...]."⁵⁴⁷

This dynamic is evident in the minutes of a discussion that took place at a ZPP board meeting on September 7, 1945, after a report was presented on the activities of the Committee. ZPP board members of Jewish origin were critical of certain phrases contained in the report: for example, the head of the Department of Education and Culture, Julian Gordon, expressed the opinion that Jews are oversensitive and therefore see everything as a threat to their pride. The head of the Organizational Department, Józef Kojfman, proposed that Jews refrain from speaking amongst themselves in Yiddish at the ZPP regional headquarters "because this hinders the development of harmony and symbiosis between the two ethnic groups."⁵⁴⁸ Mark retorted: "It is Gordon and his kind who are oversensitive on the matter of Jews—they are simply afraid of anything Jewish being visible within the bounds of the ZPP."⁵⁴⁹ Sfard reacted more violently. According to the minutes, "Citizen Sfard expresses his opposition to the mood of 'let's all love each other' which has developed during the discussion, because the everyday reality is that ZPP leaders find fault with and condemn every motion of the Jewish Committee. No one in the ZPP helps the Jewish Committee other than [Aleksander] Juszkiewicz; it is only thanks to him that we have what we have. [...] [Sfard] blames the [ZPP] Board for the fact that no plenary session of the Jewish Committee has yet been convened." Lieut. Col. Finkelstein responded sharply to Sfard, accusing the KOŻP of failing to do battle with "the Jewish reactionaries among the refugees in the USSR."⁵⁵⁰ Mark stepped in to ease the tension, noting that he saw no reason for Jews not to speak Yiddish at ZPP meetings, but also stressing that the KOŻP had been helped not only by Juszkiewicz but also by Wanda Wasilewska, Jakub Berman and others. He ended with the conciliatory

547 OHD, call no. (160)4a, p. 7.

548 Minutes no. 10, AAN, ZPP, call no. 6, p. 52.

549 Ibid., p. 53.

550 Ibid., p. 52.

statement that the “ZPP is our common ground and [...] we are among friends, so we should take a different, collegial and friendly tone.”⁵⁵¹

The “more Catholic than the Pope” attitude was also evident farther afield. In an undated communication to the presidium of the ZPP Board, Mark and Sfarid called attention to the objectionable behavior of a certain Rotenberg, the chairman of the ZPP District Committee in Balkhash, who, after information on the founding of the KOŽP was provided at a general meeting, described it as “the founding of a second Palestine,” and did not want to allow the KOŽP to organize a meeting to mark the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.⁵⁵²

It is clear from the minutes of the KOŽP Presidium that the Committee was primarily focused on soliciting and distributing shipments of aid—the minutes from most of the meetings mention (often as the only agenda item) the distribution of clothing, food, medicine, etc. The KOŽP also raised funds for a “monument to the fallen heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto” (because it was impossible to send the funds to Poland, they were used to buy books for Jewish institutions in Poland), and also used Polish embassy funds to purchase three thousand rubles’ worth of Yiddish books, which they shipped to the Jewish school in Łódź and to the Yiddish Writers’ and Journalists’ Union.⁵⁵³ These campaigns were not always organized by the KOŽP board: in Yoshkar-Ola, on its own initiative, the Polish Jewish community raised several thousand rubles in cash and over forty thousand rubles in bonds on behalf of Jewish survivors in Poland.⁵⁵⁴

A major element of the KOŽP publicity campaign was the organization of events for special occasions. For example, on April 8, 1945, the thirtieth anniversary of Peretz’s death, an event was organized at the ZPP headquarters titled “Y.L. Peretz: Bard of Polish Jewry.” The following lectures were delivered in Polish and Yiddish: “Wyspiański and Peretz” (Leo Finkelstein), “Peretz’s Spirit and the Struggle in the Ghetto” (Mark), “The Life and Work of Y.L. Peretz” (Sfarid) and “Personal Reminiscences of Y.L. Peretz” (Efraim Kaganowski). Ida Kamińska and Marian Melman performed.⁵⁵⁵

These events were often organized jointly with the ZPP Board, as well as with the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. On February 28, 1945, on the occasion of the

551 *Ibid.*, p. 53.

552 Note to the Presidium of the ZPP Board in Moscow, AAN, ZPP, call no. 8, p. 120.

553 Minutes no. 14 of March 22, 1946, AŽIH, Papers of Bernard Mark (unsorted portion), call no. 397, unpaginated. See also minutes no. 5 of September 22, 1945, *ibid.*, call no. 152, unpaginated.

554 Report of B. Mark on the activity of the KOŽP, AAN, ZPP, call no. 216/10, p. 119.

555 “Wieczór ku czci I.L. Pereca,” *Wolna Polska*, March 24, 1945, p. 4.

liberation of Poland, the KOŻP and the JAC organized a festive evening, at which representatives of both organizations made speeches. The first speaker was Leo Finkelstein, who said, among other things:

The history of the Jewish people is the history of pyres, but it should be stated that after every Jewish catastrophe, the broad masses have been able to overcome their pain in order to take on the task of rebuilding their ruined national existence. [...] We [Polish Jews] derive hope about our future prospects from the fact that the camp of democracy and progress, which preaches equal rights for all citizens regardless of ethnic background, is at the helm of the Polish state.

Sfard spoke about Jewish writers and intellectuals murdered in Poland; the writer Dovid Bergelson, speaking on behalf of the JAC, stressed “spiritual and linguistic commonality; an awareness of the common historical tradition” that connects Polish and Soviet Jews. Yiddish writers from Poland read from their own works: Moyshe Broderzon, Efraim Kaganowski, Binem Heller, Yoysef Rubinshteyn, Leyb Olitsky and Yitskhok Yanasovitch.⁵⁵⁶

Israeli scholar Hana Shlomi enumerates three types of contact between the KOŻP and the JAC: interactions in the pages of the newspaper *Eynikayt*, institutional contact, and personal contact.⁵⁵⁷ Institutional contact between the two organizations was in fact minimal. Representatives of both Committees did meet in February 1945 and adopt a resolution to carry out a series of joint actions;⁵⁵⁸ in fact, however, the proposed cooperation never took place. Years later, Sfard claimed both in his memoirs and in interviews that the JAC was afraid of close contact with foreigners (including the Polish Jewish refugees) and of the suspicion on the part of the authorities which such contact could attract.⁵⁵⁹ According to him, from the moment the KOŻP was founded, relations between the two organizations were reminiscent of relations “between two separate countries.”⁵⁶⁰ However, both, he pointed out, constantly feared the NKVD.⁵⁶¹ In addition,

556 “Wieczór polsko-żydowski w Moskwie,” *Wolna Polska*, March 7, 1945, p. 4.

557 H. Shlomi, “Ha-yahasim bein ‘ha-vaad ha-yehudi ha-antifashisti’ u-vein ‘ha-vaad ha-meargen shel yehudei Polin’ she-al yad ‘igud ha-patriotim ha-polanim’ (ZPP) she-be-Moskvah, yanuar-may 1945,” in: idem, *Asufat mehkarim le-toldot she’erit ha-plitah ha-yehudit be-Polin, 1944–1950*, Tel Aviv 2001, p. 130.

558 *Wolna Polska*, February 23, 1945, p. 4.

559 For example, the JAC assigned Sfard to coordinate American pro-Soviet journalist Bentsion Goldberg’s visit to Moscow, even though the latter was an official guest of the JAC, because JAC members wished to avoid personal contact with foreigners (*Mit zikh*, p. 148).

560 Interview with Dovid Sfard, OHD, call no. 6(93), p. 4.

561 OHD, call no. (160)4b, p. 5.

perhaps the Soviet Jews were offended by the fact that the Polish Jews felt the need to have their own organization.

Soviet and Polish Jews undoubtedly felt a sense of ethnic and cultural relatedness due to their common roots in Yiddish language and culture. Both the JAC and the KOŻP assumed that the renaissance of Jewish culture in the USSR would be permanent; they also held similar perspectives on the tasks of Yiddish literature in the wake of the Holocaust. As Peretz Markish wrote categorically to Joseph Opatoshu in 1945: “Our literature must now speak up [...]. The blood of our six million martyrs must not be compelled to cry out only through the mouth of Julian Tuwim, who fed off of anecdotes about Jews, and who was reminded only by the graves of six million that he had a connection to the Jewish people.”⁵⁶²

Social relations between members of the two organizations were apparently quite harmonious. Sfard became friends with several Soviet writers including Leyb Kvitko, and judging from his heartfelt correspondence with Ester Markish years later, probably Peretz Markish as well. Among the Polish refugees, he was closest to Mark and his wife Edwarda (Ester), with whom he and Regina even shared a room (#1402) in the Moskva Hotel for a time (in the summer of 1945 they moved into their own room, #925).⁵⁶³ Ida Kamińska and Marian Melman also lived in the same hotel. Years later, Kamińska wrote that Dovid and Regina were “like family” to her in Moscow: “When the Polish Embassy was established, I was invited there quite often, and Riva [Regina’s Yiddish name] lent me some clothes, for I didn’t have a large wardrobe.”⁵⁶⁴

The KOŻP corresponded with reborn Jewish organizations in Poland, including the editorial board of the newspaper *Dos naye lebn* and the Central Jewish Historical Commission (CŻKH) in Łódź. However, contact with the official governmental organization representing Jews in Poland, the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (CKŻP, founded in November 1944), was not always smooth. In May 1945, Mark indicated that the CKŻP preferred to have only sporadic contact with the KOŻP, and even this grudging willingness was mainly thanks to his personal acquaintance with particular members.⁵⁶⁵ In September of the same year, Mark wrote on behalf of the KOŻP to Adolf Berman, the vice-chairman of the CKŻP, to invite him to a congress of representatives of Polish Jews in the

562 *Briv fun yidishe sovetishe shraybers*, ed. M. Altshuler, Jerusalem 1979, p. 331 (August 20, 1945).

563 Letter from Jacob S. Dreyer dated March 28, 2006, personal communication.

564 I. Kamińska, *My Life, My Theater*, ed. and transl. Curt Leviant, New York 1973, p. 190.

565 Minutes of the KOŻP meeting of May 23, 1945, AŻIH, Papers of Bernard Mark (unsorted portion), call no. 152, unpaginated.

USSR in October 1945. Although the CKŻP considered the invitation, in the end no one from Poland attended.⁵⁶⁶

The congress took place on November 18–20, 1945, in the building where the ZPP Board had its offices; representatives of all the large regional concentrations of Polish Jews in the USSR—Central Asia, Ukraine, the Urals, the Kuibyshev and Saratov districts, etc.—participated. In total, about 300–350 delegates attended.⁵⁶⁷ An exhibition was prepared in the social hall to illustrate the “participation of Polish Jews in the overall efforts of Soviet Polonia, and in particular the results of the process of productivization.”⁵⁶⁸

Leon Finkelstein opened the congress proceedings; others spoke after him, including Henryk Raabe, the ambassador of the Polish Republic to the USSR, representatives of Polish political parties, and representatives of Soviet Jewry—Itsik Fefer (on behalf of the JAC), Dovid Bergelson, Peretz Markish and Arn Kushnirov. The famous cantor Moshe Koussevitzky intoned *El male rahamim* before an absolutely silent audience.⁵⁶⁹ “All those present stood. They burst into tears. After all, no one in the auditorium, whether Jew or Pole, had not lost a loved one in occupied Poland.”⁵⁷⁰

Mark gave a lecture titled “Polish Jews in the USSR and the Reconstruction of Jewish Life in Democratic Poland.” He proclaimed that in order to rebuild Jewish life in liberated Poland, Polish Jews needed to be productivized, and he condemned those who “dream of a rebirth of that life in its old, unhealthy economic forms.” He noted the need for a well-thought-out, planned repatriation process: “Productive elements—workers, artisans, members of work battalions, intellectuals, cultural activists—must take precedence. A chaotic repatriation could do a lot of harm in general and to the Jewish cause in particular. In this

566 Minutes no. 38, AŻIH, CKŻP, Presidium 1, p. 148; minutes no. 42, *ibid.*, p. 162.

567 H. Shlomi, “Kinus yehudei Polin be-Moskva bishnat 1945,” in: *idem, Asufat mehkarim*, p. 126.

568 “Narada przedstawicieli Żydów polskich w ZSRR,” *Wolna Polska*, November 30, 1945, p. 6.

569 *El male rahamim* (Hebrew “God, full of mercy”)—a funerary prayer.

570 “Narada przedstawicieli Żydów polskich.” According to *Wolna Polska, El male rahamim* was sung on the first day of the congress after the list of speakers was closed; however, a congress participant, Elkhonen Indelman, claimed that it happened on the last day, at the closing reception. According to him, after the cantor’s prayer, Mark tried to shift the mood by raising a toast to the surviving Jews in Poland, and he called out, “Next year in Jerusalem!” (a traditional wish during the Passover seder); see H. Shlomi, “Kinus yehudei Polin,” p. 127.

critical moment for Polish Jewry, those who go to Poland must be those who are strong enough to endure the first difficult period, to survive the heavy moral atmosphere that is now felt both here and there.”⁵⁷¹

Sfard presented a report on the KOŻP’s past eighteen months, listing its various activities, including cooperation in the battle against fascism, coordination with the Polish authorities in preparation for repatriation, campaigns to solicit and distribute aid shipments, contact with various bodies in Poland and reactions to anti-Jewish rioting there, publication of the bulletin, etc. Moyshe Burko spoke about economic difficulties pertaining to the rebuilding of Jewish life in Poland. In addition, the *Wolna Polska* reported that “various demands were addressed to the Committee: that its cultural activity among Jewish refugees be increased, that repatriates’ professions be logged—this was necessary in order to plan the repatriation—and that a delegation be sent to Poland to determine which locations would be best suited for the settlement of Jewish repatriates.”⁵⁷²

The third day of the proceedings was devoted to Jewish cultural issues. Lectures were given by Abraham Kagan (on education), Ida Kamińska (on theater), Rokhl Korn and Efraim Kaganowski (on literature), Marian Melman (on publishing and libraries), and Rabbi Elkhonen Soroczkin (on reviving Jewish religious life in Poland). “A discussion developed [about rebuilding Jewish education in Poland], and participants agreed unanimously [...that] the language of instruction must be Yiddish; Polish language and history must be prominent in the curriculum, and Hebrew language must be a required subject of study.”⁵⁷³ This daringly “nationalist” vision (from a Soviet perspective) shocked the representatives of the JAC, who—as memoirists describe—sat rapt and moved. “It was like a gathering of Jews, foreign ones, who were behaving in the middle of Moscow as if they were in old Warsaw,” recalled Yanasovitch years later.⁵⁷⁴ If by that time the JAC still entertained any illusions that the Polish Jews would remain in the USSR long-term, this congress must have laid that idea to rest. When Fefer, as a representative of the JAC, rose at the end of the congress to describe the relationship between the JAC and the KOŻP, he referred to it as “druzhba evreiskih narodov” (a friendship of the [two separate] Jewish peoples).⁵⁷⁵ It was a joke, but one that contained much truth.

571 “Narada przedstawicieli Żydów polskich.”

572 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

573 *Ibid.*

574 Y. Yanasovitch, *Mit yidishe shrayber in Rusland*, Buenos Aires 1959, p. 315.

575 *Ibid.*, p. 315.

Hana Shlomi notes the congress's obvious successes: the fact that it took place at the headquarters of the ZPP was a sign that the plan to repatriate Polish citizens would include Jews, as well as a sign of the good will of the new Polish authorities toward the Jewish minority; the congress served as a sort of town-hall meeting between the members of the Jewish community of liberated Poland and their future leaders; and finally, for the Jews who gathered there, many from far-away corners of the USSR, the congress provided moral support and a reminder that they were not alone.⁵⁷⁶

We Can't Place a Militiaman Next to Every Jew

A Polish Labor Party (PPR) conference on the "Jewish problem" was held in Moscow on August 18 and 21, 1945, a few months prior to the congress of Polish Jewish representatives in the USSR. This conference concentrated on the present and near future of Jews in Poland, and in particular the necessity of planning a response on the part of Jewish Party members to the difficult situation facing Jews in liberated Poland (see Chapter Five) and to the increasing intensity of Zionist propaganda, which was attracting support away from the project of rebuilding Jewish life in Poland. Conference participants considered the current approach of the new Polish authorities to the Jewish problem to be extremely unsatisfactory. For example, Mark criticized it as follows: "[Edward] Osóbka-Morawski⁵⁷⁷ said in his most recent statement that the Polish ports are operating and nothing is preventing Jews from leaving. [...] This is an inappropriate attitude for a democratic government. Rather than emphasizing that the Jewish masses wish to emigrate and can do so, the Prime Minister's first sentence should have been a condemnation of the pogroms and an assurance of job prospects for Jewish citizens. [...] It is only because people are unhappy and feel that their lives are in danger that they want to flee; the Zionist idea does not deserve credit for this."⁵⁷⁸

Sfard expressed himself even more pointedly: "What has the Party done concretely and practically so far [to combat anti-Semitism]? As a Communist, I will speak frankly: almost nothing. On the contrary, the behavior and statements of the Party have only reinforced the desire of Jews to emigrate."⁵⁷⁹

576 H. Shlomi, "Kinus yehudei Polin," p. 126.

577 Edward Osóbka-Morawski (1909–1997), a Polish socialist politician, was serving at this time as the Prime Minister of the Provisional Government of National Unity.

578 AAN, ZPP, call no. 216/67, p. 3.

579 *Ibid.*, p. 88.

In order to compete with Zionist outreach, the Party had to offer Jews something in exchange for their decision to remain in Poland. Mark asserted that a determined effort to combat anti-Semitism combined with support for Jewish resettlement in the Recovered Territories (*Ziemie Odzyskane*) could prove an adequate carrot. The Party did not have to fear Jewish “internationalism” or the ties between Jews in different countries, he said, emphasizing that, on the contrary, these ties could be exploited in such a way as to strengthen the influence of the Jewish population of Poland:

The Jewish community in Poland will be so large that it will be impossible for it not to play a role in connecting Jews separated by long distances. Jewish comrades in Poland can promote a rapprochement of American Jews with Jews in Palestine and Poland on an anti-fascist platform, as a counterweight to the Zionists and Bundists. Polish Jews can do this more quickly and efficiently by identifying ourselves as Polish Jews. We must support every positive solution in Jewish politics, excluding neither emigration nor Palestine, but remembering that we Polish Jewish Communists must cry out in defense of our connection to Europe; we cannot give up our thousand-year history. The Jewish nucleus in Poland, although small [!], can be the spiritual guide for Palestine. The site of the graves of six million Jews must remain a center of Jewry. We must build a great memorial for those who perished here, on the site of the great martyrdom of the Jewish people; wherever a ghetto was established, sooner or later a memorial must be erected. We must not abandon these graves—that is a principle that Jew[ish] comrades must promote.⁵⁸⁰

The arguments which Mark presented here for the necessity of maintaining a concentration of Jews in Poland were not that different from the arguments which the Zionists used to encourage emigration; both emphasized the importance of building a strong, concentrated Jewish community on fertile soil. As Sfarad later wrote in his memoirs: “Most Polish Jews [...] chose to leave Poland [after the war], giving the very same reasons for their decision that the minority who stayed gave for theirs.”⁵⁸¹

The participants of the PPR conference particularly criticized the insufficiency of efforts to combat postwar anti-Semitism on the part of the new leadership of Poland. KOŹP activists dreaded the reaction of the hundreds of thousands of Polish Jews in the process of repatriating who were in for a shock. Benjamin Dodiuk stated: “We did not inform the Jews in far-flung regions of the terror of the situation in Poland [...]. We lied. In Uzbekistan, we lied to 150,000 people. We should have told them what awaited them [in Poland].”⁵⁸² Finkelsztajn retorted

580 *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

581 *Mit zikh*, p. 156.

582 AAN, ZPP, call no. 216/67, p. 51.

that telling people the truth would have caused panic and offered grist for the mill of Zionist reactionism. Julian Gordon noted the prevalence of anti-Semitic feelings and the unrealisticness of the expectation that the Party would offer protection: “[The Party] cannot place a militiaman next to every Jew [to serve as a bodyguard].”⁵⁸³ Additionally, he warned that, due to the changes caused by the war, the hopes nurtured by some Jews were unrealistic: “It is necessary to inform the Jews clearly and explicitly that a Jew who goes to Poland and does not feel connected to Polish culture will feel bad there, and a Jewish militiaman will not be able to help him. Seeing to the needs of this sort of Jew there will likely be difficult.”⁵⁸⁴

Among the proposed solutions to the Jewish problem in postwar Poland, assimilation cannot be overlooked. For obvious reasons, calls for assimilation must have aroused unease among those Jewish PPR activists who considered themselves to be Jews first and foremost and Communists only secondarily. Another cause of unease was the report from Poland that some Party members were hiding their Jewish origins and changing their Jewish-sounding last names. Some, such as Gordon, did not consider assimilationism to be a serious threat:

No one is suggesting assimilation as a solution to the Jewish problem; however, there is no denying that in conditions of complete freedom and democracy, a certain portion of the Jewish people will inevitably yield to assimilation. Party activists of Jewish origin assimilate especially quickly, as we see, for example, in the Soviet Communist Party. We observe the same phenomenon today in the PPR. This is completely natural because 95 % of the population of the reborn Poland will consist of Poles, and this is our main focus in our Party work. Therefore, any attempts to condemn or laugh off this phenomenon are incompatible both with a Marxist point of view and with the basic needs and challenges of our work.

[A voice is heard: There is assimilation and there is assimilation.]

It is clear that there are numerous instances of vulgarization of this matter. Some comrades think that changing their last name compensates completely for their lack of knowledge of Polish culture, and substitutes for having a feel for the Polish milieu and sometimes even for a precise knowledge of the Polish language. Obviously, placing such comrades in responsible positions of leadership only makes them, and the Party as well, look foolish. Yet we must not throw out the baby with the bathwater.⁵⁸⁵

583 According to the minutes, after this statement, a voice from the crowd reminded those present that “policemen in Krakow beat Jews” (ibid., p. 57) which was an allusion to the pogrom against Jews in Krakow in August 1945.

584 Ibid., p. 58.

585 Ibid., p. 62.

Sfard criticized Gordon's framing in the strongest possible terms, stating that Polonizing one's last name and hiding one's Jewish origin “is not in keeping with Communist dignity,” and is even offensive to national pride and proof of “an almost racist point of view.” He remarked that such behavior certainly would not increase the respect that Jewish Communists commanded among their Polish comrades or in the Polish milieu in general. “Why does the Party fail to react to this shameful behavior?” he concluded.⁵⁸⁶

Much time was devoted to the matter of whether or not Polish Jewish Communists needed their own organization, whether in the form of a separate workers' party or as a caucus within the PPR, similar to the role that the Central Jewish Bureau had played vis-à-vis the KPP. Perhaps surprisingly, the idea of a separate Jewish body, whatever the structure, did not elicit general enthusiasm among the KOŻP activists. Mark put it as follows, pointing out the absurdity of situations that could arise, under the assumption that the Jewish party would inevitably remain marginal:

This idea is odd at the very least, because how can one country have two Marxist-Leninist parties under one roof, whose line of demarcation would be national origin or appurtenance? Today, Mark, Sfard and Heller will belong to [the Jewish party], and tomorrow perhaps some Jewish comrade who holds a [high] ministerial office? Of course, this is nonsensical. Right now in particular, it is necessary for Jewish activists to be firmly linked to the entire Party, to its Polish activists. It will be of the greatest advantage both to Jews and to Poland if we are all together in the ranks of a single workers' party.⁵⁸⁷

In a resolution summing up the conference, adopted on August 28, 1945, the Jewish Communists pronounced themselves against emigration as a solution to the Jewish problem (while supporting emigration as such) and in favor of Jewish settlement in Palestine and productivization of Jews in Poland, and also in favor of the establishment of a “Jewish national front which is to include representatives of all streams, from the PPR and the Bund to democratic Zionists and democratic Orthodox elements [...]” The need for the establishment of a special Jewish workers' party, a Jewish section of the PPR, or a Central Jewish Bureau was denied. It was declared that the function of Party leadership in the Jewish sector was to be fulfilled by a committee made up of members of the PPR caucus of the Central Jewish Committee (i.e., the CKŻP). This executive was required to be in direct contact with the Central Committee of the Party.⁵⁸⁸

586 *Ibid.*, p. 89.

587 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

588 *Ibid.*, pp. 127–129.

Just Wait a Little Longer

Repatriation of Jewish refugees to Poland turned out to be one of the KOŻP's most important and most difficult tasks, and ultimately one of its greatest successes.

In February 1946, Mark announced that about 225,000 Polish citizens, of whom about 125,000 were Jewish, had registered in the USSR for repatriation. About 40,000 additional Jews had by then already managed to leave illegally, and about 30,000 were not interested in repatriation for various reasons. Mark warned that ready or not, in the near future (i.e., spring 1946), "about 30,000 Jews from Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Moldavia, Novosibirsk, Stalingrad, etc." would be repatriated to Poland. "In the second phase of repatriation, about 5,000 persons will arrive, and in the third phase, about 80,000 Jews from Central Asia."⁵⁸⁹ Indeed, between February and July 1946, over 136,000 Jews were repatriated to Poland, mostly to the Recovered Territories and Lower Silesia.⁵⁹⁰

From the perspective of KOŻP activists, repatriation was not a foregone conclusion. Apart from the horrific scale of the wartime destruction and Nazi genocide, a new set of dismal reports flowed in: Polish Jews who had survived the war and returned to their homeland were being murdered. A pogrom took place in Krakow on August 11, 1945; one victim perished and several others were wounded.⁵⁹¹ In the wake of the Krakow pogrom, the KOŻP addressed a memorandum to the Polish Government of National Unity:

We Polish Jews in exile have believed and continue to believe that the Government of National Unity will put an end to these crimes which are meant to finish what the German occupiers started, and which are a stab in the back of the new Polish democracy. After a few weeks of relative calm, we were shocked to hear of a new blow worse than all the previous ones: the provocation of 'ritual murder' and a pogrom perpetrated in broad daylight in the heart of Polish culture and progress, in Krakow, and in its wake—a pogrom in Radom. This fact has elicited profound anxiety among the masses of Jews in Soviet exile who are preparing to return to their homeland. The events in Krakow are not only grist for the mill of Polish reactionaries abroad; they have also been exploited by a few groups of Jewish reactionaries who were previously completely without influence. [...]

589 Minutes no. 7, AŻIH, CKŻP, Presidium 2, p. 29.

590 J. Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej Ludową," in: *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce w zarysie (do 1950 roku)*, ed. J. Tomaszewski, Warsaw 1993, pp. 395–398.

591 For more on the Krakow pogrom, see A. Cichopek, *Pogrom Żydów w Krakowie 11 sierpnia 1945 r.*, Warsaw 2000.

We realize that pogroms are [not] exclusively a Jewish issue; rather, this is one of the means by which reactionaries are trying to cause unrest in Poland and to undermine the government's democratic foundations. [...]

We address the following demands to the Government of National Unity:

1. As soon as possible, all direct participants in the Krakow pogrom and its organizers and instigators must be identified, brought to public trial, and served with the highest possible penalty.
2. Laws against racist agitation in all its forms must be declared, including laws banning anti-Jewish agitators and active anti-Semitism, as in Bulgaria.
3. The government must pass and announce a resolution condemning anti-Semitic agitation.
4. A plan must be made to resettle Jewish repatriates and provide them with situations in accordance with their professional qualifications and in accordance with the needs of the country, in a coordinated effort with the leading organizations representing Polish Jewry. [...]⁵⁹²

With the arrival of disquieting news from Poland, doubts seized even those most active in the KOŻP. Sfarid recalled: “Szymon Zachariasz came and told me that we were shouldering too heavy a burden of responsibility: it is possible that we were wronging the Jews by helping them return to Poland, where they were not wanted and where their lives were in danger. I answered that I had absolutely decided to return to Poland.”⁵⁹³

Repatriation of Polish Jews was not a foregone conclusion from the perspective of the Polish or Soviet authorities either. Sfarid stated that the KOŻP learned from Jakub Berman that the repatriation of Jews was planned as a part of the general repatriation of Polish citizens even before the repatriation agreements were signed,⁵⁹⁴ but rumors nevertheless flew that only non-Jewish Poles would be repatriated. According to Sfarid, these rumors were a consequence of the actions of the first illegal group of Jewish repatriates, who apparently made it to Vienna and granted an interview there to the press, in which they told of the Siberian camps. Their decision to “leak” this information, which was, to say the least, not good publicity for the USSR, gave rise to fears that no additional Jews would be allowed to leave the country. Viacheslav Molotov would later summon Henryk Raabe, the Polish ambassador, and declare that including Polish Jews in

592 “Memoriał do Polskiego Rządu Jedności Narodowej,” *Wolna Polska*, September 10, 1945, p. 4.

593 OHD, call no. (160)4b, p. 10.

594 OHD, call no. (160)4a, p. 11.

the repatriation was not desirable in the eyes of the Soviet authorities.⁵⁹⁵ Initially, the KOŻP was not included among the bodies coordinating the preparations for repatriation, which may also have inspired the rumor that Jews would not be repatriated. The committee was alarmed: “We are sorry that some leaders have gone over our heads and, without our consent, decided on matters vital to us. We cannot allow [...] repatriation to be debated and planned without the participation of Jewish activists at a time when Jewish refugees number about 180,000.”⁵⁹⁶

In preparation for repatriation, the KOŻP helped Polish Jews to recover or obtain documents certifying their nationality.⁵⁹⁷ KOŻP members also conferred with Mściśław Olechnowicz, assistant director of the State Office for Repatriation (Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny, PUR), to discuss the possibility of resettling Jews in Lower Silesia, mainly in Reichenbach (Dzierżoniów), as well as with Dr. Henryk Wolpe, chairman of the Polish Repatriation Commission.⁵⁹⁸ It was decided that a delegation of KOŻP activists would be sent to Poland to play the role of “repatriation inspectors.” An initial list of candidates included a certain Staszewski, Szochatow, and Wassersztrum, as well as Marian Melman, Genia Lewi, Rabbi Elkhonen Soroczkin and Julian Łazebnik.⁵⁹⁹ In early 1946, a group of inspectors (perhaps modified from this list; Sfarid mentions only a certain Cyncynatus, as well as Staszewski, Szochatow and Wassersztrum)⁶⁰⁰ left for

595 *Mit zikh*, p. 155. I could not find confirmation of this information elsewhere. According to Sfarid, a few members of the PPR, apparently inspired by Molotov, tried to persuade him to encourage Jewish refugees to stay in the USSR, but he refused (OHD, call no. 6(93), s. 10).

596 Report of B. Mark on the activity of the KOŻP, AAN, ZPP, call no. 216/10, p. 120.

597 OHD, call no. (160)4a, p. 17. The question of the nationality of Polish Jews was complicated by the stance of the Soviet authorities, who on January 16, 1943 declared that all those who had been living in Western Ukraine and Western Belarus on November 1–2, 1939 were de facto Soviet citizens (see *Dokumenty i materiały do historii stosunków polsko-radzieckich*, vol. 7: *Styczeń 1939 – grudzień 1943*, ed. E. Basiński et al., Warsaw 1973, p. 385). In the end, the repatriation did include Poles and Jews with Polish citizenship who by September 17, 1939 were living in the former Eastern Provinces of Poland, which had been annexed by the USSR (see Głowacki, “Sytuacja prawna,” p. 47).

598 “Z działalności Komitetu Organizacyjnego Żydów Polskich w ZSRR,” *Wolna Polska*, September 21, 1945, p. 6.

599 Minutes of the KOŻP meeting of September 13, 1945, AŻIH, Papers of Bernard Mark (unsorted portion), call no. 152, unpaginated.

600 Sfarid mentions these names in the context of their being summoned to Moscow from various Soviet localities in order to pick up their visas (Minutes of the KOŻP meeting

Poland, where, among other things, they visited the headquarters of the PUR in Łódź and evaluated the locations proposed for resettlement. As of February 1946, two representatives of the KOŻP had begun to take part in the permanent delegation of Polish repatriates from the USSR, which was beginning its activity at the Central Board of the PUR in Łódź.⁶⁰¹

In January 1946 Mark left for Poland and Sfarid formally assumed the post of chairman of the KOŻP. Once in Poland, Mark attempted to facilitate the cooperation between the KOŻP and the CKŻP in the matter of repatriation. It was not easy. At one of the plenary sessions of the CKŻP Mark commented reproachfully, “When the delegation [of repatriation inspectors] arrived, they were quite startled by their reception on the part of those Jews in positions of responsibility. They noted that the CKŻP had made only minimal preparations in the matter of repatriation [...]”⁶⁰²

Meanwhile, the overwhelming majority of refugees wanted to be repatriated, and any delay in this matter meant the risk of a great increase in illegal emigration. Sfarid recalled that “hundreds of Jewish refugees” besieged the Moscow headquarters of the KOŻP hoping to obtain permission to leave; those who did not receive permission left illegally, in search of close relatives and friends who might have survived and fearing that the Soviet authorities would soon close the border.⁶⁰³ As historian Albin Głowacki has noted: “Tragic experiences and several years of separation from their families on the part of both deportees [to Siberia, e.g.] and those who had at one point voluntarily sought a better life deep in the USSR caused most Polish Jews to continue to view Poland as their homeland; to a considerable extent (in view of the poverty experienced by the deportees [in the USSR]) it was a home the image of which—in spite of prewar anti-Semitism and various kinds of ethnic friction—was increasingly idealized.”⁶⁰⁴

Nearly all Yiddish authors hailing from Poland and Lithuania expressed a desire for repatriation. This aroused astonishment and a certain resentment among the members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, who apparently had not foreseen this possibility at all, absorbed as they were at the time

of January 11, 1946, AŻIH, Papers of Bernard Mark (unsorted portion), call no. 152, unpaginated).

601 A. Głowacki, “Uwagi o Komitecie Organizacyjnym Żydów Polskich przy Związku Patriotów Polskich w ZSRR,” in: *Dzieje Żydów w Łodzi 1820–1944: Wybrane problemy*, ed. W. Puś, S. Liszewski, Łódź 1991, p. 298.

602 Minutes no. 7, AŻIH, CKŻP Presidium 2, p. 29.

603 *Mit zikh*, pp. 154–155.

604 Głowacki, “Czy i dokąd wracać?,” p. 165.

in the Crimea project: on February 15, 1944 (a few months before the establishment of the KOŽP), Shloyme Mikhoels, Shakhne Epshteyn and Itsik Fefer addressed an official document to Stalin on behalf of the JAC, in which they explained the necessity of settling Jews in a new region within the Soviet Union as follows: “The family members of the huge majority of the Jewish population did not manage to escape. Thus, the fascists transformed their hometowns into mass graves containing their families, relatives and friends, who cannot be resurrected. *The question of repatriation does not exist at all for those Jews from Poland and Romania who have become Soviet citizens.* All of their relatives have been murdered, and every trace of Jewish culture has been erased from the face of the earth [in the regions where they used to live].”⁶⁰⁵

The preparations for repatriation caused unease and tension between the KOŽP and the JAC—although it is worth stressing that the two organizations never cut off contact with one another. The plans of Yiddish writers from Lithuania, including Avrom Sutskever and Chaim Grade, to leave the USSR for Poland were met with particular incomprehension and resentment. Formally, these writers belonged to the JAC, not the KOŽP; on the other hand, the JAC now included Kaganowski and Heller, whose right to leave was not questioned. Sfard recalled a discussion with Dovid Bergelson on the subject: “You understand, Sfard—you and Heller are returning to Poland, which is perfectly fine. First of all, you are Party members, and you have to do what the Party tells you to do; secondly, you are returning, after all, to your home now that it has been liberated. But the Vilna [writers] are in fact now Soviet citizens and they’re not Party members, so why should they rush to Poland? You understand, [...] we welcomed all of them so warmly, with so much respect, we organized events, we were brotherly—and how will *we* look now?”⁶⁰⁶

The KOŽP was slated to be shuttered on June 15, 1946⁶⁰⁷ (although the last surviving Committee minutes are dated June 18, 1946). Most of its members had already returned to Poland, other than Binem Heller, who remained longer in Moscow due to his wife’s illness. Sfard was one of the last to leave. “On the night before we left, Moyshe Broderzon came to see us, and tried every tactic to dissuade me from leaving for Poland. ‘Why would you do something so stupid?’ he

605 Letter by Mikhoels, Epshteyn and Fefer to J. V. Stalin of February 15, 1944, in: *Evreiskiy Antifashistskiy Komitet*, pp. 136–137. Emphasis added.

606 *Mit zikh*, p. 146. Cf., e.g., OHD, call no. 6(93), p. 11. Emphasis in original.

607 Minutes no. 24, AŽIH, Papers of Bernard Mark (unsorted portion), call no. 397, unpaginated.

reproached me. ‘What is compelling you to go back to that snake pit swarming with bandits? Why are you so impatient? Just wait a little longer; [Poland] will be established [as] the seventeenth republic [of the USSR]—we’ll go together then.’⁶⁰⁸

This was to be their last conversation for the next ten years.

608 *Mit zikh*, pp. 157–158.

Chapter Five: “There Is No ‘Jewish Problem,’ There Are Only Jewish Problems” (1946–1949)

How Do Jews in Poland Spend Their Time These Days?

The short period immediately following World War II (from 1944/1945 to 1950) played an unusually significant role in Polish Jewish history. During these years, most Polish Jewish survivors were compelled to tackle one of two immense tasks: to rebuild a destroyed life in Poland or to rebuild from the bottom up in another country. The experiences and events of those few years shaped the lives of those who stayed in Poland—whether by choice or lack thereof—and established frameworks for postwar Jewish life, frameworks which lasted until March 1968. The events that led up to the formation of the Polish People’s Republic also significantly shaped this period of Jewish Polish history. Finally, the experiences of the immediate postwar years, combined with prewar memories and the glaring devastation of the Holocaust, influenced the attitude of successive generations of Poles toward the so-called Jewish problem. No one could deny that the Holocaust most certainly had not provided the “final solution” for Poland—rather, it created a new iteration of the “Jewish problem,” which was at least as severe as the prewar version. When the First National Council of Jewish PPR activists declared in a resolution that “*There is no ‘Jewish problem’ in its prewar conception in Poland. There are only [particular] Jewish problems (productivization, education, etc.)*,”⁶⁰⁹ this was wishful thinking rather than a statement of fact.

In addition to classical forms of anti-Semitism, the stereotype of the *żydokomuna* (Judeo-Communism) burgeoned in the postwar years, particularly in conjunction with memories of Jews’ behavior towards the Soviet authorities in the Eastern Provinces after September 17, 1939, and as a response to the entry of Jews into government posts. As Krystyna Kersten has written: “The stereotype of ‘Jew = exploiter, usurer, banker, competitor,’ was replaced by ‘Jew = member of the secret police, Communist, a flunky of Moscow’ [...].”⁶¹⁰ The new Communist

609 AŻIH, CKŻP, Organizational Department, call no. 15, unpaginated. Emphasis in original.

610 K. Kersten, “Rozważania wokół podziemia 1944–1947,” in: idem, *Między wyzwoleniem a zniewoleniem: Polska 1944–1956*, London 1993, pp. 37–38.

authorities were considered by most of Polish society to be foreign, imposed, sent from abroad. Jewish participation in the state apparatus, which was conspicuous both in terms of its disproportionate numbers and in contrast to its absence in prewar times, further amplified this impression of foreignness, in a context in which Jews continued to be perceived as “not quite Polish” at best.

For Polish society in the immediate postwar years, Jewish survivors evoked both pangs of conscience and resentment of the new regime with which Jews were associated. Jews were former neighbors and acquaintances whom one could live without; they returned when they were least expected, after their homes, shops and possessions had already been appropriated by others. Some of them wore the uniforms of Soviet officers, and they not infrequently—in the spirit of building a new, just reality founded on an a priori rejection of everything that had come before—disregarded or neglected the importance of cultivating a sense of Polishness per se. They also tended to place much more confidence in the new Communist system than non-Jewish Poles did. As Kersten writes, “In order to continue to live, the few Jews who had escaped death had to believe that elementary principles of justice called for reparations for the years of torment. The constitution of the authorities of the ‘democratic camp’ appeared to be a guarantee of an end to nationalistic persecution, a promise of access to all domains of public life, without exception, equal to that of the other citizens of the Polish state. Equal, but in practice, keeping in mind the difference in the relationships of each of the two collectivities to the regime imposed in Poland [by the Soviets]—more often privileged.”⁶¹¹

The attitude of the new Polish authorities toward the Jews was also somewhat ambivalent. On one hand, Communist ideology promoted general equality and justice, without favoritism for any ethnic group. Besides, it was difficult for Polish Communists to break off relations with their Jewish comrades from the former KPP considering how little support they enjoyed among non-Jewish Poles. On the other hand, it was precisely this lack of support that forced the Communists to take various measures to legitimize themselves and convince the society that being Communists did not make them any less Polish.⁶¹² In the initial postwar years, Catholic holidays as well as prewar holidays that did not fit very well into the model of eternal friendship with the Soviet Union, such as

611 Ibid., p. 38.

612 For a penetrating study of these measures, see: M. Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm: Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce*, Warsaw 2001.

November 11 (Polish Independence Day) and May 3 (Day of the Constitution of 1791), continued to be observed, even by the national government. Another legitimizing strategy was the decision to change the name of the Communist Party of Poland (the KPP) to the “Polish Workers Party” (PPR): the latter emphasized the party’s tie to the Polish state and people, whereas the former merely designated the territory in which the party was active.⁶¹³ Needless to say, in a context in which Jewishness and Polishness were still defined in opposition to one another, officials with Jewish-sounding last names, who spoke incorrect Polish with a Yiddish accent and demonstrated a lack of appreciation for the necessity of maintaining good relations with the Catholic Church, among other things, were viewed as a liability by Polish Communists on a quest for legitimacy.

Jewish Communist officials were asked more than once to change their surnames to ones that sounded “more Polish.” As Hersh Smolar recalled, one of the people who assessed whether a given Jewish Communist should be permitted to work in the Polish milieu (based on the “Polishness” of his surname and appearance) was Zofia Gomułka, herself of Jewish origin: “It was rumored that Zofia’s ‘criterion’ for whether or not to install Jewish Communist activists in office took the form of: ‘The face is not so important’ (in other words, whether or not he could pass for an ‘Aryan’), ‘but the last name, on the other hand...’ Conversely, it was said of her: ‘Her last name (Gomułka’s wife) is not so important [i.e., her surname did not indicate her Jewish origin], but as for her face—may the Lord Jesus protect her.’”⁶¹⁴ Indeed, some Jewish Communists did change their surnames. A factory worker from Łódź wrote in a sociological survey: “I keep my old family name, but I changed my first name. If my last name were Jewish, I would probably have changed it, too. I wouldn’t do it for the sake of assimilation, or out of illusory convenience, but in order to be able to disseminate more freely the truth about socialism to those surrounding me... It would have been difficult to persuade someone of the errors of his views if he was prejudiced because of a (Jewish-sounding) name.”⁶¹⁵

In fact, however, the name-change maneuver did not always help, and Polish public opinion even tended to ascribe Jewish origin to many prominent Party officials, regardless of whether or not they truly were of Jewish descent. Additionally, most Poles did not make a distinction between Jews who identified

613 Ibid., p. 125.

614 H. Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye mit der letster hofenung*, Tel Aviv 1982, p. 30.

615 I. Hurwic-Nowakowska, *A Social Analysis of Postwar Polish Jewry*, Jerusalem 1986, p. 123.

as such (regardless of their political views) and those who, despite their Jewish origins, identified primarily as Polish Communists, e.g., Jakub Berman.

Jewish survivors’ bitterness, mourning, and incomprehension collided with the stereotypes, prejudices, mistrust and feelings of partial guilt harbored by Poles. By June 1945, approximately 74,000 survivors had registered with the Central Committee of Jews in Poland: about 5,500 of them had survived camps in Germany; about 20,000 had survived by hiding on the so-called Aryan side; about 10,000 had survived concentration camps on Polish soil; and the rest arrived either with the Red Army or as repatriates from the USSR.⁶¹⁶ Although every survivor’s particular story was different, all survivors were bereaved, psychologically shattered, and physically exhausted to one degree or another. Irena Hurwic-Nowakowska, who appears to have been the only sociologist to conduct survey-based research among Jewish survivors in Poland immediately after the war, characterized them in general as a group in which “phenomena belonging to the realm of social pathology—complexes, traumas, proneness to mass psychosis—are rampant.”⁶¹⁷ Certainly, many of them generalized individual experiences, attributing anti-Semitic views to all of Polish society and seeing all non-Communists as haters of Jews, however disguised. Some decided to leave Poland as soon as possible, expressing a refusal to live in a country which had been turned by the Nazis into a giant Jewish cemetery. Others, especially Communists and Bundists, decided to stay despite what had happened. And a large number of Jews who had initially planned to remain were ultimately convinced to leave by the anti-Semitic violence that took place during the years 1944–1947. A Yiddish anecdote from the period made light of the mass emigration by emphasizing the energetic activity of those who stayed behind:

How do Jews in Poland spend their time these days?

One Jew—puts a notice in the newspaper that he is looking for relatives.

Two Jews—found a theater troupe and open a theater.

Three Jews—found a party.

Four Jews—run a Central Committee.

616 J. Adelson, “W Polsce zwanej Ludową,” in: *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce w zarysie (do 1950 roku)*, ed. J. Tomaszewski, Warsaw 1993, pp. 388–389. See also A. Skibińska, “The Return of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and the Reaction of the Polish Population,” in: *Jewish Presence in Absence: The Aftermath of the Holocaust in Poland, 1944–2010*, ed. F. Tych and M. Adamczyk-Garbowska, transl. G. Dąbkowski and J. Taylor-Kucia, Jerusalem 2014, pp. 25–66; A. Cichopek-Gajraj, *Beyond Violence: Jewish Survivors in Poland and Slovakia, 1944–48*, Cambridge 2014.

617 Hurwic-Nowakowska, *A Social Analysis*, p. 53.

Five Jews—found a kibbutz.

Six Jews—rent an apartment together.

And the few remaining Jews are waiting for visas...⁶¹⁸

Jewish Communists who were repatriated to Poland from the USSR were, on average, in a fundamentally different psychological state than Jews who—regardless of their political views—had survived the occupation in Poland. Although most members of the former group had lost relatives and friends in the Holocaust, those losses had largely taken place at a geographic remove. They had not directly experienced the trauma of Nazi occupation, and in particular its incredibly devastating devaluation of their ethnic origin. In this regard, the USSR had offered a kind of “equality in suffering”: even though Jews were sometimes sent to Soviet camps on charges of “Jewish nationalism,” nevertheless, among the other prisoners there they met large numbers of Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, and members of other ethnic groups. Thus, a Soviet camp wasn’t a Jewish-only ghetto, separated from the rest of the world by a double wall. Additionally, some Jewish refugees in the USSR had had the opportunity to take direct part in wartime combat, in the ranks of the Red Army or in General Zygmunt Berling’s Polish People’s Army. These experiences landed Jews who had survived the war in the USSR in a different psychological state on average than that of those who had survived on Polish soil.⁶¹⁹

Regardless of where a given person had spent the war, and regardless of one’s degree of cultural assimilation, ideological acceptance of the new regime facilitated recovery from the “occupation complex,” as Hurwic-Nowakowska states (in other words, those Polish Jews who believed that the new Communist regime would ensure a full and dignified place for Jews in postwar multicultural Polish society found it easier to leave behind the humiliations of the Nazi era).⁶²⁰ Another consolation for Polish Jews after the war was the newfound presence and visibility of Jews and Poles of Jewish origin in the government. For example, Jakub Berman did not identify primarily as a Jew and wasn’t in contact with Jewish institutions, but the Jewish Communists still knew him personally, both

618 M. Nudelman, *Gelekhter durkh trern: Zamlung fun humoristish-satirishe shafungen funem nokhmilkhomedikn lebn fun poylishe yidn*, Buenos Aires, 1947, p. 19.

619 To be fair, as Hurwic-Nowakowska describes, one could have an “occupation complex” even without having experienced the Nazi occupation directly: “There are persons who, upon their return to Poland, were so afflicted with this fear that they were afraid to go out in the streets of large and quiet cities” (Hurwic-Nowakowska, *A Social Analysis*, p. 54).

620 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

from before the war and from their time together in Moscow. Even if they no longer had direct social contact with him, they likely perceived him, at least to some extent, as their man in the upper echelons.

The Entire Jewish Population Has Abandoned the City

A new chapter for Polish Jews began in late 1944 in Lublin. As the Red Army advanced westward, liberating successive areas of the country, many Jews coming out of hiding headed to Lublin, which was functioning as the provisional capital of Poland. In November 1944, the Provisional Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Tymczasowy Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce, later just Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce, or Central Committee of Jews in Poland) was established there. The final composition of the CKŻP leadership was settled in February 1945: the chairman of the presidium was Dr. Emil Sommerstein, a Zionist who had been repatriated from the USSR; his deputies were Marek Bitter (PPR), Adolf Berman (Left Poale-Zion) and Shloyme Herszenhorn (Bund), and the secretary-general was Paweł Zelicki (PPR). Other members of the CKŻP included Yitzhak Zuckerman (Antek Cukierman), Celina (Tsivye) Lubetkin, the actor Jonas Turkow, Michał Szuldenfrei (Bund), and Col. Gustaw Alef-Bolkowiak.⁶²¹ CKŻP departments included Social Welfare, Childcare, Culture and Propaganda, Productivization, Information, and Legal Aid (later also Registration—a department whose purpose was to create a registry of survivors—and Emigration).

The CKŻP, like the local committees subject to it, was run according to a so-called party key system, i.e., a certain number of leadership seats were allotted to representatives of each of various political groups and organizations. In spite of ongoing internal conflicts, the Committee consistently presented itself to the Polish government as the sole representative of Polish Jewry. In that role, it oversaw such matters as founding a new Jewish school system, organizing cultural activities, and creating a registry of survivors, whereas the purview of revived Jewish religious congregations was limited to religious matters. In the words of Jolanta Żyndul: “For a certain time, it appeared that Jewish politicians’ prewar dream of autonomy had been realized.”⁶²²

The broad autonomy that was granted to the CKŻP undoubtedly reflected special treatment on the part of the Polish government: organizations representing

621 Minutes no. 1, AŻIH, CKŻP Presidium, call no. 1, p. 4.

622 J. Żyndul, *Państwo w państwie? Autonomia narodowo-kulturalna w Europie Środkowowschodniej w XX wieku*, Warsaw 2000, p. 213.

other ethnic minorities did not enjoy a similar status. However, this is unsurprising considering that the situation in which the Jewish community found itself was in many ways unique. Jews were the only minority mentioned in the PKWN (Polish Committee for National Liberation) Manifesto due to the uniqueness of their wartime fate.⁶²³ Moreover, the Communist authorities considered Communists of Jewish origin to be old, tried-and-true comrades from the KPP to whom they could turn for support. Jews, who regardless of their political convictions were at especial risk of being attacked by the anti-Communist underground, eagerly took advantage of the protection offered by the authorities.

Aside from the CKŻP, work on behalf of Jewish survivors was also carried out by a pair of governmental institutions: the Department for Aid to the Jewish Population (*Referat do Spraw Pomocy Ludności Żydowskiej*), under the umbrella of the PKWN Presidium (established in August 1944, disbanded once the CKŻP became more active)⁶²⁴ and the Government Commissar for the Productivization of the Jewish Population in Poland (*Urząd Komisarza Rządu do Spraw Produktywizacji Ludności Żydowskiej*, active from July 1946 to September 1947).

Another reason for the broad autonomy granted to Jews was the conviction that most of them would emigrate anyway, and the rest would assimilate. Wincenty Rzymowski, then-minister of culture and art, instructed Jonas Turkow explicitly: “You must bear in mind the following fact: there are no more Jews in Poland. The few Jews who miraculously survived the Holocaust will have to integrate into our society. I do not believe that there will ever again be Jewish life, Jewish cultural life in Poland—most certainly not...”⁶²⁵ The skepticism of this state official must be placed in context: Turkow himself (and he was certainly not the only one) considered Poland at that time to be a “destroyed cemetery full of hyenas.”⁶²⁶

The primary concern of the CKŻP in its initial period was to assure the safety of the Jews returning from camps and hideouts to their former hometowns. “The

623 “The Jews, [so many of whom] have been exterminated in such a beastly way by the occupiers, will be guaranteed [...] a chance to reconstruct their lives as well as de jure and de facto equal rights” (“PKWN Manifesto,” *Appendix to the Legislative Journal of the Polish Republic*, 1944, no. 1, p. 2).

624 For more information about this department see: M. Szulkin, “Sprawozdania z działalności Referatu do spraw Pomocy Ludności Żydowskiej przy Prezydium PKWN,” *BŻIH*, 1971, no. 3, pp. 75–90.

625 J. Turkow, *Nokh der bafrayung*, Buenos Aires 1959, p. 25.

626 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

Central Committee was bombarded every day with news of murders perpetrated against defenseless Jews,” recalled Turkow, referring to incidents in Biała Podlaska, Siedlce, Siemiatycze, Białystok, Czyżew, Drohiczyn, etc.⁶²⁷ At a CKŻP session in March 1945, Yitzhak Zuckerman proposed that permission to arm Jews be requested. The possibility of relocating Jews from small towns to big cities was also considered, in the spirit of safety in numbers, but the political implications of such an act were feared.⁶²⁸ A CKŻP delegation sent to investigate the situation on the ground returned in a generally pessimistic mood. After visiting Rzeszów and Przemyśl in June 1945, Józef Sack and Salo Fiszigrund reported to the Committee:

Immediately after our arrival in Rzeszów on Tuesday, June 26, 1945, we learned that aside from two or three people, the entire Jewish population has abandoned the city and headed westward. Not a single member of the [local] Jewish Committee remained in town, and its chairman, Mr. Reich, himself helped to prompt the “evacuation,” as he was one of the first to leave Rzeszów and thus singlehandedly put an end to the Committee’s activity [...]

The [Przemyśl Jewish] Committee described the mood of the [Jewish] population as panicked. Most of them intend to abandon the city. For its part, the Committee did all it could to get these sentiments under control. However, it confirmed that the situation was serious, if not dangerous. [...] Rumors had been spread that a dozen or more Christian children had disappeared, and these rumors were accompanied by “the expected” comments.⁶²⁹ We asked what steps had been taken by the Jewish Committee to increase security; they answered that a delegation had approached the bishop of the Przemyśl diocese, Rev. [Franciszek] Barda, and asked him to deliver sermons that would help to clear the air. His response was that he constantly expressed the principles of Christian love from the pulpit, but that “the Jews are behaving provocatively” and, “the number of practicing Catholics is small at present.” [...]

We decided to advise the Committee to seek support from the [local] democratic political parties, and we decided that we would first of all contact the local secretary of the Polish Workers’ Party [PPR]. When we communicated this intention to the representatives of the Jewish Committee, they expressed serious reservations about both the influence of these parties on the masses of the gangrenous [sic; presumably intended as an descriptor of widespread moral corruption resulting from the influence and impact of the Nazi occupation] local society and the integrity and ideological values of the

627 Ibid., p. 83.

628 Minutes no. 7, AŻIH, CKŻP Presidium, call no. 1, pp. 19–20.

629 Identical rumors precipitated the pogroms that followed in Krakow and Kielce. For recent research see M. Zaremba, *Wielka Trwoga: Polska 1944–1947: Ludowa reakcja na kryzys*, Warsaw 2012.

party leaders. Moreover, they expressed even more serious reservations about the local administrative, security and civilian militia authorities. [...]

The security situation throughout the entire Przemyśl district is—catastrophic. Murders and attacks are perpetrated against the Polish and Jewish populations on a daily basis [by local bandits]. The non-Jewish population has thus far suffered well over 300 murders in the Przemyśl district; 106 Jews have been murdered to date in the region under the purview of the Provincial Jewish Committee. The civilian militia is completely corrupt. The security authorities are not up to the task. Both forces are terribly understaffed. The Democratic parties are weak and passive; they are full of large numbers of random people who have no ideas and are often crypto-reactionary. The Offices of Public Administration are filled with people stemming from the prewar regime. Change in this border district, which has already been dubbed “Mexico” [!], can only be brought about through vigorous action undertaken by central political and governmental figures.⁶³⁰

Most of the attacks on Jewish survivors were the result of property disputes. Particularly significant is this report of another CKŻP inspector, Zeliwski, from his trip to Kielce, Radom, Skarżysko and Szydłowiec on May 7–17, 1945:

In Kielce voivodeship, the security situation of the Jewish population is at present not arousing much apprehension. [...] To a significant extent, that has been made possible by the rapid and effective political-economic reorientation of the local Jewish element, as expressed by a conscious abandonment of claims to real estate, property, shops, goods, apartments, etc. The relatively few instances of property recovery have been effected by compromise, almost without intervention by the authorities.

In the opinion of the members of the local Committees who are most familiar with the situation on the ground throughout the voivodeship—it is *only for this price* that a relatively (if problematically) peaceful coexistence can be established in the villages and small towns.⁶³¹

Of course, in some instances Jews were also murdered for being (real or imaginary) adherents of a new, despised regime. However, there is no way to know where the battle between the anti-Communist underground and representatives of the regime ended and ordinary banditry with an anti-Semitic subtext began. Nor do we know the precise number of victims—David Engel estimates that between 1945 and 1947, about 400 Jews were killed.⁶³²

630 Report by J. Sack and S. Fiszgrund, AŻIH, CKŻP Presidium, call no. 24, pp. 363–366.

631 Trip report by inspector Zeliwski, AŻIH, CKŻP Presidium, call no. 24, p. 429. Perhaps the inspector “Zeliwski” was the PPR activist Paweł Zelicki. Emphasis in original.

632 D. Engel, “Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1944–1946,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 26, 1998, p. 60. For recent research see A. Żbikowski, “The Post-War Wave of Pogroms and Killings,” in *Jewish Presence in Absence*, pp. 67–94.

On August 11, 1945, stirred up by rumors of Christian children having been murdered by Jews, a mob attacked a synagogue in Krakow. One person was killed in the pogrom and a few were wounded. Aside from the expected reactions, such as a surge in emigration, a rush to register “Aryan” surnames dating from the Occupation era (i.e., to make the name changes official, rather than returning to the use of prewar, recognizably Jewish surnames) was also noted.⁶³³

Less than a year after the Krakow pogrom, on July 4, 1946, the most tragic and disruptive pogrom of this era took place; forty-two people were killed in Kielce.⁶³⁴ CKŻP representatives were among the speakers at the public funeral for the victims on July 8. Speaking on behalf of the Committee, Adolf Berman called the pogrom “a fascist act aimed against Polish democracy.”⁶³⁵ Rabbi David Kahane condemned the inaction of the Catholic Church in the face of anti-Semitic acts:

Chaplains of the Polish people! Polish intelligentsia! Polish people!

Can you say with a clear conscience after leaving here: “Our hands have not shed this innocent blood, our eyes have not seen it?”

What have you done since independence was regained in order to raise the consciousness of the broad masses of society that were poisoned by five years of Nazi venom? Polish bishops, where are your pastoral letters on this matter? Have you not seen the papal encyclicals that explicitly reject accusations of ritual murder as nonsense? Does the commandment “Thou shalt not kill!” not apply to Jews?⁶³⁶

When asked directly, members of the Church hierarchy suggested that the Jews themselves were to blame for provoking anti-Semitic sentiments. At a meeting with American journalists a few days after the funeral of the victims of the Kielce pogrom, Cardinal August Hlond, the Primate of Poland, pointed the finger at Jews who held “leading positions in political life” and tried to “impose forms of government that a huge majority of the population does not want,” and thus bore

633 A. Cichopek, *Pogrom Żydów w Krakowie 11 sierpnia 1945 r.*, Warsaw 2000, p. 122.

634 On the Kielce pogrom see.: B. Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach 4 lipca 1946*, Wrocław 1992; K. Kersten, “Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach – znaki zapytania,” in: idem, *Polacy – Żydzi – komunizm: Anatomia półprawd 1939–68*, Warsaw 1992; *Antyżydowskie wydarzenia kieleckie 4 lipca 1946 roku: dokumenty i materiały*, vol. 1–2, ed. S. Meducki and Z. Wrona, Kielce 1992 and 1994. For more recent research see J. Tokarska-Bakir, “‘Communitas’ of Violence: The Kielce Pogrom as a Social Drama,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 41, 1 (2013), pp. 23–61.

635 Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów*, p. 71.

636 *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce 1944–1968: Teksty źródłowe*, ed. A. Cała and H. Datner-Śpiewak, Warsaw 1997, p. 58.

the responsibility for the worsening of Polish-Jewish relations.⁶³⁷ Several months later, in an official letter to the papal Secretary of State, the Primate explained:

Today, somewhat more is known about the genesis and aims of the pogrom. Kielce was the first location on the list in a comprehensive, large-scale plan for pogroms established by the Russian government, Polish Communist authorities and several international Jewish organizations. After Kielce, similar events were planned for Łęczycza, Kalisz, Częstochowa, Krakow and other cities. These pogroms were planned as small-scale events that would immediately be exploited and exaggerated by Russian and Jewish propaganda in order to claim that Jews could no longer remain in Eastern European countries and thus the Anglo-Saxons would have to open the way for them to Palestine and the USA, where Jews, especially those from Russia, would continue to spread the Communist plague.⁶³⁸

Further down in the letter, the Primate brusquely addressed the Vatican's suggestion that the Polish episcopate issue an official condemnation of the pogrom:

Nor am I of the opinion that we could honestly say anything that would satisfy both the Jewish organizations and the authorities. What they have thus far tried to extract from me and the entire episcopate is unjust, untrue, and harmful to the honor of the [Polish] people and to the prestige of the Church. In reality, the motivation is not to ask us to defend Jews in Poland from persecution, *of which there is no danger*, but rather to compel us to issue an official and holy edict that would justify opening the doors to Palestine and the wealthy gates to the United States for Jewish Communists moving from the USSR to the West, because even the Polish bishops fear for their [i.e., the Jews'] lives in Eastern Europe. Such a document would be interpreted and exploited in this way by the Jewish and Bolshevik press in every country. That is all this is about.⁶³⁹

Many of Primate Hlond's contemporaries shared his attitude. Then-bishop of Lublin Father Stefan Wyszyński expressed similar thoughts: after visiting him, a delegation of the local Jewish Committee reported, "According to the bishop, the Jewish contribution to Polish life is minimal. The Polish people is grateful to the Jews for Fitelberg⁶⁴⁰ and other [similar figures], but that's all."⁶⁴¹

637 Ibid., p. 61.

638 J. Żaryn, "Podróż po archiwach kościelnych (1944–1989)," *Polska 1944/45–1989: Studia i Materiały* 6, 2003, p. 273. This letter was deposited in the archives of the Gniezno Archdiocese, dated November 27, 1946.

639 Ibid., p. 276. Emphasis added.

640 Grzegorz Fitelberg (1879–1955), renowned violinist and conductor, a convert to Catholicism.

641 AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz, call no. 476/21, p. 160.

If this was the stance of the most prominent and well-educated representatives of the Catholic hierarchy, it is no wonder that many ordinary believers and their priests also held and expressed anti-Semitic attitudes. It is also no wonder that Jews viewed the Communist authorities as the only figures invested in their safety. Even someone as remote from Communism as Zionist Yitzhak Zuckerman stated categorically years later: “In that period, to be a partner of the Communists was a Jewish national role, if only from the single perspective of Jewish existence.”⁶⁴² Yet even the Communist authorities sometimes felt helpless to protect the Jews. When public meetings were called in factories in Łódź on July 10, 1946 for the purpose of denouncing the Kielce pogrom, the workers signed the resolution against anti-Semitism only with great reluctance, if at all. Workers in some factories utterly refused to adopt the resolution, and even some of the workers who did sign it held strikes in order to express their desire that it not be published in the press. The scope of the protests must have been large if the authorities planned to deport 15 % of Łódź residents to other regions as a strategy to repress them.⁶⁴³ When Jonas Turkow demanded protection for the Jews, the Minister of Public Safety, Stanisław Radkiewicz, asked irritably: “What do you want us to do, exile eighteen million Poles to Siberia?”⁶⁴⁴

The reaction of the Jews to the situation in Poland was two-pronged. On one hand, they decided to organize self-defense (from July 1946 to March 1947, the CKŻP convened a “Special Commission” to arm guards for local Jewish Committee offices).⁶⁴⁵ On the other hand a feverish, unstoppable wave of emigration commenced, the scale of which may have startled even CKŻP members. According to Albert Stankowski, between July 1946 and March 1947, about 92,000 Jews left the country, out of 216,000 present in Poland before the Kielce pogrom.⁶⁴⁶ That wave of emigration set the scene for the first serious clashes between Zionists and Communists.

642 Y. Zuckerman (Antek Cukierman), *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, transl. and ed. Barbara Harshav, Berkeley 1993, p. 614.

643 Ł. Kamiński, *Polacy wobec nowej rzeczywistości 1944–1948*, Toruń 2000, pp. 94–95.

644 J. Turkow, *Nokh der bafrayung*, p. 89.

645 On the Commission’s activities see: J.T. Gross, “In the Aftermath of the Kielce Pogrom: The Special Commission of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland,” *Gal-Ed* 15–16 (1997), pp. 119–136.

646 A. Stankowski, “Nowe spojrzenie na statystyki dotyczące emigracji Żydów z Polski po 1944 roku,” in: G. Berendt, A. Grabski, and A. Stankowski, *Studia z historii Żydów w Polsce po 1945 roku*, Warsaw 2000, p. 111. For more recent research see idem, “How Many Polish Jews Survived the Holocaust?” in: *Jewish Presence in Absence*, pp. 205–216.

In July 1946, the Italian ambassador to Poland reported to his superiors: "Their [= Polish Jews'] future fate depends mainly on whether or not they stop leaving Poland. If a group of Jews, however small, can summon the strength not to surrender to these temporary setbacks, we can suppose that in keeping with their centuries-long tradition they will be able to flourish on Polish soil and play a valuable role in rebuilding the country with democratic principles in mind."⁶⁴⁷ The ambassador added that this idea was being propagated by the Bund, but at the present time, the Zionists were dominant. However, the time was approaching when both the former and the latter would be outvoted by the Jewish Communists.

Let's Hope Things Can Be Different in Poland

Not all members of the "left-wing writers' group" survived the war. Zalmen Elbirt perished in Lviv, where he had fled in 1939.⁶⁴⁸ Moyshe Levin, who was drafted while in Tashkent, was killed in action.⁶⁴⁹ Dovid Richter was probably a victim of the pogrom organized by the Einsatzgruppen in Słonim in July 1941.⁶⁵⁰ In 1946, Szymon Zachariasz and Bernard Mark returned to Poland from the USSR; somewhat later, Hersh Smolar did as well. According to Stefan Grajek: "Until their arrival, there was harmony among all the parties participating in the Central Committee of Jews in Poland [CKŻP]; however, afterward, when the Communist caucus in the Committee elected Zachariasz as its secretary, he and Smolar introduced quite strict discipline into the Committee."⁶⁵¹

Zachariasz immediately became the leading figure in the PPR Jewish caucus,⁶⁵² which was the only ethnic section of the Communist Party in postwar

647 E. Reale, *Raporty: Polska 1945–1946*, transl. P. Zdziechowski, Warsaw 1991, p. 245.

648 P. Zelman, *Ideologiczne oblicze pisma Literarysze Trybune (żydowskiego czasopisma społeczno-literackiego, wychodzącego w Polsce w latach 1930–1934)*, master's thesis written in 1951 under the direction of Żanna Kormanowa, AAN, Papers of Żanna Kormanowa, call no. 361, p. 30.

649 D. Sfarid, "Eynike zikhroynes un kharakter-shtrikh," in: *Unter der fon fun KPP: Zamlbukh*, ed. H. Goldfinger et al., Warsaw 1959, p. 130.

650 B. Mark, "Literarysze Trybune i Tłomackie 13," in: *Księga wspomnień 1919–1939*, Warsaw 1960, p. 240.

651 S. Grajek, *Po wojnie i co dalej: Żydzi w Polsce w latach 1945–1949*, transl. A. Klugman, Warsaw 2003, p. 112.

652 It is important to distinguish here between the two caucuses at play: the PPR caucus within the CKŻP, and the Jewish caucus within the PPR (note that the latter was ultimately formed even though the original decision was that such a body was not necessary, see the end of Chapter Four).

Poland.⁶⁵³ His arrival and that of other Communists returning from the USSR led to the sidelining of previous Caucus leaders, such as Marek Bitter, Paweł Zelicki and Chaskiel Kameraz. Importantly, Zachariasz was perhaps the only major member of the Central Jewish Bureau of the KPP who had survived both the purges of the 1930s and World War II. He was respected in Jewish Communist circles: Sfard characterized him years later as “one of the most loyal, intelligent and cultured officials tasked with implementing Stalinist policy in liberated Poland.”⁶⁵⁴ On another occasion, he said: “For him the Party was supreme and could not be criticized. The Party could not be thought of critically; one could think critically about a person, about [individual] Communists, but not about the Party.”⁶⁵⁵ It was undoubtedly Zachariasz’s standing among former KPP members that gave Jewish Communists a free hand in the immediate postwar years.⁶⁵⁶

The program hammered out at the Jewish caucus’s first conference, in October 1945 (i.e., before Zachariasz returned to Poland), listed the following aims: to rebuild the Jewish community in Poland, to uphold national unity, to express conditional recognition of Jewish statehood in Palestine, to do battle with Zionist propaganda, to fight against illegal Jewish emigration from Poland while accepting legal emigration, to productivize the Jewish population, and to found economic-cultural institutions.⁶⁵⁷ In short, the program attempted to lay out the “Polish-Jewish path to socialism,” referred to as “Nusekh Poyln” (the Polish way) in Jewish Communist circles. As Smolar wrote: “The situation of the Jews in the USSR, which was well-known to all Polish Jews returning from there, elicited serious doubts even in our circles about whether there was still any possibility of making changes [in the USSR] along the lines of ‘our’ way of solving the Jewish problem. We wholeheartedly desired that *things be different in Poland*,

653 A. Grabski, *Działalność komunistów wśród Żydów w Polsce (1944–1949)*, Warsaw 2004, p. 19. See also the broad discussion of the plans and activities of the Caucus (ibid.).

654 D. Sfard, *Mit zikh un mit andere: Oytobiografye un literarishe eseyen*, Jerusalem 1984 [henceforth: *Mit zikh*], p. 170.

655 Interview with Dovid Sfard, private collection of Michał Chęciński, p. 25.

656 Aleksandra Namysło notes that the Jewish caucus of the PPR is completely omitted from the October 1946 instruction to dissolve Jewish parties and organizations, perhaps because the authorities trusted the caucus’s activists to be loyal to the Party (“Instrukcja MBP dla rozpracowania partii i organizacji działających w społeczeństwie żydowskim z 1946 roku,” *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*, 2004, no. 2, p. 345). Zachariasz’s standing among non-Jewish Communists may have played a major role in this matter.

657 Grabski, *Działalność komunistów*, p. 97.

and that [by means of this difference] we would be able to influence other Eastern European Jewish communities, especially the largest one: the Soviet Jewish community.”⁶⁵⁸ The concept of “Nusekh Poyln” can thus be summarized as follows: “Let’s hope things can be different in Poland.”

The first moment of validation for the PPR Jewish caucus was the referendum of June 30, 1946, which was intended to test the relative strength of the PPR-dominated government vs. the opposition camps, particularly the Polish People’s Party (PSL). From the PPR perspective, “the poll was supposed to indicate that at the existing level of repression, without the introduction of mass terror, the PPR and the parties allied with it stood a good chance of enjoying the support of a significant portion of the population,” writes Krystyna Kersten.⁶⁵⁹ The task of the Jewish caucus was to mobilize the Jewish population for mass participation in the referendum. According to a report by Zachariasz, no effort was spared in pursuit of this goal: among other things, 80 meetings were held in Lower Silesia, 20 in Upper Silesia, and at least as many in Łódź, and agitators spoke in synagogues, prayer houses and at Jewish theater performances.⁶⁶⁰

Not only the PPR Jewish caucus but also representatives of other political currents, including the Zionist movement,⁶⁶¹ suggested that Jews should answer positively to all three of the referendum’s questions. The Jewish Communists believed that a definite majority of Polish Jews would actually vote “three times yes” as the authorities had requested. The Jewish press, including *Dos naye lebn*,⁶⁶² engaged in similar propaganda. This was undoubtedly to a great extent a reaction to the counterpropaganda on the part of the anti-Communist underground, which was generally equated with anti-Semitic rhetoric. Voting according to the instructions of the Communist authorities seemed to be the safe choice. As is now known, the referendum results were falsified in order to conceal the defeat of the ruling camp: despite what they claimed officially, the Politburo of the PPR Central Committee in fact estimated the vote for “three times yes” at barely 30 %.⁶⁶³ Some of these votes no doubt came from the Jewish

658 Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye*, p. 120. Emphasis in original.

659 K. Kersten, *Narodziny systemu władzy: Polska 1943–1948*, Poznań 1990, p. 239.

660 “Some remarks on the referendum and the Jews,” AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz, call no. 476/21, p. 2.

661 Zuckerman, *Surplus of Memory*, p. 614.

662 See, e.g., the article “Di yidish gas greyt zikh tsum referendum,” signed “B.,” *Dos naye lebn*, June 21, 1946, p. 1.

663 Kersten, *Narodziny systemu władzy*, p. 249.

population, although Zachariasz complained that not all Jews voted according to the instructions.⁶⁶⁴

The next test for the Jewish caucus turned out to be the pace of Jewish emigration after the Kielce pogrom. Only the Communists and Bundists relied for their activities on the continued existence of a strong Jewish community in Poland. Conversely, Zionists in the CKŻP and local Jewish Committees viewed the surge of emigration as proof of the correctness of their stance, and as such encouraged it.⁶⁶⁵ Years later, Zuckerman wrote that at the time, they did all they could to prevent the Jews from “putting down roots where they were.”⁶⁶⁶ CKŻP meetings became the scene of clashes between Communists and Bundists on one hand and Zionists on the other. The latter were accused of encouraging emigration and sowing panic. “Panic does not arise artificially,” stated Zachariasz at a meeting of the CKŻP presidium on August 5, 1946. “It comes from a combination of uncertainty about the future, anti-Semitism, and lack of safety. However, there is no basis to this panic. It has been ‘engineered.’ Nothing justifies the intimidation which people feel. [...] It is unfair to tell the Jews: ‘Stay,’ but [it is also] unfair to tell them: ‘Leave.’ Where can they go? Into worse conditions. [...] We must take some action. Our comrades from the Zionist groups must admit that they are partly responsible for the panic.”⁶⁶⁷ He was echoed by Bundist Salo Fiszigrund and Jewish caucus activists Chaskiel Kameraz and Paweł Zelicki. Zelicki blamed the Zionists for the fact that Jews who emigrated were ending up not in Palestine but in D.P. camps in Germany, where they lived in life-threatening conditions.⁶⁶⁸ For their part, the Zionists claimed that the idea that the situation of the Jews in Poland had been stabilizing before the Kielce pogrom was only wishful thinking on the part of the activists in the PPR Jewish caucus. They also argued that the latter were not acting in accordance with the opinion of the Polish majority in the PPR: “Zachariasz, Zelicki, and Kameraz are PPR activists, but they’re saying something different than their Polish comrades [...]. The attitude [in the

664 “Some remarks on the referendum and the Jews,” AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz, call no. 476/21, p. 2.

665 For more on the postwar Zionist movement in Poland see N. Aleksiu, “Zionists and Anti-Zionists in the Central Committee of the Jews in Poland: Cooperation and Political Struggle, 1944–1950,” *Jews in Eastern Europe* 33, 2 (1997), pp. 32–50; eadem, “The Vicious Circle: Jews in Communist Poland, 1944–1956,” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 19 (2003), pp. 157–180.

666 Zuckerman, *Surplus of Memory*, p. 658.

667 Minutes no. 63, AŻIH, CKŻP Presidium, call no. 3, pp. 65–66.

668 Minutes no. 64, AŻIH, CKŻP Presidium, call no. 3, p. 71.

Party] toward illegal emigration has changed. They [Polish Communists] now believe that the borders should be opened. The government is helping in this. You are proposing to make it difficult or impossible to emigrate. [...] I state that Democratic Poland is not interested in keeping all the Jews in Poland; nor are we interested in that, aside from the Bund. [...] It is not our job to stop the exodus. We only have to oppose panic and chaos," said Zionist Adolf Berman, and added that he would be happy to be a Pole "because they are accomplishing for the Poles what I want to accomplish for the Jews in Palestine."⁶⁶⁹

Nothing irritated the Jewish Communists more than having their attitudes and opinions contrasted with those of non-Jewish PPR activists. "We will not tolerate constant comparisons of our activities and opinions with those of the PPR in general," Zachariasz said angrily at a meeting of the presidium on September 12, 1946. "All our actions at the meetings derive from PPR directives. [If] some Party representatives [are expressing a different point of view, it] might be [because they are] making mistakes. The stance of the PPR is uniform."⁶⁷⁰

In spite of the rapid emigration, the Jewish Communists continued to promote the basic principles of their program, with a particular emphasis on productivization (mainly by setting up cooperatives). Repatriation from the Soviet Union, which peaked in the spring of 1946, lent energy to the cooperative movement; the fresh arrivals included many workers and craftsmen in trades that had been common among Jews before the war (including shoemakers, tailors and carpenters). Most of these repatriates had grown up in a traditional Jewish milieu and had a poor command of Polish; thus, for them the offer of housing and a job in a strictly Jewish environment was particularly attractive. In August 1945, the CKŻP decided to settle most of the repatriates in Lower

669 Ibid., pp. 72–73. Zuckerman's opinion was similar: "If I had been Polish, I would have joined them [i.e., the Communists] wholeheartedly and not the other forces" (Zuckerman, *Surplus of Memory*, p. 582).

670 Minutes no. 72, AŻIH, CKŻP Presidium, call no. 3, p. 109. It appears that this irritation was partly a result of the fact that Adolf and Jakub Berman were brothers, which led the Jewish Communists to worry that Adolf might be better informed about the PPR stance or its future direction than they were. A memorandum from the "PPR group of the CKŻP" addressed to the PPR Central Committee in Warsaw and dated May 15, 1945, reads: "We ask that Dr. Berman, the chairman of the Left Poalei-Zion party, be treated as the representative of a party completely foreign and unfavorable to us. Please issue instructions in this regard to the Local Warsaw Committee, with which, as we know, Dr. Berman is in constant contact, and from which he brings various inconvenient pieces of news" (AŻIH, Organizational Department of the CKŻP, call no. 15, unpaginated).

Silesia, especially in Dzierżoniów, Wałbrzych, Kłodzko and Świdnica districts, where local Jewish Committees were already active.⁶⁷¹ In the early postwar years, Dzierżoniów (known then as Rychbach) in particular functioned as a Yiddishland: Jews made up 40.5 % of the city’s population, and many Jews settled there specifically “in order to live in a Jewish environment.”⁶⁷² Joseph Tenenbaum recalled: “I arrived in Rychbach on April 28, 1946. I was struck by conversations everywhere in Yiddish, posters in Yiddish, banners in Yiddish announcing May 1st celebrations, theater posters in Yiddish, and in the Silesian Polonia Hotel, where I was staying, a dance party with Yiddish instrumental music and singing had been scheduled for that evening. I even heard some non-Jewish Poles mangling Yiddish with horrible Polish accents, as if even they recognized that Yiddish was the official language of this ‘Jewish shtetl.’ For the first time, I felt at home, free of the fear of pogroms in the back of my mind.”⁶⁷³

As Irena Hurwic-Nowakowska observed, Yiddish was the everyday language of Jewish workers and craftsmen.⁶⁷⁴ Jobs in Jewish cooperatives, mainly producing clothing and shoes, were specially created for them. In the Wrocław district, Jewish cooperatives made up 95 % of all the workers’ cooperatives functioning at the time.⁶⁷⁵

Lower Silesia was attractive as a site for Jewish resettlement because it was less beset by conflict than the central and eastern regions of Poland. It was a “no-man’s land,” abandoned by the Germans, to which repatriates from the former eastern Polish provinces (now under Soviet rule) were being directed; like the majority of Jews, they had had to part with all their property. Lower Silesia was free of conflicts caused by attempts to reclaim property abandoned or given away for safekeeping during the war. Everyone was a new arrival, everyone was from “elsewhere.” The situation was similar throughout the Western Region.⁶⁷⁶

671 E. Hornowa, “Powrót Żydów polskich z ZSRR oraz działalność opiekuńcza Centralnego Komitetu Żydów w Polsce,” *BŻIH*, 1985, no. 1–2, p. 117.

672 Hurwic-Nowakowska, *A Social Analysis*, p. 32.

673 J. Tenenbaum, *In Search of a Lost People*, New York 1948, p. 253.

674 Hurwic-Nowakowska, *A Social Analysis*, pp. 88–89.

675 M. Grynberg, “Problemy zatrudnienia ludności żydowskiej w Polsce w pierwszych latach po II wojnie światowej,” *BŻIH*, 1986, no. 1/2, pp. 104–106. For more on Jewish cooperatives see idem, *Żydowska spółdzielczość pracy w Polsce w latach 1945–1949*, Warsaw 1986.

676 On resettlement in Lower Silesia see B. Szaynok, *Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku 1945–1950*, Wrocław 2000. Another large center of Jewish resettlement in the Western Territories was the Szczecin voivodeship. Twenty-three thousand Jews had been resettled there by the end of July 1946 (Hornowa, “Powrót Żydów polskich,” p. 118).

The next notable occasion was the Legislative Assembly elections of January 19, 1947. Jews were encouraged to vote the Democratic Bloc ticket, which included candidates from the PPR and PPS (the Polish Socialist Party), as well as two Jewish candidates: the Bundist Michał Szuldenfrei and the Zionist Józef Sack. Zachariasz wrote in *Dos naye lebn*:

The people's democracy has secured our life and existence and given us the opportunity to develop and strengthen the Jewish community in Poland; only democracy will guarantee us the opportunity to further develop secular Jewish schools in the mother tongue, to develop Jewish culture and art. We Jews have already accomplished much in the new, liberated Poland. We are no longer scattered, unproductive arrivals from bunkers and camps without a roof over our heads. The people's democracy and the government of national unity with its democratic state organs have made it possible to welcome great masses of repatriates, give them housing and make them productive.⁶⁷⁷

The elections resulted in a victory for the ruling camp, and consequently—for the Jewish caucus activists. Summing up the election campaign, caucus representatives reported with satisfaction that the number of PPR members active in Jewish circles had reached 5,500, a 100 % increase over the preceding six months. It was also noted that “There is a great danger that our activists will be confined exclusively to Jewish circles, cut off from the larger whole of political and Party life. Reporting regularly on Jewish affairs to PPR committees and coordinating our major projects with the Party leadership are the best guarantees against [Jewish] separatist feelings.”⁶⁷⁸

I Want to Work Among Jews

Dovid Sfard returned to Poland on November 14, 1946.⁶⁷⁹ Regina Dreyer and her son, and the poet Elkhonen Vogler, arrived with him. Vogler, who was silent throughout the flight from Moscow, spoke up only after disembarking from the plane: “I want to go back.” Sfard had a similar feeling when he approached the car sent by the CKŻP and was greeted by ironic looks and remarks on the part of the Poles who were present.⁶⁸⁰

At first, David, Regina and her son moved into the Savoy Hotel in Łódź, which was then the cultural capital of Polish Jewish

677 S. Zachariasz, “Ale tsu der val-arbet,” *Dos naye lebn*, 1947, no. 1, p. 4.

678 AŻIH, Organizational Department of the CKŻP, call no. 83, unpaginated.

679 Letter from Jacob S. Dreyer dated June 15, 2006 (personal communication).

680 *Mit zikh*, pp. 159–160. Smolar describes a similar reception (*Oyf der letster pozitsye*, p. 29).

survivors.⁶⁸¹ About two months later, they moved into an apartment at 54 Narutowicz St. Regina got a job at the Screenplay Office of Polish Films. In 1947, David and Regina married, and in the same year, they had a son, named Leon after his paternal grandfather Yehude Leyb. Ten-year-old Jakub was sent to the Y.L. Peretz School on Kiliński St. The entire family lived in Łódź until 1949, and then moved to Warsaw.⁶⁸²

After returning to Poland, David Sfarid reported to the Cadre (Staffing) Department of the PPR Central Committee, where Zenon Kliszko⁶⁸³ offered him work in the “general milieu” (i.e., among the Polish intelligentsia), considering Sfarid’s level of education. “But I told him that I was a Jewish writer and that *I wanted to and could work only among Jews*. “That means that you want to go to Shmelke [i.e., Zachariasz],” Kliszko answered.⁶⁸⁴ At the time, Zachariasz was in charge of work in the Jewish cultural milieu, and it was probably he who delegated to Sfarid the task of organizing a new Jewish cultural life that, although modest in comparison to the Jewish Poland of the years before the war, nevertheless turned out to be astonishingly exuberant.

After Lublin was liberated in 1944, a small group of survivors, among them the writers Leyb Rokhman and Yehuda Elberg and the actor Jonas Turkow, established there the Union of Jewish Writers and Artists, which later split into two organizations: the Union of Jewish Theatrical Performers and the Union of Jewish Writers and Journalists.⁶⁸⁵ The latter had its seat in Łódź at 32 Narutowicz Street. In May 1946, 36 writers were members.⁶⁸⁶ Only a few of them had survived

681 The CKŻP headquarters were located in Warsaw at 60 Sienna Street, but cultural institutions, including the Union of Jewish Writers and Journalists and the editorial offices of *Dos naye lebn*, were located at 32 Narutowicza Street, Łódź.

682 Letter from Jacob S. Dreyer dated July 4, 2006 (personal communication).

683 Zenon Kliszko (1908–1989), a Communist politician and one of Władysław Gomułka’s closest colleagues.

684 *Mit zikh*, p. 164. Emphasis added.

685 For more on the postwar Writers’ Union see: N. Cohen, “The Renewed Association of Yiddish Writers and Journalists in Poland 1945–48,” in: *Yiddish after the Holocaust*, ed. J. Sherman, Oxford 2004, pp. 15–36. On the beginnings of the Union see also E. Siedlecki, “Vi azoy hot zikh gegrindet der fareyn fun yidishe literatn un zhurnalistsn in Poyln (Tsum tsveytn yortog),” *Yidishe shriftn*, 1946, no. 1, p. 13. For more recent research see A. Żółkiewska, *Zerwana przeszłość: Powojenne środowisko żydowskiej inteligencji twórczej; Pomoc materialna i organizacyjna ze strony CKŻP*, Warsaw 2017.

686 Minutes no. 40, AŻIH, CKŻP Presidium, call no. 2, p. 140.

the war in Nazi-occupied Poland; the overwhelming majority had been repatriated from the USSR.⁶⁸⁷

In the early postwar years, the surviving writers functioned as sociocultural activists who undertook the task of reviving Yiddish writing in Poland and rescuing or recovering the remnants of the cultural heritage of Polish Jews (e.g., by preparing Jewish radio programs for abroad and working with the Central Jewish Historical Commission). They also spoke up on political matters. In 1946 the writers considered publishing an open letter to Polish society about the attitude of Poles toward Holocaust survivors. The letter was prepared by Rokhl Auerbach but in the end was not published.⁶⁸⁸ In the same year, 32 writers signed an appeal to Jews around the world: “For six and a half years, you looked on from afar as millions of Jews were murdered. You wanted to help and could not. Now that all avenues for help are open, will you look on with indifference as the surviving remnants of Polish Jewry suffer in misery?”⁶⁸⁹

Also in Lublin, the *Bulletin of the Jewish Press Agency* (*Biuletyn Żydowskiej Agencji Prasowej*) began to be published, at first in handwritten format. The *ŻAP Bulletin* was criticized for almost the entire period of its existence by representatives of various political streams. Zachariasz openly accused the *Bulletin* of harboring Zionist sympathies, but even the Zionist Adolf Berman was of the opinion that the *ŻAP* was falling down on the job.⁶⁹⁰

The next initiative was the founding in March 1945 of the national newspaper *Dos naye lebn*, a joint organ of the CKŻP and the Union of Jewish Writers and Journalists. Its first issue appeared in Łódź on April 10, 1945. Michał Mirski was editor-in-chief, and like the presidium of the CKŻP, the makeup of the editorial board was apportioned according to a so-called party key. Mirski was soon replaced by Mark.⁶⁹¹

687 Those who did survive the war in Poland included Yiddish writers Rokhl (Rachel) Auerbach, Yehuda Elberg, and Yeshaye Shpigl and journalist Grzegorz Jaszufiski.

688 Minutes of the Union of Writers and Journalists, AŻIH, CKŻP, Department of Culture and Propaganda, call no. 202, unpaginated. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find the text of the letter.

689 “Apel fun di yidishe shrayber in Poyln tsu di yidn in der velt,” AŻIH, CKŻP, Department of Culture and Propaganda, call no. 202, unpaginated.

690 Minutes no. 13, AŻIH, CKŻP, Presidium, call no. 2, p. 48; minutes no. 47, *ibid.*, p. 167.

691 For more on *Dos naye lebn*, see: Y. Goldkorn, *Aliyato u-nefilato shel ha-iton ha-yehudi ha-rishon be-Polin* *Dos naye lebn, 1945–50*, Tel Aviv 1993; J. Korzeniowski, “*Dos Naje Lebn* – pierwsza gazeta żydowska w PRL,” *BŻIH*, 1981, no. 3, pp. 53–61; J. Nalewajko-Kulikow, “‘Syjonistyczna z lekkim zabarwieniem PPR-owskim’: *Dos Naje Lebn*

Like the *ŻAP Bulletin*, *Dos naye lebn* seemed to please no one. The Bund representatives in the CKŻP considered it to be “Zionist with a slight PPR tinge”; Zionist Adolf Berman disagreed.⁶⁹² At other internal sessions of the PPR caucus, others complained that *Dos naye lebn* contained “too little pulsating life” and was too difficult for the average reader.⁶⁹³ Much space in the newspaper was devoted to columns, mainly sociopolitical but also cultural. Most Yiddish writers who were still in the country published in the newspaper.

Despite repeated demands to the authorities for permission to do so, *Dos naye lebn* was not converted into a daily. Neither at that time nor at any other time in postwar Poland was a Yiddish daily established, even though the Yiddish writers considered it an “absolute necessity.”⁶⁹⁴

Sfard never formally joined the editorial board of *Dos naye lebn*, but he was a regular contributor, publishing a large number of articles on cultural life as well as book and theater reviews and other items. He also took the initiative of establishing a small publishing house under the aegis of the editorial board. The publishing house was also called *Dos naye lebn* at first, but in 1947 it became Yidish Bukh, which in the 1950s would become one of the largest postwar publishers of Yiddish books in the world.⁶⁹⁵

The resurrected Union of Jewish Writers and Journalists was involved not only in political-journalistic activities, but also in purely literary ones. Its first activity on this front was the publication of a two-volume literary yearbook titled *Yidishe shriftn*, which surveyed the wartime output of surviving authors.⁶⁹⁶ The first volume was rightly dubbed by one of its reviewers the “Book of Lamentations”: “It must be read with breaks, running your eyes over only a few pages at a time in order not to break down from this infinite sadness.”⁶⁹⁷ The second volume was praised for being less mournful: “It allows for a note of optimism in the works of even ‘professional’ Jeremiahs...”⁶⁹⁸

1945–1950 – gazeta Centralnego Komitetu Żydów w Polsce,” in: *Żydzi a lewica*, ed. A. Grabski, Warsaw 2007, pp. 257–278.

692 Minutes no. 80, AŻIH, CKŻP Presidium, call no. 3, p. 171.

693 Minutes of October 7, 1946, AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz, call no. 476/19, p. 27.

694 A. Zak, *Geven a yidish Poyln*, Buenos Aires 1968, p. 104.

695 *Mit zikh*, p. 185.

696 *Yidishe shriftn: Literarish zamlbukh*, ed. L. Finkelstein, Łódź 1946; *Yidishe shriftn: Literarish zamlbukh*, ed. Y. Ashendorf et al., Łódź 1948.

697 Dr. M. Leński, “*Jidisze Szriftn* (Almanach literacki, Rok 1946: Nakładem Związku Literatów i Dziennikarzy Żydowskich),” *Mosty*, 1946, no. 3, p. 14.

698 S. Łastik, “Almanach *Idisze Szriftn*,” *Nasze Słowo*, 1948, no. 12, p. 11. For recent research on Yiddish literature in postwar Poland, see Magdalena Ruta, *Without Jews?*

Sfard published in both volumes—in the first one, a discussion of the literary works of writers repatriated from the USSR⁶⁹⁹; in the second—eight poems, written in Almaty, Moscow and Łódź. Among these, the poems written in Almaty and Moscow are the only literary works that we know of that Sfard definitely wrote during the war (the poems written in Łódź are from 1947 to 1948).⁷⁰⁰

Aside from the yearbooks, the Union set out to publish a regular literary monthly, also titled *Yidische shriftn*, the first issue of which appeared in 1946. Poetry, prose, and literary and theater criticism were published in *Yidische shriftn*, as well as columns on current sociocultural topics. The editorial board was composed of Avrom Zak, Bernard Mark, Michał Mirski, Dovid Sfard, Leo Finkelstein and Efraim Kaganowski.⁷⁰¹

The PPR Jewish caucus also had its own press organ, the *Folks-shtime*. The first issue was published in Łódź in February 1946. The editorial board included Mark, Zachariasz, Sfard, Shloyme Łastik, Julian Łazebnik, Ida Merżan, and Abram Kwaterko. At first the *Folks-shtime* was a monthly; in March 1947 it became a weekly. By 1948 it had a circulation of 6,000–7,000 and was taking measures to double that number.⁷⁰²

Publishing its own newspaper was not the Jewish caucus's only cultural strategy. In 1947 it founded the Jewish Cultural Association (Żydowskie Towarzystwo Kultury, or ŻTK) to serve as a coordinating agency for the already-existing cultural institutions, including the Central Jewish Library and local branches of the Jewish Cultural and Artistic Association. Smolar, head of the Cultural and Propaganda Department of the CKŻP at the time, defined the goals of the Association as follows:

1. To organize, in all Polish cities where there is a Jewish presence, local branches of the Jewish Cultural and Artistic Association, in order to ensure that all Jewish cultural institutions without exception become members of the [Jewish] Cultural Association.

Yiddish Literature in the People's Republic of Poland on the Holocaust, Poland and Communism, Krakow 2017.

699 D. Sfard, "Tsum tsurikker fun undzere shrayber," in: *Yidische shriftn*, 1946, pp. 55–59.

700 D. Sfard, "Lider," in: *Yidische shriftn: Literarish zamlbukh*, ed. Y. Ashendorf et al., Łódź 1948, pp. 82–84.

701 Cohen, "The Renewed Association," pp. 25–26.

702 M. Fuks, "Prasa PPR i PZPR w języku żydowskim (*Folks-Sztyme* 1946–1956)," *BŻIH*, 1979, no. 3, pp. 21–35.

2. To provide Jewish theater groups and choruses with the necessary repertoire and technical instruction.
3. To send lecturers on general Jewish cultural topics to all large Jewish communities.
4. To organize standardized Jewish libraries in all large Jewish communities and to enrich their collections, and to make contact with all major Jewish communities in the world in order to achieve this goal.
5. To place existing theater and artistic studios under the aegis of the Association and to organize Jewish dance studios.
6. To produce programs, instruction in pedagogical methods, and curricula for Jewish popular universities [i.e., non-degree-granting adult education centers and collectives].
7. To plan a general Jewish cultural conference, to be held in Poland in early 1948, where ideological resolutions will be adopted.⁷⁰³

Smolar's proposition was accepted by the CKŻP, and the Jewish Cultural Association was established at the national conference of Jewish cultural activists on November 23, 1947. The provisional organizing committee of the ŻTK, which included among others Smolar, Sfard, Kaganowski and Rokhl Auerbach, was charged with planning a future cultural conference and bringing about the establishment of local ŻTK branches.⁷⁰⁴ The bylaws of the Association stated that the Association's purpose was to promote Jewish culture and art among the Jewish population. Its tasks included organizing lectures, exhibitions, concerts and similar events, establishing educational and cultural institutions (theaters, music schools, libraries), and publishing periodicals and works of literature.⁷⁰⁵

By January 1949, after fourteen months of existence, the ŻTK had 53 local branches (as well as seven new ones on the way) in nearly all the cities inhabited by Jews; these branches encompassed about 7,500 individual members, eleven theatrical clubs, six orchestras, three choruses, thirty Yiddish libraries and forty-six social clubs.⁷⁰⁶ The ŻTK was run by Smolar (chairman), Shmuel Hurwicz and Binem Heller (vice-chairmen), and Sfard (secretary general).

By the way, in October 1948, at a national conference of Jewish cultural activists and pedagogues organized in Łódź by the ŻTK, a demand was raised to standardize Yiddish orthography by spelling common words of Hebrew origin

703 Minutes no. 64 (appendix), AŻIH, CKŻP Presidium, call no. 7, p. 165.

704 *Biuletyn Żydowskiej Agencji Prasowej*, November 24, 1947, pp. 4–5.

705 ŻTK bylaws, AŻIH, CKŻP Organizational Department, call no. 39, unpaginated.

706 *Biuletyn Żydowskiej Agencji Prasowej*, January 28, 1949, pp. 1–2.

phonetically, rather than in keeping with their spelling in Hebrew. However, judging by the orthography visible in publications and documents from that period, this demand remained theoretical only.⁷⁰⁷

The Palestinian Illusion Becomes Reality

The year 1947 was a more stable one for the Jewish population in Poland—emigration continued, but at a slower pace, and fewer violent attacks took place. Once the PPR camp took control of the government, the PPR Jewish caucus began to play a more dominant role in the Jewish milieu. In July 1947, the caucus prepared a resolution for the PPR Central Committee titled “The Work and Tasks of the PPR among the Jewish Population.” The resolution was adopted in October.⁷⁰⁸ It may have been the work of a single author or several; it is certain that Zachariasz was influential in shaping its final form.

The resolution advises the Jewish Communists to embrace a “united front” tactic, which in practice meant subordinating various domains of Jewish life to Party policy. In schools where Yiddish was the language of instruction, Hebrew was to be introduced as a supplementary subject; however, the schools had to be “conducted in the spirit of the People’s Democracy” (i.e., without placing over-much emphasis on the Jewish religion). In the realms of Jewish theater, literature and scholarship, it was necessary to train new cadres of leaders “who are deeply connected to the reality of the People’s Poland, as well as to the life and struggles of Jews around the world.”

Jewish Communists were to continue to cooperate with democratic streams in the Jewish political scene, with the proviso that in the case of the Bund, this cooperation would be limited to activities that were pro-USSR. In regard to the Zionists, the Jewish Communists were ordered to continue to combat so-called emigrationism, i.e., the artificial cultivation of a trend toward emigration. The Jewish Communists were to encourage religious congregations to cooperate with local Jewish Committees, but at the same time to restrict their activities to strictly religious matters.

On the matter of a possible Jewish state in Palestine, the authors of the document stated: “We believe that the task of PPR members and all democratic, progressive elements is to support the aspirations of the Jewish community in

707 Radio program of October 21, 1948, AŻIH, CKŻP Department of Culture and Propaganda, call no. 17, p. 7.

708 AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz, call no. 476/21, pp. 10–14; AŻIH, Papers of Michał Mirski, call no. 2, pp. 1–6.

Palestine, and of those Jews who have linked their fate to Palestine, to establish in that country an independent state that will satisfy the aspirations of both Jews and Arabs.”⁷⁰⁹

The last section of the resolution notes that:

According to the Central Committee, we have not yet made sufficient effort to bring the Jewish population, and particularly Jewish workers, closer to the Polish Working Class of the Polish nation [capitalization in original]. In the future, it will be necessary to create a network of adult education courses about the Polish language, the history of the Polish people, and the labor movement, in order to bring the population of Jewish workers closer to Polish culture and to the historical achievements of Polish democracy. Because we have not adequately fought symptoms of sectarianism or promoted unity in the Jewish Committees, [...] we must now combat more strongly than heretofore these displays by our comrades and see to it that the political line of the Party is put into practice in daily life.⁷¹⁰

Despite these efforts to act in sync with Party dictates, Jewish Communists still felt that work in the Jewish milieu was cut off from general Party work (a sentiment that was somewhat reminiscent of the prewar era, when the CBŻ was moved to reproach the KPP Central Committee for failing to appreciate its work among the Jewish population). At the national Jewish PPR conference, which took place on October 31–November 1, 1947, and at which the aforementioned resolution was discussed, Józef Gitler-Barski⁷¹¹ said: “It is unsurprising that Polish society has a distorted view of Jews, because it sees either assimilated Jews working in government posts or Zionists, and no other sorts of Jews. We [i.e., the members of the PPR Jewish Caucus] are barely represented in the public life of the State, whereas Zionists are omnipresent. The only representative of Polish Jewry in the Sejm is a Zionist. [...] Jews are represented by Zionists in the Administration of the Association of Polish-Soviet Friendship as well.”⁷¹²

Earlier in 1947, the Soviet Union had unexpectedly come out in support of the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine, which undoubtedly strengthened the position of Zionists in Poland. At a special session of the UN General Assembly on

709 AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz, call no. 476/21, p. 12.

710 *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.

711 Józef Gitler-Barski (1898–1990), a prewar member of the Communist Party, survivor of the Warsaw ghetto; from 1945 till 1949 he served as the secretary general of the Joint in Poland.

712 AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz, call no. 476/20, p. 25. The Jewish Sejm deputy was Józef Sack; Adolf Berman was a member of the Administration of the Association of Polish-Soviet Friendship.

May 14, 1947, Soviet vice-minister of foreign affairs Andrei Gromyko expressed the USSR's support for the creation in Palestine of a binational state or two separate states. What's more, Gromyko stressed the historical right of the Jews to territory in the Middle East and also mentioned the recent wartime martyrdom of the Jewish people. Gromyko's speech met with an enthusiastic reaction from the Zionists.⁷¹³ The already-favorable stance on the part of the Polish authorities toward Jewish emigration to Palestine now had official Soviet approval. Undoubtedly, this stance resulted, at least in part, from the desire to solve the "Jewish problem" in Poland by encouraging Jews to leave the country (or at least not preventing them from doing so)—with the idea that a future Jewish state in Palestine might be prepared to receive all Jewish emigrants unconditionally. Polish authorities also hoped that by being lenient about Jewish emigration, they would win over influential Jewish communities in the West, particularly in the United States.⁷¹⁴

Jewish Communists found themselves in a delicate situation. What they had contemptuously dubbed the "Palestinian illusion" before the war was suddenly on the verge of being realized, and thus they needed to change their stance in order to catch up with the party line. Yitzhak Zuckerman recalled that "the Jewish Communists went along [with the change] reluctantly, following the orders of their Party."⁷¹⁵ With or without commands from above, it was difficult to ignore the 700,000-strong Jewish community in Palestine, which, after all, was largely made up of refugees from Eastern Europe.⁷¹⁶ After the UN resolution on the partition of Palestine, the PPR caucus, in an official declaration at a session of the Presidium of the CKŻP, expressed the hope that the rebuilt Jewish community in Poland would be a "point of support for our brothers in Palestine in their deepening struggle for liberation."⁷¹⁷ Nor did it object to the establishment in Bolków (Lower Silesia) of a training camp for youth who wanted to enter the ranks of the Haganah. At a CKŻP session dedicated to providing aid to the Palestine fighters, Zachariasz himself convinced his Bundist opponents of the necessity

713 A. Krammer, *The Forgotten Friendship: Israel and the Soviet Bloc, 1947–53*, Urbana–Chicago–London 1974, pp. 16–17.

714 For more information on the attitude of the Polish authorities toward Jewish emigration to Palestine, see M. Chajm, "Stosunek rządów polskich do powstania żydowskiej siedziby narodowej w Palestynie w latach 1945–1948," *BŻIH*, 2000, no. 3, pp. 356–373.

715 Zuckerman, *Surplus of Memory*, p. 652.

716 M. Pisarski, "‘Na żydowskiej ulicy’: Szkic do dziejów żydowskiej frakcji PPR i zespołu PZPR przy CKŻP, 1945–1951," *BŻIH*, 1997, no. 2, p. 36.

717 Minutes no. 97, *AŻIH*, CKŻP Presidium, call no. 8, p. 175.

of supporting the Haganah as the only Jewish armed force in Palestine.⁷¹⁸ At a reception for a delegation of Soviet and Yugoslav writers at the headquarters of the Union of Jewish Writers and Journalists, Mirski declared: “Some of the writers see their future in Palestine; some of us wish to remain and work in Poland. In spite of our differences, we are, however, all in agreement that our fate is tightly bound up with the fate of democracy.”⁷¹⁹

Tension over the Palestine matter was on the rise. In January 1948, the CKŻP issued a call to the Jewish population in Poland to provide moral and material aid to the Palestine fighters. Both individuals and organizations, including the Writers’ Union, declared that they would help. The ongoing fundraising campaign for a monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising enjoyed less success. The PPR Jewish caucus activist Chaim Cieszyński from Katowice reported that in his voivodeship, 13,000,000 zlotys had been collected for Palestine (from among the Jewish population) and only 2,000,000 for the Ghetto monument (of which over 1,000,000 was paid by the Polish population, including the Polish Army garrison in Gliwice).⁷²⁰

The proclamation of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948 aroused enormous enthusiasm among Polish Jews. Festive meetings and celebrations were held across the country. On May 30, the Writers’ Union organized an event titled “The Yiddish Writer to the Jewish State of Israel.” The gathering was opened by the honorary chairman of the Union, the most venerated of Yiddish writers in Poland, Efraim Kaganowski. Among others, Avrom Zak, Binem Heller, Yitskhok Yanasovitsh, Dovid Sfard and Reyzl Żychliński read their works dedicated to the embattled Israel. Yisroel Ashendorf read aloud an open letter to the writers in Israel, signed by 46 authors—prose writers, poets and journalists. At the end of the gathering, everyone sang the Israeli national anthem.⁷²¹

The decision to remain in Poland was not a foregone conclusion for the Sfard family, especially because at the time, most writers with whom they were in professional and social contact were emigrating. If Sfard had left Poland after the war, he would have gone to Palestine/Israel; however, he did not do so for several reasons. First, Regina did not want to, because she was deeply connected to Polish language and culture (although her first language was Yiddish). As Jacob

718 Minutes no. 7, AŻIH, CKŻP Presidium, call no. 9, p. 76.

719 *Biuletyn Żydowskiej Agencji Prasowej*, November 6, 1947, pp. 2–3.

720 Report of the activity of the PPR Caucus at the Regional Jewish Committee in Katowice, AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz, call no. 476/25, p. 107.

721 *Opinia*, 1948, no. 36, pp. 4, 7.

Dreyer put it, for his mother, “leaving Poland was not an option at all; and settling in Palestine was definitely out of the question.”⁷²² Second, in the eyes of Yiddish writers including Sford, a great defect of life in Palestine/Israel was discrimination against Yiddish as the “zhargon” of the ghetto and Diaspora, and the favoring of Hebrew in public life.⁷²³ Third, like most Jewish Communists, Sford believed that under Communist leadership, anti-Semitism could be eradicated in Poland. Finally, living conditions in Poland were nothing to sneeze at. Compared to the Soviet Union, life in postwar Poland “was heaven on earth”: “We lived in a comfortable three-room apartment [...], we had a maid (and after Leon was born, we had two), a Polish tutor for me for a certain time, music lessons, summer camps, winter vacations, etc. This feeling of well-being played a significant part in Dovid and Regina’s decision not to emigrate, although undoubtedly it was not the determining factor in their eventual decision to remain in Poland.”⁷²⁴

The determining factor, it seems, was the government promise to maintain a revived Jewish, and Yiddish, cultural life. The Sford family was not alone in placing significant weight on this consideration: a Jewish official in Dzierżonów, when asked which country he considered his homeland, answered: “Poland, given the existence of a Jewish community in Poland.” He also explained that he wanted to live in a Jewish milieu, which was why he had settled in Dzierżonów. If that milieu were ever to disappear, he would certainly emigrate.⁷²⁵

This attitude (which can be summed up as “Poland—yes, socialism—yes, but only if there are Jews”) reflects the fact that the Polish Jewish Communists were for the most part not integrated into the mainstream of Polish society—and they liked it that way. As Jacob Dreyer wrote: “Despite all the proclamations on the need to integrate Jews into Polish society, Dovid had no contact with ethnic Poles. I am sure that the same can be said of all Jewish activists of that period. [...] In my opinion, one of the consequences of this ghettoization was the permanent abyss between Jewish Communists of Dovid’s generation and the Polish community—a large difference in how they perceived the authorities, the political system, the reigning ideology, and the overall lifestyle [in Poland at the time].”⁷²⁶

722 Letter from Jacob S. Dreyer dated July 4, 2006 (personal communication).

723 See, e.g., H. Yablonka, *Survivors of the Holocaust: Israel after the War*, New York 1999, p. 76.

724 Letter from Jacob S. Dreyer dated July 4, 2006 (personal communication).

725 Hurwic-Nowakowska, *A Social Analysis*, p. 82.

726 Letter from Jacob S. Dreyer dated July 4, 2006 (personal communication).

Cocreators of the Process of Jewish Culture

In July 1948, a delegation from Poland participated in the European Conference for Jewish Culture in Paris. The event was planned as an alternative to the World Congress for Jewish Culture that was to take place in autumn of the same year in New York. The Paris conference gathered together representatives of leftist and pro-Soviet Jewish organizations; yet, to everyone’s astonishment and despite having been invited, no delegation of Soviet Jews attended. Altogether, 205 delegates took part, including 150 from France and 25 from Poland. Communist Party members and sympathizers made up the majority of the participants.⁷²⁷ The conference focused on four themes: 1. The place of Jewish culture in the struggle of the Jewish people; 2. Basic topics in Yiddish literature; 3. Yiddish theater—the avant-garde of Jewish culture; 4. Yiddish education and Yiddish schools in Europe.

The conference report, delivered by Smolar at the CKŻP plenum in November 1948, foreshadows sentiments of “If you’re not with us, you’re against us.” Smolar said:

Yiddish cultural activists have no choice; they must ultimately to decide whom they are with, with whom they are going; the fate of Yiddish culture depends on this answer. The CYCO⁷²⁸ congress gave one answer, whether or not its participants agreed: it was oriented toward the forces of reaction, toward those forces that agitate against the Soviet Union and against the countries built on the People’s Democracy. It was not oriented toward the forces of ‘tomorrow,’ toward the difficult struggle of ‘today,’ but rather toward ‘yesterday,’ which in their sick imagination is still underway. Thus, that milieu is fated to degenerate, to fall into ruin, although some of its participants have in the past brought a certain amount of benefit to Jewish cultural life.⁷²⁹

Smolar expressed contempt for several writers who had emigrated from Poland, particularly the anti-Soviet Shmerke Kaczerginski, who had taken part in rescuing the cultural treasures of the Vilna ghetto: “This individual’s only contact with Jewish culture has been to rob first the Jewish museum in Vilna, then the Historical Commission in Łódź, and sell the spoils on the New York YIVO exchange. Of people like that we can only say, good riddance to bad rubbish.”⁷³⁰

727 AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz, call no. 476/24, pp. 24–28.

728 The Central Yiddish Culture Organization, founded in 1938 in New York, functioned primarily as a Yiddish publishing house and was the organizing force behind the founding conference of the World Congress for Jewish Culture, held in 1948.

729 AŽIH, CKŻP Presidium, call no. 12, p. 136.

730 *Ibid.*, p. 143.

The participants of the Paris conference agreed that it was necessary to establish a Federation of Jewish Cultural Associations, whose directorship would be divided between a Western European secretariat in Paris and an Eastern European one in Warsaw; the latter would coordinate efforts in the socialist countries. In the end, this Federation was never established, surely, as August Grabski has stated, due to the increasing repression of Yiddish culture in the USSR and the desire to isolate Soviet Jews from the influence of foreign Jewish communities.⁷³¹

In the next part of his speech, Smolar concentrated on the newly expanded needs which Jewish culture in the People's Poland had to fulfill. Previous concepts of "Jewish culture," he argued, were insufficient, since Polish Jews now felt themselves to be "joint leaders, joint owners of well-rounded life" in modern secular society. He warned:

If we limit ourselves to creating only cultural content especially geared toward Jews, this will satisfy only a part of Jews' increased cultural needs. [...] Jews will look for and find the rest from other, non-Jewish cultural organizations. After all, we cannot require a Jewish worker who does not suffer from an inferiority complex to limit himself only to Jewish commemorative days, only to performances connected to even the most important events in Jewish life, to limit himself to a theatrical repertoire deviating from current problems. [...]

In our cultural work, we must aspire to satisfy in every way the increased demands of Jews, their aspirations to become acquainted with the paths of development of human society, with ways and methods of nullifying the boundaries between physical and intellectual labor; to know the processes of direct interaction of humans with nature and its changes; to know the culture of the Polish people; to understand profoundly the paths of development of the Soviet Union; to recognize the problems presented by everyday creative life in nations building socialism. Only such a concept of the scope of Jewish cultural work will be able to assure that the Jewish population will continue to participate even more actively not only as consumers, but also as cocreators of the process of [Jewish] culture.⁷³²

According to Smolar, consumers had to be transformed into creators within their natural work environments: the factory, the workshop, the cooperative. Smolar also pointed to the "cultural resources" that were ripe for the picking:

From the point of view of our cultural work, the following belong to us: the classics of Yiddish literature, the great modern Yiddish literature with its great talents who are working within the realm of socialism, i.e., Soviet Yiddish literature, progressive Yiddish

731 Grabski, *Działalność komunistów*, p. 270.

732 АŽИH, CKŽP Presidium, call no. 12, p. 145.

literature in America and in all countries of the world—all this is our Polish cultural treasury, and our work will lean on it. The works of writers rooted in many generations of Polish Jews are not ours, are not Polish, if their works stand in contradiction to our popular march toward a free socialist society, toward socialism. This line of demarcation is the same as in all our work.⁷³³

In mentioning Soviet Yiddish writers, did Smolar realize that the situation of Yiddish culture in the USSR was worsening, and that the absence of a Soviet delegation in Paris was not a coincidence? Earlier attempts to cooperate with the JAC on cultural projects had also fallen through. Back in September 1946, Smolar wrote to Itsik Fefer proposing regular cooperation between Polish and Soviet Jews, including a Soviet writers’ tour in Poland.⁷³⁴ Later, in February 1948, Smolar and Heller proposed publishing a literary yearbook in Warsaw with the participation of “progressive” writers from Poland, Romania, France, the United States, Palestine and the USSR.⁷³⁵ These suggestions, however, were turned down. Likewise, no Soviet delegation attended the commemoration of the fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising or the unveiling of the monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.⁷³⁶ Even worse, in January 1948, Shloyme Mikhoels was killed in what was thought to be a car accident in Minsk (his death is now known to have been an assassination engineered by Stalinist agents).⁷³⁷ Although Mikhoels was later buried in Moscow with full honors, his unexpected death was an ominous sign of a turn for the worse in Stalin’s policy toward the Jews.

It appears that Jewish Communists in Poland did realize that something bad was happening with Soviet Jews (although Moyshe Shklar claimed that no one suspected the NKVD of murdering Mikhoels at the time).⁷³⁸ According to Jacob Dreyer, on two visits to Paris in those years, Sfarad heard from Jewish activists

733 Ibid., p. 149.

734 Note by Smolar of September 18, 1946 to the JAC, in: *Evreiskiy Antifashistskiy Komitet v SSSR 1941–1948: Dokumentirovannaia istoriia*, ed. S. Redlich and G. Kostyrchenko, Moscow 1996, pp. 218–220.

735 Note of June 17, 1948 by K.M. Simonov, deputy secretary general of the Soviet Writers’ Union, to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party in: *Gosudarstvennyy antisemitizm v SSSR: Od nachala do kulminatsii 1938–1953*, ed. G.V. Kostyrchenko, Moscow 2005, pp. 135–137.

736 Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye*, p. 116.

737 On Mikhoels’s death see G. Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina: Vlast’ i antisemitizm*, Moscow 2003, pp. 388–395.

738 M. Shklar, “The Newspaper *Folks-shtime* (People’s Voice), 1948–1968: A Personal Account,” in: *Under the Red Banner: Yiddish Culture in the Communist Countries in the Postwar Era*, ed. E. Grözinger and M. Ruta, Wiesbaden 2008, p. 140.

that anti-Semitism in the USSR was increasing.⁷³⁹ For his part, Smolar recalled that every Friday at noon he had a phone conversation with Itsik Fefer on various subjects of mutual interest. One Friday, Fefer did not call. Smolar managed to get through to Moscow, but an unfamiliar voice spoke into the receiver on the other end. When he asked that “Isaac Solomonovich Fefer” be called to the phone, the answer he was given was: “There is no Isaac here, no Solomonovich and no Fefer! *Vy poniali?* [= You got it?]”⁷⁴⁰

Fefer was one of the first to be arrested in the JAC purge that was just beginning. The decision to liquidate the Committee had been made on November 20, 1948, but the arrests were delayed for another month.⁷⁴¹ By June 1949, fifteen former members of the JAC had been arrested, of whom five were writers: Peretz Markish, Dovid Hofshteyn, Itsik Fefer, Leyb Kvitko and Dovid Bergelson. The newspaper *Eynikayt* and the publishing house Der Emes were closed. The noose began to tighten.

Without Culture, There Is No Socialism

In October 1948, in a letter to the Secretariat of the PPR Central Committee, Szymon Zachariasz characterized CKŻP members in a rather contemptuous tone⁷⁴² and demanded that the PPR caucus be allowed more influence in the CKŻP: “Out of a total of 25 CKŻP seats, the PPR possesses one-third. This has been the status quo since the Lublin period—1944, when the [party] key was fixed. This proportioning favors the political parties lacking a broader social base and does not appropriately reflect our strength, our role, or the changed

739 Letter from Jacob S. Dreyer dated July 4, 2006 (personal communication).

740 Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye*, pp. 162–163. Smolar claims that his inferences into the fate of the JAC were directly confirmed by Panteleymon Ponomarenko, a Soviet Politburo member at the time, whom he knew from Białystok in 1939–1941 (*ibid.*, p. 164). If this incident really took place, Jewish Communists in Poland may have been fully aware of the situation facing Soviet Yiddish writers.

741 Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika*, p. 422. In his memoirs, Smolar gives no date for that phone call to Moscow; he only writes that it was a “cloudy late-autumn day” (Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye*, p. 163). Kostyrchenko states that Fefer was in Lubianka Prison by December 24 (Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika*, p. 426).

742 For example, he characterized Adolf Berman as follows: “Inclined to forceful pro-democratic and pro-Soviet phraseology together with an anti-Marxist and nationalistic attitude in Jewish matters. He is cut off from life and has no feeling for practical work at all” (AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz, call no. 476/21, pp. 67–68).

situation. This will prove a serious obstacle to our work in this new stage of Polish reality.”⁷⁴³

He then suggested restructuring the Jewish Committees in such a way as to “broaden their social base, draw them closer to the reality of the People’s Poland, and engage the working Jewish population in the general struggle for socialism.” Representatives of economic organizations, ORT,⁷⁴⁴ TOZ,⁷⁴⁵ the Jewish Historical Institute, the Jewish Cultural Association, and the Provincial Jewish Committees in Wrocław, Łódź, Szczecin, Krakow and Katowice had to join the CKŻP.

That same month, the PPR Jewish Caucus held a “self-criticism” conference, in an attempt to forestall any accusations of rightist-nationalist deviation, such as had recently begun to be leveled against non-Jewish Party members. At the conference, Zachariasz forcefully criticized the Polish-Jewish discourse concerning Palestine/Israel: “An idea is abroad in the PPR ranks that allegedly, there is an equal sign between the struggle for liberation of the Jewish popular masses in the state of Israel on one hand, and Zionism on the other. This is a fundamental illusion. Zionism is not capable of solving any social or national Jewish problem in any country.”⁷⁴⁶ He criticized the “eclecticism of the Jewish oppositional movement in Poland,” i.e., the failure to place sufficient emphasis on the leading role of the PPR. He also presented his vision of “progressive literature”:

In literary works, the new type of man, the man who is building socialism, must occupy the central focus, as is his due. We have failed to spiritualize this new man, the creator of socialism, so that he shines and becomes the object of general admiration. It is necessary to encourage progressive creativity in the realms of research, literature and art in the spirit of Marxist realism. I would not want to minimize our great literary, historical ([Jewish] Historical Institute), and artistic achievements, but these achievements must not be permitted to conceal the actual state of affairs: the prevalence of the spirit of nationalism, which expresses itself in the aspiration to achieve national unity at any

743 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

744 ORT (Obshchestvo Remeslennogo i Zemledelecheskogo Truda Sredi Evreev v Rossii, The Society for Handicraft and Agricultural Work among the Jews of Russia) – organization founded in 1880 to support the development of skilled trades and farming among Jews through professional training; it ran courses and schools for youth and adults.

745 TOZ (Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia—Society for the Protection of Health) – founded in St. Petersburg in 1912 to promote preventive medicine, hygiene, public health and childcare. After the war TOZ became part of the CKŻP and served as its Health Department.

746 Speech delivered by Zachariasz at a meeting of the PPR Jewish Caucus, AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz, call no. 476/20, p. 110.

price. On the cultural front, we must immediately launch a general Marxist-Leninist offensive.⁷⁴⁷

Zachariasz also castigated the comrades working on editorial boards for their lack of ideological vigilance and for continuing with their prewar work habits. He particularly stressed the failings of the editors of the *Folks-shtime*, who supposedly did not fight hard enough against Zionism, Jewish nationalism or the conception of an “Exodus” from Poland.⁷⁴⁸

Zachariasz’s speech was followed by a discussion in which various activists offered their own “self-criticisms”; Mirski, for his part, concentrated not on his own mistakes but on those that Mark had made in his role as editor-in-chief of *Dos naye lebn*. Mark wondered out loud whether the Union of Jewish Writers and Journalists should remain a separate organization or be merged into the Union of Polish Writers. Paweł Zelicki expressed the common conviction that the Jewish caucus was being underappreciated and ignored by the PPR authorities: “The complaint, which has continued for a number of years, is that the central voices in our Party, our comrades in the government, act on matters that concern the Jewish sector without consulting us.”⁷⁴⁹

Sfard responded to Zachariasz’s pronouncement on the current shortcomings present in Jewish cultural work:

In order to conduct cultural work, it is necessary to be aware of what Jewish culture is and what we want to accomplish through it. We have not had a clear image of socialist cultural work. Our work is not clearly defined, and therefore we have not been able to transform the Jewish Cultural Association into a mass organization. We have been operating in isolation, cut off from Polish culture. We have not tried to initiate contact with [non-Jewish Polish] writers and cultural activists. [...] The process of attracting the interest of writers to the new problematics must be gradual and systematic. It cannot be expected to arise overnight. Nor is it possible to remain indifferent to the tragedy of our people. [...] The caucus has devoted little attention to Jewish writers and artists. We have not fathomed the mentality of the Jewish artist. It is necessary to pose the problem of assimilation honestly. [Jewish] Communists must have a clear, unambiguous stance on this matter. Otherwise, the indifference on the part of our [non-Jewish] comrades toward Jewish culture, art and theater will come into play, [contributing to the disappearance of Jewish culture]. We are all advancing together via our language and culture toward our final goal. Without culture, there is no socialism.⁷⁵⁰

747 Ibid., p. 112. Sfard concurred with this viewpoint in his volume of critical essays published in 1949, titled *Shrayber un bikher*.

748 Ibid., p. 115.

749 Ibid., p. 131.

750 Ibid., p. 129.

The Jewish caucus enjoyed a series of successes in early 1949. After the December conference unifying the PPR and PPS into the PZPR, the Bund capitulated and dissolved, encouraging its members to join the ranks of the PZPR. The reorganization of the CKŻP that Zachariasz had demanded earlier took place. At the first plenary session of the expanded CKŻP, a new, eleven-member Presidium was established; among its members were Łazebnik, Zachariasz and Sfarid. Smolar became the new chairman; Adolf Berman had to be satisfied with the post of vice-chairman. It is difficult to say why Zachariasz did not assume the highest position in the Committee; Stefan Grajek suggests that it was on account of his poor command of Polish.⁷⁵¹ The goal of the new CKŻP was clearly stated: “The most important task of the new Central Committee and of the Jewish Committees which are to be convened as a result of this congress will be the building and rebuilding of Jewish life in the spirit of the line traced by the great historic unification conference in Poland, i.e., building Jewish life in the spirit of socialism.”⁷⁵²

The few Zionists remaining in Poland, led by Berman, attempted in vain to preserve the remnants of the autonomy formerly enjoyed by the CKŻP. PZPR members dominated not only the CKŻP, but also the provincial committees, occupying all chairman and secretary posts. Zionists made up barely 20 % of the committees.⁷⁵³ What’s more, all Zionist activity had been banned by the government. Again, Zachariasz took the initiative, proposing that all prominent and mid-level Zionist activists emigrate to Israel, Zionist schools and kibbutzim be disbanded, fundraising campaigns for Israel be banned, and Zionist periodicals be shut down or placed under restrictions.⁷⁵⁴ Zachariasz’s proposal was approved by PZPR leadership. In September 1949, a government communiqué about the option of emigration to Israel was published in *Dos naye lebn*, although it was accompanied by a discouraging editorial note: “It is clear that Jewish factory and cooperative workers, Jews active in the roles of intelligentsia—teachers, writers, artists, cultural activists—are social forces on which our new Jewish community relies; through their creative work they join in the general building and

751 Grajek, pp. 199–200. Zachariasz’s foes used to murmur that he could speak three languages (Yiddish, Polish and Russian), but none of them correctly.

752 Minutes no. 11 of the first broadened plenary session of the CKŻP, AŻIH, CKŻP Presidium, call no. 15, p. 74.

753 Information from the PZPR caucus of the CKŻP, AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz 476/21, p. 75.,

754 Informational note by Zachariasz, AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz, call no. 476/21, pp. 78–81.

rebuilding that is taking place in our Polish homeland—thus binding their own fates even more tightly to the prospect of building socialism in our country.”⁷⁵⁵

Later, Zachariasz complained that most of the population had misinterpreted that communiqué; they understood it to mean that the Polish authorities wished for Jews to leave the country, which led to 30,000 Jews registering to leave.⁷⁵⁶ His dissatisfaction was probably a reaction to the fact that among them were many members of the working class, who were supposed to be kept in the country. Stankowski estimates that about 28,000 Jews left Poland in the last wave of emigration before 1956.⁷⁵⁷

On October 14–16, in Wrocław, the National Congress of the Jewish Cultural Association took place. By then there were 49 ŻTK branches throughout Poland (mainly in central Poland and Lower Silesia), encompassing 10,500 members.⁷⁵⁸ 309 delegates participated in the congress. A broad discussion of the need to combat cosmopolitanism, the Bundist theory of national-cultural autonomy, eclecticism, the idealization of the Jewish past, Bundism, and Zionism ran through the congress “like a red thread,” according to Zachariasz’s description.⁷⁵⁹ The status of Yiddish literature in the People’s Poland was described thus by Binem Heller: “Poland has never had the feel of a remote province as far as Jewish life is concerned. In spite of its small numbers, the Jewish community in Poland will never descend into provinciality, and its literature must therefore remain a lively, gushing spring, an inspiration and a guidepost.”⁷⁶⁰ However, he simultaneously reproached postwar Yiddish literature for “running in place within the horror of the Holocaust atmosphere” (i.e., failing to move beyond it to other, postwar topics) and Jewish writers in Poland for living and writing “cut off from the folk masses.”⁷⁶¹ He also criticized the publishing house Yidish Bukh: “That which has been published thus far by the Yidish Bukh press does not reflect the new life of Jews in Poland. The vast majority of books that have

755 *Dos naye lebn*, September 2, 1949, p. 1.

756 Note of Zachariasz to the PZPR Central Committee, AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz, call no. 476/21, p. 120.

757 Stankowski, *Nowe spojrzenie*, p. 117.

758 Informational report of the ŻTK for the Central Council of Trade Unions in Poland, AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz, call no. 476/22, p. 170.

759 Information on the National Congress of the Jewish Arts and Cultural Association, AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz, call no. 476/22, p. 177.

760 B. Heller, “Literatura żydowska w Nowej Polsce,” in: *Zjazd Żydowskiego Towarzystwa Kultury w Polsce*, Warsaw 1949, p. 125.

761 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

come out so far portray an extremely important period in the history of our people; [...] yet it is futile to look to these books to convey the color of the New, Democratic People’s Poland.”⁷⁶²

The ŻTK congress was the de facto conclusion of the epoch of liberalism in postwar Yiddish literature in Poland. Mirski’s aforementioned statement from two years earlier acknowledging the political pluralism present among Jewish writers was no longer accurate. Heller’s next words banished all illusions: “Jewish writers who have fled Poland have, essentially, fled reality. If they do not like the fact of the new, rebuilt Poland, then they have found the best ‘way out of the situation’: they simply do not recognize that fact. So much the worse for them and their work. For no literature can exist if it is not grounded in reality.”⁷⁶³

In the “Resolution about Literature” approved at the congress, two key decisions were made about the future of Jewish writers remaining in Poland. First, in the wake of the Szczecin congress of Polish writers,⁷⁶⁴ it was decided that writers must “set forth on the broad track of socialist realism,” i.e., allow their work to be governed by the Party-approved artistic schemata. Second, the Union of Jewish Writers and Journalists was to be merged with the Union of Polish Writers. The former was, however, allowed to keep its own publishing house and *Yidishe shriftn* as its own literary monthly.

From that point on, only two other Yiddish periodicals were to be permitted in the Polish People’s Republic—for it was recognized that the reduced-in-size and, more importantly, the newly politically uniform Jewish community in Poland did not need so many different newspapers. *Dos naye lebn* was merged into the *Folks-shtime*. The Jewish Historical Institute had at its disposition its own academic periodical, *Bleter far geshikhte* (Pages for History).

Zachariasz’s demands overlapped with and perhaps even anticipated the actions of the non-Jewish authorities, who aspired to dismantle the autonomy of the Jewish population in Poland. “From the point of view of the Stalinist bureaucrats,” writes August Grabski, “as the transformation of the Polish reality in the direction of Soviet solutions accelerated, and considering the looming alliance between Israel and the United States, there was no longer any reason to

762 *Ibid.*, p. 126.

763 *Ibid.*, p. 130.

764 For more on the congress, see Carl Tighe, “Forward to Battle for the Six-Year Plan! Polish Writers 1945–56,” *Journal of European Studies*, 2015, no. 45(3), pp. 1–31, accessible online: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.852.4191&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

preserve the autonomy of Polish Jews.”⁷⁶⁵ Jewish distinctiveness would henceforth only be allowed in the religious sphere, and in the cultural sphere on account of the Yiddish language. The dismantling of Polish-Jewish pluralism was, of course, a microcosm of the growing drive in the country at large toward uniformity and subordination of all fields of life to PZPR control.

On October 29, 1950, the CKŻP and the Jewish Cultural Association merged into one organization, the Socio-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce, TSKŻ). Aside from the Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith (Związek Religijny Wyznania Mojżeszowego, ZRWM), whose activity was limited to strictly religious matters, the TSKŻ was now the only Jewish organization recognized by the state.

765 Grabski, *Działalność komunistów*, p. 322–323.

Chapter Six: “A Model Solution to the Jewish Problem” (1950–1959)

The Nose of Polish Stalinism

After assuming the position of secretary general⁷⁶⁶ of the Socio-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland in November 1951, David Sfarid found himself responsible, more than ever before, for sociopolitical matters (with the possible exception of the years he spent in Moscow). However, he did not give up his interest in culture, which was political in and of itself.

After Jewish political pluralism was squashed, the dominant role in the Jewish milieu was assumed by the TSKŻ, which in 1954 had 11,640 members.⁷⁶⁷ The total number of Jews in the Polish People’s Republic at the time was estimated to be about 75,000, which put Poland in fourth place in the Eastern Bloc as far as the size of its Jewish population, after the USSR, Romania and Hungary.⁷⁶⁸ According to Grzegorz Berendt, no more than a maximum of 40–50 % of Polish Jews belonged to the TSKŻ at any given time.⁷⁶⁹ In 1957, Hersh Smolar claimed that 12,500 members were “paying dues and taking part in the Association’s work,” a number that appears too optimistic for 1957, considering that the large wave of emigration to Israel was already underway at that point.⁷⁷⁰ Compared to other ethnic minorities in Poland, the Jewish community enjoyed certain advantages—it had its own cultural organization (of the other minorities, only

766 The first secretary general of the TSKŻ was Julian Łazebnik. He may have resigned from the position due to being too busy at his new job at the Central Office for Oversight of the Press, Publications and Performances (GUKPPiW).

767 G. Berendt, “‘Nuseh Pojln’: Polsko-żydowskich komunistów próba zmian i kontynuacji widziana oczami rodaków za granicą (1950–1955),” in: *Polacy i sąsiedzi: Dystanse i przenikanie kultur*, part 3, ed. R. Wapiński, Gdańsk 2002, p. 308.

768 G. Berendt, *Życie żydowskie w Polsce w latach 1950–1956: Z dziejów Towarzystwa Społeczno-Kulturalnego Żydów w Polsce*, Gdańsk 2006, p. 44. For the year 1955, Albert Stankowski gives a total of 69,000 Jews (“Nowe spojrzenie na statystyki dotyczące emigracji Żydów z Polski po 1944 roku,” in: G. Berendt, A. Grabski and A. Stankowski, *Studia z historii Żydów w Polsce po 1945 roku*, Warsaw 2000, p. 120).

769 Berendt, *Życie żydowskie*, p. 256.

770 Note by Hersh Smolar for the PZPR Central Committee titled “The Jewish Problem at the Present Time,” dated February 8, 1957, quoted in A. Grabski, “Sytuacja Żydów w Polsce w latach 1950–1957,” *BŻIH*, 2000, no. 4, p. 515.

the Russians had a similar association; the far more numerous Ukrainians and Germans did not); moreover, it had its own research institute (the Jewish Historical Institute, or ŻIH), press, publishing house and theater. However, as historian Eugeniusz Mironowicz describes, rather than encouraging the creation of similar institutions for the other ethnic minorities, the period of Stalinization did away with the Jewish institutions as well, so that the Jewish community's remaining shreds of organized sociocultural life were rapidly dismantled.⁷⁷¹ Mironowicz remarks that “being a non-Pole ceased to be a bad thing in and of itself. The measure of a person's value now became the degree to which he accepted the transformations taking place.”⁷⁷² However, the Jewish Communist leadership, to whom the state had granted complete control over the only remaining Jewish political and cultural institutions, was not displeased by the new order.

Despite the fact that the postwar Jewish population was concentrated in the territory of Lower Silesia and a few other large cities, the “Jewish problem” continued to exist in the public consciousness in reaction to Communists of Jewish origin who occupied high positions in the government and in the Party apparatus (such as Jakub Berman, Hilary Minc and Roman Zambrowski). For the general public, these figures and their actions were the face of the Jewish minority in Poland.⁷⁷³ Years later, Sfarid wrote: “Likewise, to tell the truth, Jewish Communists, especially newcomers to the Party, deserters from other parties or simply those of petit-bourgeois origin, demonstrated in the new positions of

771 E. Mironowicz, *Polityka narodowościowa PRL*, Białystok 2000, p. 95.

772 *Ibid.*, pp. 93–94.

773 I am not focusing here on Communists of Jewish origin who held high positions in government in the postwar years. However, just as their image shaped – and continues to shape – public opinion about the presence of Jews in Poland, their existence and reputation also helped shape the conditions facing the TSKŻ and its activists and members. A rich literature on their role already exists; e.g., W. Krajewski, “Facts and Myths: About the Role of Jews in the Stalinist Period,” in: *Under One Heaven* (special issue of *Więź* monthly), Warsaw 1998, pp. 93–108, accessible online at: http://web.archive.org/web/20020828034409/http://www.mszy.gov.pl/ambasada/content/08_OnTheRole.html; A. Smolar, “Tabu i niewinność,” *Aneks*, 1986, no. 41–42, pp. 89–133; R. Zimand, *Piołun i popiół (Czy Polacy i Żydzi wzajem się nienawidzą?)*, Warsaw 1987; K. Kersten, “Polish Stalinism and the So-Called Jewish Question,” in: *Der Spätstalinismus und die “jüdische Frage”: zur antisemitischen Wendung des Kommunismus*, ed. L. Luks, Köln 1998, pp. 221–236; M. Kula, *Narodowe i rewolucyjne*, Londyn–Warsaw 1991, pp. 221–227; and M. Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968*, New Haven 2006.

authority too much diligence and too little dignity. [...] [Their] demonstration of ‘authority’ was to some extent a kind of self-rehabilitation for their own humiliation, or complacency in the face of their long-lasting inferiority complex, and perhaps somewhere [there was] also a feeling that this was a chance to extract ‘payback’ for the torture and murder of their nearest and dearest.”⁷⁷⁴

There is no evidence, it seems, that officials of Jewish origin on the upper rungs of the Party and state ladders maintained connections with the TSKŻ milieu at all. Undoubtedly, they were acquainted with some of the Association’s representatives thanks to shared history in the KPP or thanks to the time they had spent together in the USSR during the war. Were they perceived as “our people” by TSKŻ members? Understandably, direct testimonies about this topic are difficult or impossible to find. However, judging by later reactions of the Jewish population to, e.g., Berman’s resignation, it seems that TSKŻ members viewed these figures, at the very least, as a kind of barometer—“Whatever happens to them will soon happen to us.”

In his memoirs, Sfard draws a line between “Communists who are Jews” (*komunistn yidn*), i.e., Jakub Berman, et al., and “Jewish Communists” (*yidische komunistn*), the group among which he counted himself. He writes that most “Jewish Communists” were raised in traditional homes, “where Jewishness was not artificial, a matter of fashion or political attitudes, but rather natural, rooted in generations-old customs, with its own particular joys and sorrows.”⁷⁷⁵ The demarcation between the two groups was evident from their attitude toward Yiddish language and culture. The “Communists who are Jews” treated Yiddish as the Maskilim and early Zionists had—as a “zhargon” that sometimes had to be used in order to reach the masses, but that would eventually become unnecessary and disappear. The Moscow State Yiddish Theater, which Sfard and others like him viewed as proof that Yiddish could also serve as a language of high culture, e.g., for productions of Shakespeare’s plays, did not elicit any particular reverence from them, as Władysław Krajewski describes: “I remember how flabbergasted Stande⁷⁷⁶ (himself of Jewish origins) was at the fact that Lear would be speaking ‘zhargon.’”⁷⁷⁷

774 D. Sfard, *Mit zikh un mit andere: Oytobiografye un literarishe eseyen*, Jerusalem 1984 [henceforth: *Mit zikh*], pp. 204–205.

775 *Ibid.*, p. 218.

776 Stanisław Ryszard Stande (1897–1937), poet and translator, member of the Communist Party of Poland, murdered during the Great Purge of 1937.

777 Krajewski, “Facts and Myths.”

Most of Polish society did not, however, differentiate between “Communists who are Jews” and “Jewish Communists.” Sford recalled that one day “a former [non-Jewish] director of the Lublin rail network” showed up at the TSKŻ and demanded that someone intercede on behalf of his nephew, who had been arrested for participating in the anti-Communist underground—a sign that he thought that the TSKŻ was the highest authority for all Jews in Poland, and that as such, Sford—as the secretary general of the TSKŻ—was de facto higher in the hierarchy than Jakub Berman.⁷⁷⁸

Identifying the Party and state apparatus with Jews was a way to refuse to grant the Communists legitimacy.⁷⁷⁹ The presence of Jews in posts that had been mostly inaccessible to them before the war—in the police, the military, and the government—was conspicuous and grating to non-Jewish Poles who felt powerless in the face of the new order. This led to the creation of a new stereotype: to “Judeo-Communism” was now added “Jewish secret policeman” (*żydowski ubek*).⁷⁸⁰ “Considering that according to public opinion, and in the collective subconscious even more so, Jews had disappeared from the Polish landscape,” writes Krystyna Kersten, “the fact that some had survived the Holocaust was often an occasion for exclamations of astonishment; hence, their appearance, in high-profile positions and in numerous settings to boot, necessarily led to demonization of the phenomenon and exaggeration of its dimensions.”⁷⁸¹ Henryk Grynberg pointed out with acuity the process of scapegoating that was underway: “Question: if there had been no Jews in Poland after the war, would Polish Stalinism have looked any different? At most, it would have had a slightly different—nose.”⁷⁸²

The “Jewish problem” continued to exist and evolve in the collective subconscious, especially because there was no space to discuss it in a public forum. Any attempt to do so would have been silenced by an official condemnation-cum-denial of anti-Semitism, which “cannot exist in a socialist society”; in addition,

778 *Mit zikh*, p. 204.

779 M. Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm: Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce*, Warsaw 2001, p. 187.

780 In his analysis of “Jews in the Urząd Bezpieczeństwa,” Andrzej Paczkowski came to the conclusion that in the security apparatus, “Jews were over-represented, occupied higher rather than lower positions, and that the higher the level, the greater their proportion.” See A. Paczkowski, “Jews in the Polish Security Apparatus: An Attempt to Test the Stereotype,” *Polin* 16, 2003, p. 458.

781 K. Kersten, “Żydzi – władza komunistów,” in: idem, *Polacy – Żydzi*, p. 84.

782 H. Grynberg, “Wygnanie z Polski,” *Kultura*, 1968, no. 11 (254), p. 50.

as Berendt's research has shown, the Polish-language press passed over Jewish matters in almost complete silence during the years 1949–1955. There was no mention of Jewish emigration from Poland, of TSKŻ congresses—in fact, the very establishment of the organization itself went unremarked. “One gets the impression,” writes Berendt in his groundbreaking research into the functioning of the TSKŻ in the first half of the 1950s, “that a censorship rule banned the printing of any information on the subject of the TSKŻ and the ZRWM.”⁷⁸³ This media silence is especially surprising considering that TSKŻ activity was at its high point during this time period.

None of Us Believed, But Many Pretended

From 1950 to 1956, the TSKŻ presidium was composed of: Hersh Smolar (chairman), Julian Łazebnik (secretary general until November 1951), David Sfard (secretary general beginning in November 1951), Michał Mirski, Szymon Zachariasz, Bernard Mark, Salo Fiszigrund, Shmuel Hurwicz (vice-chairman),⁷⁸⁴ Ignacy Felhendler, Binem Heller, Ida Kamińska and Leyb Olitsky. Later in this time period, Jakub Wassersztrum, Chaim Cieszyński and Idl (Yudel) Korman-Barszczewski also joined.⁷⁸⁵

A majority of the presidium members were born between 1900 and 1908, so in the time period under discussion, they were approaching fifty—which could explain why in the early 1950s, the TSKŻ did not consider working with children and youth to be of much importance. Most of the presidium members had grown up in poor working-class and petit-bourgeois families; only Sfard, Hurwicz and Mark had had any higher education, and only Sfard held a doctoral degree.⁷⁸⁶ This credential enabled Sfard to “legitimize” the TSKŻ in the eyes of both members and outsiders. In fact, Sfard played the chief role in the TSKŻ leadership, because Smolar was primarily absorbed in editing the *Folks-shtime*.⁷⁸⁷ Maria Hirszowicz

783 G. Berendt, “Cele, treść i metody oddziaływania prasy żydowskiej w Polsce w latach 1949–1956,” in: *Propaganda PRL: Wybrane problemy*, ed. P. Semków, Gdańsk 2004, p. 97.

784 Three different spellings of this name appear in the sources: Hurwicz, Gurwicz, Górwicz. Here I will use only the first, as it is the Polish transliteration of the name's Yiddish spelling.

785 Berendt, *Życie żydowskie*, p. 146.

786 *Ibid.*, p. 158. However, in 1954, despite his lack of a formal doctorate, Mark was named associate professor at the Polish Academy of Sciences, under whose institutional umbrella the Jewish Historical Institute operated.

787 *Ibid.*, p. 152.

remarks that “in the wake of the decimation of the [Polish] intelligentsia during the war, the scope of activity [open after the war to those few who had survived] was almost limitless.”⁷⁸⁸ The same can be said of the Polish Jewish intelligentsia, which was hardly visible in the TSKŻ. At the TSKŻ congress of 1953, barely 21 out of 265 delegates could boast of a university degree⁷⁸⁹; nevertheless, the TSKŻ undertook cultural work of an impressive scope. This on-the-average low educational status resulted from the fact that most intellectuals of Jewish origin were assimilated and were not among the consumers of the TSKŻ’s cultural offerings; for their part, Jewish intellectuals living and working in Yiddish had mostly emigrated to countries with larger Jewish communities.

The TSKŻ’s departments were: Finance, Education and Propaganda, Culture, Economy, Social Welfare (changed to Organizational Training in 1953), Youth (which existed only for a short period and even then was barely active) and Publishing.⁷⁹⁰ The Publishing Department was merely a new incarnation of the publishing house Yidish Bukh; it was directed by Jakub Egit, and when he was unavailable due to having been arrested, by Shmuel Likhtenshteyn. The fact that Egit, former director of the Provincial Jewish Committee in Lower Silesia, was allowed to direct the Publishing Department is quite surprising, considering that he had a reputation among the authorities as a Jewish nationalist. According to Egit himself, it was Sfarid’s idea to appoint him to head Yidish Bukh.⁷⁹¹

It is possible to divide the TSKŻ’s activity into the following arenas: vocational education (courses run by ORT), publishing (Yidish Bukh), commemoration of Holocaust victims (memorial events, especially to mark the anniversaries of the Warsaw and Białystok Ghetto Uprisings, or upon the occasion of the exhumation of victims), maintenance of Jewish cemeteries, and cultural events broadly speaking: lectures, conferences, meetings with authors, etc. In March 1954, the TSKŻ Wrocław branch held two chess matches, three sessions of the Propaganda Committee, a session of the Women’s Committee and a Women’s Circle evening, two chess lessons, four so-called Friday evenings⁷⁹² (one of which was devoted

788 M. Hirszowicz, *Pułapki zaangażowania: Intelktualiści w służbie komunizmu*, Warsaw 2001, p. 87.

789 Information on the course of the TSKŻ National Congress, AAN, KC PZPR, Propaganda and Agitation Department, call no. 237/VIII-78, p. 20.

790 Berendt, *Życie żydowskie*, p. 145.

791 J. Egit, *Grand Illusion*, Toronto 1991, p. 101.

792 Berendt writes: “It appears that these [Friday-evening] get-togethers were intended to serve as a new secular custom, an alternative to traditional Sabbath evenings, and at the same time to remove all traces of the former way of life, which was, after all, deeply rooted in the religious context” (*Życie żydowskie*, p. 173).

to the first anniversary of Stalin's death), four ideological training sessions, four youth evenings, two meetings of the presidium, a gathering of women activists, a council of club activists, a seminar for activists and agitators, a children's morning at the People's Club, a press discussion for women, and a meeting of the Committee of the Circle of the Women's League of the TSKŻ. One or more events were held on almost every day of that month.⁷⁹³

Much attention was devoted to so-called artistic self-creativity, i.e., the development of amateur choruses, orchestras, drama clubs, dance bands and poetry recitations. In 1952, the TSKŻ had 35 branches (which employed 162 intellectual and 136 physical workers), 33 reading rooms, 5 cultural centers, and two theaters (in Wrocław and Łódź).⁷⁹⁴ The local branches organized a total of 12 choruses, 10 drama clubs, 9 recitation groups, 4 orchestras and 5 dance sections.⁷⁹⁵ A year later, the TSKŻ Board announced that 1,025 people were participating in its performing arts groups.⁷⁹⁶ The TSKŻ amateur groups performed at local and national festivals and concerts. Most of these groups were from Lower Silesia, where the Jewish community was relatively large and had the closest connection to Yiddish culture.⁷⁹⁷

Jews who were not active in the TSKŻ had mixed feelings about it. On the one hand, it was a necessary evil against which it was dangerous to take a stand; thus, for the sake of domestic tranquility, the average Jew attended some events and subscribed to the newspaper, even if his heart wasn't really in it. On the other hand, for those who could not function outside of a Jewish environment (first and foremost workers and tradesmen with a poor command of Polish), TSKŻ was, other than religious congregations, the only available option. As Berendt notes:

793 Plan of activity of the TSKŻ Wrocław branch for March 1954, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 77, unpaginated.

794 Note of the TSKŻ Administration to the Office of Planning and Finances of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 1, unpaginated.

795 Note of the TSKŻ Administration to the Office of the Division of Education and Culture of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 1, unpaginated.

796 Note of the TSKŻ Administration to the Minister of Culture and Art, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 1, unpaginated.

797 Some communities in Lower Silesia offered something that did not exist anywhere else in Poland – a professional, family and social life conducted in an exclusively Jewish milieu. Leopold Sobel, born in 1946, met non-Jewish children for the first time when he moved from Wrocław to Warsaw (conversation with Leopold Sobel, Warsaw, June 22, 2006).

[...S]ome members of the [Jewish] community continued to feel best when surrounded by other Jews. It was with them, not with the rest of society, that they felt solidarity and with them, to the extent possible, that they kept in closest contact. The feeling of community arose from similar life experiences and fears for the future. *It is impossible to rule out the possibility that this environment served to replace the ‘extended family’ which had been murdered during the Holocaust. The alternative for those interested in continuing [to live] in an ethnic enclave, if there wasn’t one available, was not assimilation, but rather emigration to a country where it would be possible to lead a traditional lifestyle.*⁷⁹⁸

The attitude of the authorities toward TSKŻ was nothing if not favorable. It is worth stressing that in spite of the political conditions elsewhere in the Eastern Bloc (the trials of Communists of Jewish origin, the liquidation of Yiddish culture in the USSR), Jewish Communists in Poland had practically *carte blanche* in their activities within their own circles; and as mentioned above, until 1956 the Jewish community was the only ethnic minority in the Polish People’s Republic to possess cultural institutions of its own such as theaters and a publishing house. However, this latitude should not be interpreted as a sign of complete trust on the part of the Party and state authorities in the unconditional and absolute loyalty of Jewish Communists. In fact, even the activists endured repression and harassment. In 1953, Jakub Egit was imprisoned for six months on charges of spreading “Jewish nationalism.” Attempting to intervene on his behalf, Szymon Zachariasz was warned that Egit’s arrest was only the beginning of a wave of arrests in Jewish circles.⁷⁹⁹ Sfard mentioned in his autobiography that he had the impression during this period (i.e., before Stalin’s death) that he was being observed and followed. Around the same time, Sfard was visited by an official from the secret police, an assimilated Jew named Kwiatkowski, who demanded a list of all TSKŻ activists, signed by the secretary general. According to his own account of the incident, Sfard refused to comply, and when Kwiatkowski insisted, Sfard informed Zachariasz of what was going on. Zachariasz’s intercession must have been effective, judging from the fact that Kwiatkowski did not come back after that.⁸⁰⁰ Elsewhere, Sfard linked this episode to rumors of plans to deport the

798 Berendt, *Życie żydowskie*, p. 128. Emphasis added.

799 Egit, *Grand Illusion*, p. 111. Józef Gitler-Barski, the former secretary general of the Polish branch of the Joint, and Arie Lerner, the secretary of the Israeli diplomatic mission to Poland, were also arrested at the same time (B. Szaynok, “Sprawa Arie Lerner: Nieznany fragment “walki z syjonizmem” w Polsce w pierwszej połowie lat 50.,” in: *Polska w podzielonym świecie po II wojnie światowej do 1989 roku*, ed. M. Wojciechowski, Toruń 2002, pp. 261–276).

800 *Mit zikh*, pp. 222–224.

Soviet Jews.⁸⁰¹ This was most likely his only such contact with the secret police.⁸⁰² After Egit's arrest, the Sfards were among the few friends who did not cut themselves off from Klara Egit (out of fear of being tarred with the same brush), but rather helped her in her husband's absence.⁸⁰³

Both ordinary Jews and leading TSKŻ members were increasingly alarmed by the intensifying atmosphere of Stalinist terror in Poland. Gossip and rumors of persecution circulated among non-Jews as well, in the absence of any sources of information other than the official ones.⁸⁰⁴ But while non-Jews were also understandably wary, the warning signs carried a different weight for Jews, who attempted to read between the lines for indications of impending anti-Semitic persecution. At a briefing for TSKŻ branch secretaries in Lower Silesia in February 1953, the secretary from Wałbrzych reported that an attempt to document the socioeconomic profile of the Jewish community in Wałbrzych by sending letters to local employers requesting data on their Jewish employees had caused a panic because it was interpreted as a first step towards deporting the Jews. Local TSKŻ activists unanimously confirmed that ordinary Jews were avoiding attempts to engage them in conversation about political subjects, and no few Jews began to risk listening to the BBC and Kol Israel. According to the branch secretary from Wrocław, many people were asking whether TSKŻ activity was legal and whether the *Folks-shtime* would be banned; those present at the briefing also stated that TSKŻ activists were being demoted by their employers.⁸⁰⁵

The hints of state-engineered anti-Semitism that had reared their heads in the USSR a year earlier around the "Doctors' Plot" incident⁸⁰⁶ came as a great shock to the Polish Jewish Communists. Years later, Ida Kamińska recalled that upon hearing about the case against the doctors, she ran into the TSKŻ

801 Historians have not yet ascertained unambiguously whether these rumors circulating in the last years before Stalin's death about preparations to deport Soviet Jews to the Far East were founded. See G. Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina: Vlast' i antisemitizm*, Moscow 2003, pp. 671–685.

802 Interview with Dovid Sfard, private collection of Michał Chęciński, pp. 8–10.

803 Egit, *Grand Illusion*, p. 111.

804 For a discussion of the significance of rumors in Stalinist Poland see: D. Jarosz and M. Pasztor, *W krzywym zwierciadle: Polityka władz komunistycznych w Polsce w świetle plotek i pogłosek z lat 1949–1956*, Warsaw 1995.

805 Briefing of the secretary of TSKŻ branches in Lower Silesia, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 76, minutes no. 3, unpaginated.

806 On the echoes of the "Doctors' Plot" in the USSR itself see S. Czarnyy, "'Vyslat' vsekhn...v Palestinu!': Otkliki na arest vrachei-vreditelei," in: *Svoi ili chuzhoi?: Evrei i slovanie glazami drug druga*, ed. O.V. Belova, Moscow 2003, pp. 484–491.

headquarters in Warsaw called out: “We have to do something!” The response was silence. No one spoke. “Everyone knew that it was not true,” Kamińska said, adding that only a few “fanatics” believed the accusations.⁸⁰⁷ Years later, Sfard wrote almost the same thing: “None of us believed it, but many pretended to, and many remained silent.”⁸⁰⁸ He also mentioned a conversation he had had at the time with Zachariasz: “Szymon and I were walking on Nowy Świat Street and he said quietly: ‘You know, Sfard, I don’t believe any of these accusations. This man [Stalin] is obligated to convoke a [Party] plenum and a [Party] congress every few years, and he has convoked neither a plenum nor a congress. This whole matter of the doctors and the [Yiddish] writers [i.e., the trial of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee] is just a dirty trick,’ etc. He said this when Stalin was still alive.”⁸⁰⁹

Despite these unofficial reactions, on the official front, the TSKŻ did not deviate from the party line—the *Folks-shtime* condemned the defendants in the Rudolf Slánský trial, the employees of the Israeli diplomatic mission in Warsaw, and the Kremlin doctors. Between the end of November 1952 and the end of February 1953, dozens of articles appeared in its pages on the supposed close ties between the Zionist movement and “imperialist spies.”⁸¹⁰

Sfard’s poem “Tsu mayn partey” (To My Party), published in *Yidishe shriftn* in March 1954 (a year after Stalin’s death) and not reprinted in any of his books, can be considered part of the “official reaction” to the wave of official anti-Semitism:

Now, when every day red flags bloom
And every hour announces a new joy—
How good it is to recall on young streets
That the deepest night has not separated us.⁸¹¹

There is no way to know what inspired Sfard to write and publish such a profession of faith in the Party as late as 1954. Coercion? Fear? Opportunism? Is it possible that he was still completely sincere at that late date? Or perhaps this is evidence of an internal struggle, an attempt to persuade himself that an idea in which he had invested so much could not turn out to be mistaken?

In spite of the unfavorable political climate throughout the Eastern Bloc from 1950 to 1955, no specifically anti-Jewish measures were taken in Poland.

807 Interview with Ida Kamińska, OHD, call no. 4 (87), p. 34.

808 *Mit zikh*, p. 173.

809 Interview with Dovid Sfard, private collection of Michał Chęciński, pp. 23–24.

810 Berendt, *Życie żydowskie*, p. 243.

811 D. Sfard, “Tsu mayn partey,” *Yidishe shriftn*, 1954, no. 3, p. 2.

As of today it is still not clear why not. Berendt believes that perhaps it was a result of Stalin's decision to give certain Polish Jews a role in building socialism. Additionally, any state-sponsored discrimination against Jews in the country that the Nazis had designated as the place of their annihilation would have resulted in extremely bad press for the Polish state worldwide.⁸¹² In any case, the absence of anti-Semitic policies on the part of the state led even those Jews who were not Party members to feel that only the Communist regime could guarantee them peace and safety⁸¹³ in the face of occasional incidents of violent anti-Semitism, for example when the windows of the TSKŻ headquarters at 16 Konopacka Street in Warsaw were smashed and the Jewish cemetery on Okopowa Street was vandalized.⁸¹⁴ Referring to the absence of state-sponsored anti-Semitic policies, Berendt writes:

Polish Jews suffered incomparably less from the first anti-Zionist campaigns instigated by the Soviet authorities in 1948–1953 than did inhabitants of other countries dependent on the USSR. This fact was, in our estimation, a far more decisive factor than any activity on the part of Communist-dominated institutions in helping the propaganda campaign of the authorities to produce at least one desired result: Jewish circles abroad and the media connected to them usually did not criticize the political system of the People's Poland. Dissatisfaction [on the part of Jewish circles abroad] was expressed primarily in connection with the administrative hurdles established by the Polish state to prevent Jewish emigration.⁸¹⁵

TSKŻ was not a flawless organization, and some of its activists were overly zealous, but its existence and activity undoubtedly slowed the assimilation of Polish Jews, which became more and more prevalent even in the first postwar generation.

We Have Yiddish Writers of Various Genres

Sfard was also active in the 1950s as the editor-in-chief of the publishing house Yidish Bukh.⁸¹⁶ Established in 1947 under the auspices of CKŻP, Yidish Bukh

812 Berendt, "Nuseh Pojln," p. 289.

813 Berendt, *Życie żydowskie*, p. 262.

814 Note of the TSKŻ Board to the MBP, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 1, unpaginated.

815 Berendt, *Życie żydowskie*, p. 336.

816 For my previous research concerning Yidish Bukh, see: J. Nalewajko-Kulikow, "The Last Yiddish Books Printed in Poland: Outline of the Activities of Yidish Bukh Publishing House," in: *Under the Red Banner: Yiddish Culture in the Communist Countries in the Postwar Era*, ed. E. Grözinger and M. Ruta, Wiesbaden 2008, pp. 111–134.

rendered Warsaw the second most-active center for Yiddish publishing at the time (following Buenos Aires, where in the 1950s and 1960s a long series entitled *Dos poylishe yidntum* was published, encompassing, among other things, memoirs and diaries from the interwar and Holocaust periods⁸¹⁷). Yidish Bukh had a completely different publishing profile: aside from commemorating the Holocaust, it also had to promote the rebuilding of Jewish life in the country⁸¹⁸ and serve as a visible sign of the liveliness and authenticity of contemporary Jewish culture in Poland. During the years 1950–1955, Yidish Bukh published at a frenetic pace of between ten and thirty-plus books per year, beginning with thirteen in 1950 (each with a print run of 3,000 copies), twenty-three in 1951 (4,500 copies), and thirty-one in 1952 (5,500 copies).⁸¹⁹ “Yidish Bukh is the only Jewish publisher in the world that publishes so many titles in print runs of so many copies,” wrote an employee, Shmuel Likhtenshteyn, in 1954.⁸²⁰

Yidish Bukh’s publications throughout its existence can be categorized into seven general arenas: books about the Holocaust; classic works of Yiddish literature; works by contemporary Yiddish writers, especially those from Poland; books about the history of the Jewish people, with particular consideration for Poland and the revolutionary movement; literature for children and youth; translations from other languages (including Polish); and albums of reproductions showcasing the works of Jewish artists.⁸²¹ From 1950 to 1955, hardly any children’s or youth literature was published (the first book for children during this time period, a translation from Polish of Julian Tuwim’s children’s poetry, came out in 1954); in contrast, particular attention was paid to ideological literature, including a series of works by Lenin and Stalin (edited by Sfarđ).

As for translations from foreign languages, Polish literature was in first place, including translations of Igor Newerly’s *Pamiątką z celulozy* and Julian Strykowski’s *Bieg do Fragala*. Many of the translations from Polish, as well as translations of works of Russian literature, were prepared and edited by Sfarđ.

817 For a discussion of this series, see: J. Schwarz, “A Library of Hope and Destruction: The Yiddish Book Series ‘Dos poylishe yidntum’ (Polish Jewry) 1946–1966,” *Polin*, vol. 20, 2007, pp. 173–196.

818 *Mit zikh*, p. 188.

819 Informational note, AAN, PZPR Central Committee, Propaganda and Agitation Department, call no. 237/VIII–78, p. 6.

820 S. Likhtenshteyn, “Di antvicklung un tetikayt fun farlag Yidish Bukh in bafreytn Poyln,” *Bleter far geshikhte* 7, 1954, no. 2–3, p. 44.

821 “Der yidisher farlags-vezn in folks-Poyln (in di yorn 1945–1968),” AŽIH, Papers of Leopold Trepper, call no. 3, p. 32.

It is possible that it was Sfar'd's own literary preferences that led to the publication of a preponderance of poetry by contemporary Yiddish authors, in particular Binem Heller, Hadasa Rubin and Elye Rajzman. He was either unacquainted with or uninterested in the literary taste of readers, since at gatherings devoted to distributing Yidish Bukh publications, many complained that too much poetry was being published and not enough prose. This is no surprise, considering that the readership of these books consisted mostly of so-called listed Jews, i.e., employees of Jewish cooperatives and institutions who were mostly unassimilated and had little experience reading literature; poetry was probably difficult for them to digest. Yet the editors explicitly claimed to know what readers needed better than they themselves did. Those who complained at the gatherings were instructed that "poetry is just as important as prose. We have Yiddish writers of various genres, and we cannot tell them how to write. Writers write in the manner that they have chosen, and so it is necessary to study poetry as well, although it is a little more difficult."⁸²²

In 1951 Yidish Bukh began to publish the classics of Yiddish literature: Mendele Moykher-Sforim, Y.L. Peretz, and Sholem Aleichem. Over the course of three years, the press published four volumes of Mendele's, two of Peretz's, and five of Sholem Aleichem's selected works.⁸²³ For Yidish Bukh, it was a point of honor to publish at least one "classic" work yearly.⁸²⁴ As far as other popular Yiddish writers, the press did not publish the work of Sholem Asch, as he had been blacklisted as a "reactionary" belonging to the *Forverts* circles in New York.

Books were distributed via a system of annual subscriptions, which were sold by agitators from local TSKŻ branches, mostly members of specially designated Book and Press Committees, known according to the traditional formula as *moykher-sforimnikes* [itinerant book peddlers]. In addition to Yidish Bukh publications, they sold subscriptions to the *Folks-shtime*. Was the distribution of Yidish Bukh publications reflective of the actual level of interest in Yiddish literature present in the Jewish Polish population? Undoubtedly not. The number of subscribers—5,300 in 1953⁸²⁵—would certainly have been lower if not for the practice of obligatory subscriptions, euphemistically known as "recruiting," a tactic which was being used at the time among non-Jewish Poles as well.⁸²⁶

822 Minutes of meeting of Jewish employees of the cooperative "Zgoda," AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 77, unpaginated.

823 Likhtenshteyn, "Di antviklung," p. 44.

824 AŻIH, Papers of Leopold Trepper, call no. 3, p. 35.

825 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

826 As M. Czyżniewski describes, "One of the strategies for addressing the negligible interest in the press [...] was obligatory subscriptions by institution or workplace.

TSKŻ activists surmised that the reluctance to subscribe to Yidish Bukh and the *Folks-shtime* was due to their propagandistic character, insufficient knowledge of the language, or simply resentment of the coercion to do so.⁸²⁷ In a summary of the activity of Yidish Bukh over the course of the previous decade, which he presented at the Third TSKŻ Congress in April 1956, Sfard mentioned 165 titles published, for a total of 817,500 copies. However, he also made a significant remark: “However many subscribers there are, that’s how many readers there should be”—which attests to the fact that he realized that a certain portion of subscribers simply did not read the books that they purchased.⁸²⁸ From then on, at least officially, the criterion was quality, not quantity.

Judging by the documents preserved by the Central Office for Oversight of the Press, Publications and Performances (GUKPPiW), Yidish Bukh publications from 1953 to 1956 did not make too much work for the censors.⁸²⁹ This was probably a consequence partly of the authors’ own self-censorship and partly of the fact that both the publishing house and the TSKŻ were being run by Jewish Communists who believed in the party line.

Certain people were assigned to be “leaders of ten,” who each oversaw a group of a dozen or so subscribers, collected money from them and made sure that they did not forget to renew their contracts. Obligatory subscriptions (abolished in workplaces in 1955) guaranteed that the press [had customers, but] only in theory [that it] had readers” (*Propaganda polityczna władzy ludowej w Polsce 1944–1956*, Toruń 2005, p. 115).

827 Minutes of the meeting of Jewish ZPO [it is not clear what this acronym stands for] workers, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 76, unpaginated. Claims not to know the language well were not necessarily merely an excuse: Irena Hurwic-Nowakowska writes that a lack of knowledge of written Yiddish was frequent among the Jewish intelligentsia. “Many respondents understand and quite often speak (sometimes better, sometimes worse) Yiddish without being able to read or write it. In most cases, their knowledge of Yiddish comes from their parents’ home where it was used as the everyday language by the adults; the children used it much less and Polish was the language used in school” (I. Hurwic-Nowakowska, *A Social Analysis of Postwar Polish Jewry*, Jerusalem 1986, p. 92).

828 “Mit tsutroy zikh batsien tsum poshetn mentsh: Fragmentn funem barikhts-referat fun der hoypt-farvaltung, velkhn es hot opgegebn der kh. Dovid Sfard,” *Folks-shtime*, April 18, 1956, p. 4.

829 See AAN, GUKPPiW, call no. 399.

Concrete Acts of Creativity

In the early 1950s, Yiddish writers in Poland enjoyed a fair number of opportunities to publish their work. Members of the former Union of Jewish Writers and Journalists were automatically instated as members of (or at the very least candidates for membership in) the Union of Polish Writers (Związek Literatów Polskich, ZLP). In 1954, eight Yiddish writers belonged to the Warsaw Branch of the ZLP, out of 312 members total: Binem Heller, Shloyme Łastik, Bernard Mark, Michał Mirski, Leyb Olitsky, Hadasa Rubin, Dovid Sfard and Hersh Smolar. Five additional Yiddish writers were candidates for membership.⁸³⁰ None of the Yiddish writers seem to have played an active role in ZLP work (Sfard was asked to do so, but he declined).⁸³¹ Although they took advantage of privileges enjoyed by members of the ZLP (such as the opportunity to spend time at state-sponsored writers' and artists' retreats), they interacted actively only with contacts in Jewish circles—within the TSKŻ, Yidish Bukh and *Yidishe shriftn* milieus.⁸³² Events like the joint evening in Warsaw honoring both Polish and Yiddish authors on which *Yidishe shriftn* reported in June 1951 took place infrequently and were organized primarily for propaganda purposes.

The full makeup of the editorial board of *Yidishe shriftn* between 1950 and 1956 is unclear, but we do know for certain that it included Sfard, Moyshe Shklar, Lili Berger and Bernard Mark.⁸³³ Among the poets who published in the monthly, Binem Heller was by far the most heavily represented (in 1955 alone, *Yidishe shriftn* published 41 of his poems), followed by Olitsky, Rubin and Shklar. Journalistic texts and literary criticism were provided mainly by Sfard, Mark, Mirski and Shmuel Hurwicz. Few texts by authors from outside of Poland were published unless they belonged to explicitly “progressive” circles: as Magdalena

830 AAN, PZPR Central Committee, Department of Culture, call no. 237/XVIII–131, pp. 34–54.

831 File of Dovid Sfard, Archiwum Związku Literatów Polskich (Archive of the Union of Polish Writers), unpaginated.

832 Although the “Jewish Writers’ Club of the Union of Polish Writers” is mentioned many times in the *Folks-shtime* and *Yidishe shriftn*, it is not clear whether such a club truly existed as a formal institutional entity. Berendt mentions it (*Życie żydowskie*, pp. 231–235), but Krzysztof Woźniakowski, in his monograph on the ZLP, only notes that on December 13, 1949, Mark was recruited to participate on the ZLP Board as a representative of the “Jewish writers’ milieu” (*Między ubezwłasnowolnieniem a opozycją: Związek Literatów Polskich w latach 1949–1959*, Krakow 1990, p. 148).

833 M. Ruta, “Preliminary Remarks on Yiddish Culture in Poland 1945–1968,” *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia* 2, 2003, p. 64.

Ruta has noted, the concept of “Yiddish literature” was defined by *Yidische shriftn* as basically the works of the three classic writers plus those of a few “progressive” writers.⁸³⁴ After the “thaw” of October 1956, Mark admitted that the self-isolation—in literary as well as other realms—on the part of the Jewish community in Poland had been a “fatal error.”⁸³⁵ But did the editors of *Yidische shriftn* have a choice in the early 1950s?

The editors made an effort to make contact with Jewish writers in the USSR. In 1954, Mark, Smolar and Zachariasz, on behalf of the *Folks-shtime*, *Yidische shriftn* and *Bleter far geshikhte*, wrote to a representative of the Soviet Information Bureau in Warsaw to ask for help getting in touch with Soviet Jewish writers, as well as obtaining copies of newspapers printed in Birobidzhan. They stressed that this would be a major contribution to the battle with “Jewish nationalism.”⁸³⁶ In their note, the absence of the names of the leading representatives of Yiddish culture in the Soviet Union from the list of people they sought to work with is striking. This is additional evidence that TSKŻ activists were already more or less aware of what was happening to Soviet Yiddish cultural leaders, although they might not yet have known of their deaths. If they did indeed know or suspect what was happening, it is possible that the very act of addressing this request to the Soviet representatives was designed to fish for additional information.

Poems, theater reviews, literary criticism, features on current sociocultural affairs, and even articles about politics were published in *Yidische shriftn*. Stalin’s death in March 1953 was commemorated by the publication of three topical poems (by Binem Heller, Hadasa Rubin and Leyb Morgentau), official statements by Alexandr Fadeyev (chairman of the Soviet Writers’ Union) and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz (vice-chairman of the ZLP), and a telegram from the TSKŻ Board to the Soviet ambassador to Poland, Arkadiy Sobolev.⁸³⁷ That same year, Julian Łazebnik published a long article arguing that Zionism was an instrument of American imperialism.⁸³⁸ However, the publication of a review by Aron Wahl of Adam Schaff’s book *Wstęp do teorii marksizmu* (Introduction to Marxist

834 Over the course of its more than twenty-year existence, *Yidische shriftn* published barely thirty articles on non-Communist Yiddish writers (*ibid.*, p. 68).

835 B. Mark, “Tsvishn lebn un toyt: Dos yidische lebn un di yidische literatur in Poyln in di yorn 1937–1957,” *IKUF Almanakh*, 1961, p. 83.

836 Note to the representative of the Soviet Information Bureau in Warsaw, AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz, call no. 476/22, pp. 227–229.

837 *Yidische shriftn*, 1953, no. 3 (71), p. 3.

838 J. Łazebnik, “Der tsienizm – an agentur fun amerikaner imperializm far shpionazh un diversye,” *Yidische shriftn*, 1953, no. 1 (69), p. 3.

Theory) turned out to be a serious political error. The author was reproached for criticizing Schaff from an anti-Marxist, anti-Leninist angle. The Party group at *Yidische shriftn* repented in a note to the Press Department of the PZPR Central Committee: “Likewise, the editors state unanimously that it was tactless of them to publish a review of a book by one of our leading comrades, written by a man who was expelled from the Party before the war as a Trotskyist and who has to this day not yet criticized his own Trotskyist attitudes.”⁸³⁹

Particular attention was devoted in *Yidische shriftn* to the development of a Jewish publishing market in Poland, the advertising of books and the obligations of Yiddish writers. Many contributors expressed regret that the writers were neither dealing with contemporary subjects nor describing the present-day life of Jewish workers.⁸⁴⁰ In order to correct this problem, Yidish Bukh inaugurated a series entitled “The Foreman and Industrial Expert Library” (Biblioteczka Przodowników Pracy i Racjonalizatorów), which was to present sketches of exemplary industrial experts and foremen—ideal heroes of socialist realism.⁸⁴¹

In 1955, Yidish Bukh published a volume of Sfard’s socialist-realist literary criticism, titled *Shtudyas un skitsn* (Studies and Sketches). It contains three parts: “In krayzn fun Y.L. Peretz” (In Y.L. Peretz’s Circles), which includes sketches of Peretz, Weissenberg, Kaganowski and Kacyzne; “Shrayber un bikher” (Writers and Books), in which he reviews works of prose, poetry and drama; and “Fragn fun literatur” (Literary Questions). This third section comprises ten chapters, whose genre can be gleaned from their titles: “Lomir zikh lernen fun Leninen” (Let’s Learn from Lenin), “In shayn fun Stalins lere” (In Light of Stalin’s Teachings), “Di eynikayt fun forem un inhalt” (The Unity of Form and Content), “Dos folk—Der kval fun ekhter kunst” (The People—The Source of Authentic Art), “Far ekhtn realism” (For Authentic Realism), “Shtrikhn fun sotsyalistishn realism” (Features of Socialist Realism), etc. In the book’s last chapter, “Far naye oyfgabn” (Faced with New Tasks), Sfard calls for Jewish writers to deepen their work “ideologically and artistically” and to bring their work closer to the new reality.⁸⁴² Here Sfard echoed Binem Heller’s sentiment of six years earlier (see

839 AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz, call no. 476/22, p. 235.

840 See, e.g. “Land-baratung fun di yidishe shrayber in Poyln,” *Yidische shriftn*, 1952, no. 8–9 (64–65), p. 8.

841 For more on social-realist literature in Yiddish see: J. Nalewajko-Kulikow, “Czy socrealizm miał odmianę żydowską?: Kilka uwag o twórczości pisarzy jidysz w powojennej Polsce,” in: *Socrealizm: Fabuły – komunikaty – ikony*, ed. K. Stępnik and M. Piechota, Lublin 2006, pp. 171–177.

842 D. Sfard, “Far naye oyfgabn,” in: idem, *Shtudyas un skitsn*, Warsaw 1955, p. 253.

Chapter 5). It is possible that little had changed in the interim; it is also possible that these ideas had simply become a litany to be repeated, a Party refrain, regardless of what was actually happening in Polish Yiddish literature.

In a review of the book in *Yidishe shriftn*, Mark praised Sfard for having developed as a literary critic, based on his assessment that *Shtudyen un skitsn* was free of “impressionism” and relied rather on an honest analysis of the relevant works. At the same time, Mark criticized the excessive theoreticism and complexity of some of Sfard’s reflections. It is difficult to say whether Mark truly disapproved of this aspect of Sfard’s work, or whether he was merely bowing, consciously or not, to the requirement to be “anti-elitist” and assert the value of being in constant contact with the “masses.”⁸⁴³

The volume *Shtudyen un skitsn* followed Sfard’s previous volume of criticism, *Shrayber un bikher*, the preparation of which Sfard had mentioned in an interview for *Dos naye lebn* back in 1950, describing it as a “synthetic, theoretical Marxist work.”⁸⁴⁴ At the time, he was also working on a volume of short stories in which he wanted to present “figures from the past, figures from wartime and figures from the present.”⁸⁴⁵ The interview was accompanied by a fragment of one of the stories, “Unter der rut” (Under the Rod), set in the realia of the traditional prewar shtetl, complete with synagogue, *heder*, and a rabbi and his pupil.

It is interesting that the fragment selected for publication concerned times past and described a world that the Jewish Communists had scrupulously disparaged and ultimately rejected—and did not focus, for example, on an industrial expert exceeding the “norm” (i.e., productivity quota) in an iron refinery. Is it possible that as a literary critic Sfard was able to accommodate the trends then in force, but was unable, or unwilling, to do so in his own prose? The following statement from that same interview is significant: “Life in present-day Poland is full of great and concrete acts of creativity, and these demand from the writer an appropriate, concrete expression, whether in prose or in poetry. This is one reason why I am not rushing to publish poetry. Haste is not one of the greatest virtues of a writer...”⁸⁴⁶ Might the poetry that Sfard was writing at the time have been incompatible with socialist-realist criteria? His first postwar volume of poetry did not appear until 1957—and the aforementioned volume of short stories ultimately never saw the light of day.

843 B. Mark, “Dovid Sfard der literatur-kritiker,” *Yidishe shriftn*, 1955, no. 6, pp. 2, 7.

844 “A shmues mitn shrayber Dovid Sfard,” *Dos naye lebn*, no. 32/1950, p. 5.

845 Ibid.

846 Ibid.

The tasks facing Yiddish writers in those years were in large part the same as those facing Polish writers. Among the reasons that literary scholar Wojciech Tomasik lists for the state patronage that writers enjoyed in the People's Poland, two are particularly interesting in the context of Yiddish literature: "The war solidified the particular position of literature in Polish culture, which it has enjoyed since the Romantic era: i.e., since it became the mainstay of national identity. [...] [And] out of all artists, it fell to the lot of the people of the pen to convey to the public a sense of the transformations taking place in Poland."⁸⁴⁷ The latter was true for Yiddish writers as well: as far as literature as a "mainstay of national identity," in the context of Yiddish, literature was viewed as the only available way to resurrect the world that had been annihilated in the Holocaust, and to keep alive the native tongue of murdered friends and family.

The very fact of Yiddish literature's existence in postwar Poland lent itself to being exploited as "evidence" of the harmonious coexistence of various ethnic groups under the socialist regime. However, regardless of the ways in which that fact was indeed exploited for propagandistic purposes, it is nevertheless worth remembering that Yiddish was marginalized in Israel at the time (e.g., in 1949, the Writers' Union in Tel Aviv approved by majority vote a resolution banning Yiddish writers from becoming members⁸⁴⁸). In the very country in which Yiddish could have been expected to have a chance to flourish as a secular spoken language after the war, it was de facto condemned to a slow death; as such, however circumscribed it was from an ideological point of view, the lively Yiddish cultural production in postwar Poland truly was a phenomenon worthy of notice.

A Strange Spring

"A strange spring: hope and fear," wrote Binem Heller in a poem in May 1956⁸⁴⁹: a terse and accurate summation of the events taking place at the time, which would shake the Eastern Bloc and within it the Jewish community in Poland.⁸⁵⁰

847 W. Tomasik, *Inżynieria dusz: Literatura realizmu socjalistycznego w planie "propagandy monumentalnej"*, Wrocław 1999, p. 7.

848 *Biuletyn Żydowskiej Agencji Prasowej*, September 14, 1949, p. 8.

849 B. Heller, "Hofenung un shrek," *Yidishe shriftn*, 1956, no. 5, p. 5.

850 A previous version of this subchapter appeared as "Od podejrzanego do oskarżonego: *Folks-shtime* 1956–1967," in: *Jidyszland: Polskie przestrzenie*, ed. E. Geller and M. Polit, Warsaw 2008, pp. 277–290.

The Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union took place in Moscow in February 1956. After the Polish delegation returned home, the text of the secret speech delivered by Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, began to make the rounds in Party circles. The speech, titled “On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences,” admitted to numerous “injustices” which had taken place in the Stalin era.⁸⁵¹ Although the speech did not acknowledge the suppression of Yiddish culture in the USSR or the liquidation of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, Hersh Smolar deduced at this point that the members of the JAC had suffered the same fate as other victims mentioned in the speech.⁸⁵² His conjecture was confirmed by a *Forverts* reporter, Leon Krishtol (Crystal), who stopped over in Warsaw on his way from Moscow back to New York.⁸⁵³ Only one question remained—whether all those who had not been heard from since 1948 were dead, or whether some of them could still be alive. Smolar decided to write about this question for the *Folks-shtime*, and he managed to do so “after a heated night of battle with my ‘inner censor.’”⁸⁵⁴ In the morning, Smolar discussed the contents of his article with the *Folks-shtime*’s leading political writers, Zachariasz and Mirski. It was decided that the text would appear as an editorial, without Smolar’s name attached, and only after appealing to the PZPR Central Committee for its “blessing.” They sent it to Jerzy Morawski, a member of the PZPR Politburo; he lingered over it for almost a month. Finally, after some prodding on the part of Smolar and Sfard, he consulted with Tadeusz Galiński, the head of the Press Department of the Central Committee, who declared that he saw no obstacles to publishing it.⁸⁵⁵

851 On the dissemination of the speech’s contents, see: J. Lewandowski, “‘Tajny’ referat Chruszczowa: Okoliczności wygłoszenia i ujawnienia,” *Zeszyty Historyczne*, 1977, no. 41, pp. 197–209. For more recent research, see M. Mayzel, “Israeli Intelligence and the Leakage of Khrushchev’s ‘Secret Speech,’” *Journal of Israeli History* 32, 2 (2013), pp. 257–283.

852 H. Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye mit der letster hofenung*, Tel Aviv 1982, p. 214.

853 Krishtol’s reports from Moscow in the *Forverts* were the first news articles written about the deaths of the writers Peretz Markish, Dovid Hofshiteyn, Dovid Bergelson, Itsik Fefer and Leyb Kvitko. See “5 barimte yidishe shrayber in rusland dershoshn in 1952, keyblt ‘Forverts’ korespondent: Markish, Hofshiteyn, Bergelson, Fefer un Kvitko ermordet,” *Forverts*, March 7, 1956, pp. 1, 3.

854 Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye*, p. 215.

855 *Ibid.*, pp. 215–216.

On April 4, 1956, the readers of the *Folks-shtime* discovered on the third page of the newspaper, which was ordinarily designated for editorials on politics, an unsigned article titled *Undzer veytik un undzer treyst* (Our Pain and Our Consolation). The article began with the admission that the cult of personality in the USSR had led to anti-Semitism and ethnic discrimination, in violation of Leninism. Next came a description of the development of Yiddish culture in the USSR, which was made possible by the October Revolution and the equal rights which Jews enjoyed in its wake. However, the article acknowledged, “Beriaism” (Beriovschchina)⁸⁵⁶ had sacrificed Shimen Dimanshteyn, Ester Frumkin, Moyshe Litvakov, Izi Kharik, Moyshe Kulbak and others who had been “devoted heart and soul to the great cause of Communism and full equal rights for the Jewish masses” to the regime in the Purges in the years leading up to 1939. Next, the article described the flourishing of Jewish culture in Western Belarus and Western Ukraine between 1939 and 1941, as well as the fact that most Polish Jews who had survived the war did so as refugees absorbed by the Soviet Union.

Then Smolar went on the offensive: “How can it be that the body representing the Jewish community [...], made up of the best sons and daughters of the popular Soviet Jewish masses—the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee—suddenly, for no reason at all, was liquidated, and its leaders were sentenced to death?!” However, he immediately qualified the question by acknowledging that it was necessary to take into account the entire complexity of the problem, and, instead of adopting a purely Jewish point of view, to remember that “Beriovschchina” affected everyone without concern for ethnic background or religion. The leaders of the JAC, he argued, were not murdered on the basis of a specifically anti-Semitic Soviet policy, as the “press organs of Jewish nationalism,” such as the *Forverts*, the *Tog-morgn zhurnal*, *Undzer vort*, *Undzer shtime* and other Jewish periodicals around the world, were claiming. Smolar complained that Jews who were enemies of the USSR were attempting to exploit the tragedy of Soviet Yiddish culture for their own “ignoble purposes,” and that they were accusing the Jewish Communists of remaining silent. “We were silent,” admitted Smolar, “because we believed profoundly, and still believe, that only a Leninist party would be capable of disentangling this tragic knot.”

856 Lavrentiy P. Beria (1899–1953), chief of the Soviet security apparatus under Joseph Stalin, and one of his closest collaborators. After Stalin’s death, he became First Deputy Premier of the Soviet Union, but after Nikita Khrushchev’s coup d’état, he was soon removed from power and sentenced to death as punishment for the terror (*Beriovschchina*) he had induced as head of the security apparatus from 1938 to 1953.

Having addressed the first part of the title—*veytik*, i.e., the pain over the fate of Yiddish culture—Smolar moved on to *treyst*, consolation for the readers. He wrote: “We emphasize the truth that all the peoples of the Soviet Union without exception, and especially the Soviet Communist Party, are interested in completely eradicating any remnants of the cult of personality. [...] That is the point of the Communist Party, of Leninism. In this lies our consolation, our hope and our confidence in the future.”⁸⁵⁷ Smolar offered as additional consolation the news of the rebirth of Jewish culture in the USSR and the return of Jewish writers (over 60 of them) to creative work.⁸⁵⁸ Oddly, the name “Stalin” does not appear even once in the text.

Thus, the *Folks-shtime* became the newspaper that broke the news in the Jewish Soviet Bloc that the Yiddish writers of the JAC had been executed or sentenced to years in the Gulag. Although this fact was already known in the West (thanks to Leon Krishtol’s reports in the *Forverts*), its confirmation by a newspaper from behind the “Iron Curtain” had its own import.

Why did the PZPR Central Committee allow the article to be published? Probably because of the upheaval caused by the Twentieth Party Congress: not only had the cult of personality been condemned there, but the Polish Communist Party and its leaders had also been rehabilitated, which had enormous psychological significance for former KPP members, and empowered them to risk acting autonomously to grant the Jewish press leeway to an extent that they would not previously have dared.⁸⁵⁹ Additionally, they were not overly concerned that an unsigned article printed in a Yiddish newspaper in a country with a comparatively small Jewish population could have any repercussions. As it turned out, however, that was overly optimistic: the article irritated the Soviet authorities, and in an interview with the New York-based *National Guardian*, Leonid Ilyichov, press spokesman for the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, called it “slanderous and anti-Soviet”:

857 “Undzer veytik un undzer treyst,” *Folks-shtime*, April 4, 1956, p. 3.

858 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

859 C.f. the following interesting remark by Aleksander Wat: “It seems to me that one of the essential causes of the Polish October, that revolt by the old Polish Communists, those KPP members [...] was that the hatred caused by the murder of the leaders, the old leaders, which had been buried in the unconscious, was at last able to come to the surface. Every Polish Communist Party member had retained in memory a profound affection for those leaders.” A. Wat, *My Century: The Odyssey of a Polish Intellectual*, ed. and transl. Richard Lourie, Berkeley 1988, p. 43.

It mixes together true claims with fictitious ones. The authors have exploited the true claims in order to make the fictitious ones appear more credible. [...] The article's conclusions about the persecution of the Jewish masses and their culture are pure slander. Every objective, thoughtful person can ascertain that discrimination is not even a concern in the Soviet Union.⁸⁶⁰

Ilyichov's declaration provoked a storm in the left-wing Jewish press around the world. The Communist *Morgn-frayhayt* took the side of the *Folks-shtime*, writing: "In our opinion, the *Folks-shtime* did what the organs of the Soviet authorities should have done in the first place, namely, inform the world what had happened."⁸⁶¹

The violence of this reaction came as a surprise. In response, the editors of the *Folks-shtime* sent Ilyichov a letter asking for an explanation. After waiting in vain for a response for six weeks, the newspaper published a bold open letter to him, composed by Zachariasz:

Don't you realize, Comrade Ilyichov, that you're responding to a matter that unfortunately encompasses the nightmarish period of the Stalin cult, when anyone who issued even the most comradely, friendly criticism or demanded an explanation concerning acts that were unjust or in conflict with the most elementary fundamentals of Leninist ethnic policy was stigmatized? [...] Is it possible to justify or explain away the painful subject broached in our article in the *Folks-shtime* with peremptory claims of 'slanderous and anti-Soviet' [statements]? Whom can such claims convince? *No one!*⁸⁶²

As Berendt has noted, the open letter to Ilyichov assumed a tone unusual for the time: "Here, journalists from a publication in a country in many respects dependent on the USSR, activists in a relatively small organization, decided to deliver a public reproach to a Soviet state official of high rank."⁸⁶³ However, the contents of the letter were screened ahead of time by the GUKPPiW and published with state approval.

860 "Wywiad z szefem prasowym radzieckiego MSZ o antysemityzmie," *Zeszyty Teoretyczno-Polityczne*, 1957, no. 1/2, p. 227.

861 "Oświadczenie Iljiczowa i jego wystąpienie przeciw *Folkssztymie*," *Zeszyty Teoretyczno-Polityczne*, 1957, no. 1/2, p. 231 (originally published in *Morgn-frayhayt*, September 1, 1956).

862 "List otwarty do tow. Leonida Iljiczowa," *Zeszyty Teoretyczno-Polityczne*, 1957, no. 1/2, p. 234 (originally published in *Folks-shtime*, November 3, 1956). Emphasis in original.

863 G. Berendt, "Udział Żydów polskich w walce o pamięć i rehabilitację twórców radzieckiej kultury żydowskiej – lata 1955–1956," in: *Jewish-Polish and Jewish-Russian Contacts*, ed. W. Moskovich and I. Fijałkowska-Janiak, Jerusalem–Gdańsk 2003, pp. 161–162.

Urgings “not to speak ill of the dead” were also protested by other representatives of TSKŻ. When Soviet Yiddish writer Hirsh Bloshteyn criticized the pessimistic tone of the poetry published in *Yidische shriftn*, Sfard, by then editor-in-chief, answered him in the *Folks-shtime*:

The sadness, and sometimes even despair, evident in contemporary Yiddish poetry is not some kind of poetic mannerism that can be debated. [...Rather,] it is a cry of profound pain that cannot and must not be smothered; on the contrary, [it should be] heard everywhere. [...] Doesn't Comrade Bloshteyn know that in the wake of the great tragedy [i.e., the Holocaust], several other tragedies have taken place in Jewish life that, while incomparably smaller in size, are however not smaller in their measure of moral and human humiliation?⁸⁶⁴

As a result of this incident, the *Folks-shtime* (with the approval, it must be remembered, of the Polish authorities), acquired a nonconformist reputation in the Soviet Union. Soviet Jews were not permitted to subscribe to the newspaper; as such, the only way to obtain a copy was by requesting that an acquaintance in Poland forward it concealed as personal mail.⁸⁶⁵ Back issues of the April 4, 1956 issue, in particular, were made available only to select readers, since it was a specially protected document.⁸⁶⁶ When in 1956 the *Birobidzhaner shtern* was flooded with letters to the editor from abroad, local Party officials suspected that the letters were instigated by the *Folks-shtime*, because Polish Jews were the only foreign subscribers to the publication.

In Jewish Matters, We Are Always More Catholic Than the Pope

Another event of April 1956 was the Third National Congress of the TSKŻ in Warsaw. The *Folks-shtime*'s front page sported a telegram with greetings on the occasion of the Congress sent from Moscow, signed by a group of fourteen Yiddish writers, including, among others, Shmuel Halkin and Moyshe Broderzon, who had both recently been released from Gulag camps. The newspaper reported that when Smolar read the telegram aloud, the delegates in the hall reacted with “a boisterous ovation.”⁸⁶⁷ The congress itself was boisterous enough, with 400

864 D. Sfard, “Vegn dem hoypt-forvurf fun khaver H. Bloshteyn tsu di *Yidische shriftn*,” *Folks-shtime*, January 5, 1957, p. 4.

865 G. Estraikh, “The Yiddish-Language Communist Press,” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 20, 2004, p. 76.

866 G. Estraikh, “Literature Versus Territory: Soviet Jewish Cultural Life in the 1950s,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 33, 2003, pp. 31–32.

867 A. K., “III land-tszamenfor fun kultur-gezelschaftlekhn farband fun di yidn in Poyln,” *Folks-shtime*, April 17, 1956, p. 1.

delegates and guests from 40 cities gathered in the assembly hall of the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw, demanding that the representatives of the TSKŻ Board explain their stance during the Stalin years: what had they known about the conditions facing Soviet Jews and Jews in the Eastern Bloc more generally? Had they believed the denunciations launched against the JAC and other victims of Stalinist repression?

As TSKŻ secretary general, David Sfar delivered an address discussing TSKŻ activity to date, with an emphasis on the Association's role in "the struggle for world peace." He admitted that TSKŻ had taken a "sectarian approach" to (i.e., had been overly zealous in disowning) petit-bourgeois artisans, religious Jews and former members of other parties. Speaking about the mistakes made during the cult-of-personality and "Beriovschina" period, he repeated Smolar's point, cautioning against taking the facts out of context. According to Sfar, the culprit behind all these mistakes was supposedly an unspecified enemy in the Party ranks, who was also guilty of a "traitorous provocation" against the KPP; however, this enemy had not succeeded in shaking the Polish Communists' confidence in the Soviet Union. Finally, Sfar appealed to TSKŻ members to pay greater attention to Jewish schools, the Yiddish theater, the Jewish Historical Institute and contacts with other major Jewish communities around the world.⁸⁶⁸

Twenty-one people took part in the sometimes-heated discussion following Sfar's address (out of more than fifty who had requested to speak). The detailed responses of the TSKŻ Board were printed in the *Folks-shtime*, probably partly in an attempt to save face in the wake of the Stalinist catastrophe, and also to forestall gossip and speculation. Those who came under the most fire were Zachariasz, the eminence grise of the TSKŻ and its chief ideologist from 1950 to 1956, and Mirski, who had written an infamous article "unmasking" the Zionists and the Kremlin doctors, for which he was now being brought to task.⁸⁶⁹

When he spoke, Zachariasz defended the TSKŻ leadership from the accusation of not having spoken out during the Stalin era by claiming that they had been silent only "externally"; "internally," they had attempted to ascertain what was really happening to the Jews in the USSR. Zachariasz claimed that TSKŻ leaders had spoken about the question amongst themselves and raised it

868 "Mit tsutroy zikh batsien tsum poshetn mentsh: Fragmentn funem barikhts-referat fun der hoypt-farvaltung, velkhn es hot opgegebn der kh. Dovid Sfar," *Folks-shtime*, April 18, 1956, pp. 3-5.

869 M. Mirski, "Syjonizm: Narzędzie amerykańskiego imperializmu," *Nowe Drogi*, 1953, no. 2, reprinted in: *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce 1944-1968: Teksty źródłowe*, ed. A. Cała and H. Datner-Śpiewak, Warsaw 1997, pp. 139-141.

in conversations with the Politburo of the PZPR Central Committee and with “[our] Soviet friends,” but that a direct question about the fate of Yiddish culture in the USSR would have gotten the TSKŻ labeled an enemy of the Soviet Union.⁸⁷⁰ Mirski was even more defensive, emphasizing that his opinion on Zionism was not subject to change, and that he was guilty of unfair and rash judgment only in the case of the Kremlin doctors. He also declared that he considered himself a spiritual victim of “Beriovschina,” which apparently did not increase his popularity.⁸⁷¹

The “April thaw” resulted in an increase in the popularity of the *Folks-shtime*, which had not previously enjoyed much respect among its readers.⁸⁷² Demands were even heard for an increase in its circulation.⁸⁷³ This increase in popularity was prompted not only by the end of the silence about previously unmentionable subjects, but also by its new, less propagandistic writing style. The *Folks-shtime* gave up its subtitle “Organ of the Central Committee of the PZPR,” reflecting a desire to become the voice of all Jews in the People’s Poland, not only Party members.⁸⁷⁴ However, no particular changes were made in the composition of the TSKŻ Board. Smolar remained the chairman and Sfarid the secretary general.

Some TSKŻ materials from 1956 to 1957 have survived—in particular, minutes of open meetings of local branches of the TSKŻ, often with TSKŻ Board members present. A particularly stormy meeting of an expanded TSKŻ plenum took place in Wrocław on May 6–7, 1956. Sixty-five people attended the deliberations on the first day; on the second, the number increased to 80. Herman Brecher, director of the Wrocław branch of the TSKŻ and a PZPR member, delivered a crushing speech criticizing the TSKŻ’s policies to date:

Unfortunately, some longtime comrades among us express themselves in keeping with the party line in public, but in private they sing a different tune. [...] Up until now, it has been customary in our milieu to allow Comrade Zachariasz to do the thinking for all of us. This must stop. We need look no further to find the reason why we have not managed to spread our activity into broader circles of the Jewish community. Comrade Sfarid’s speech at the Third TSKŻ Congress was, in my opinion, not accurate, a sign

870 S. Zachariasz, “Di ikerdike oyfgabn, velkhe shteyen far undz in itstikn moment,” *Folks-shtime*, April 26, 1956, p. 5.

871 M. Mirski, “Derklerung vegn a gevisn artikl,” *Folks-shtime*, April 28, 1956, p. 6.

872 Berendt, “Cele, treść i metody,” pp. 93–95.

873 Minutes of a meeting of the TSKŻ Łódź branch board, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 102, p. 138,

874 “Derklerung fun dem redaktsye-kolektiv fun der *Folks-shtime*,” *Folks-shtime*, December 8, 1956, p. 1.

that he either is not in touch with the Jewish masses or does not say what he is really thinking. We can boast of real achievements in various fields, e.g., building theater groups and other amateur ensembles, but we have not managed to win over the broad masses for our cause. [...] Comrade Zachariasz, in his speeches on the subject of collaboration with religious Jews, said that our goal was for religious Jews to become Marxists, not for Marxists to become religious; he added ironically that perhaps there are some 'tsadiks' [meaning religious Jews but with pejorative intent] in the hall. I consider this tone in relation to religious people to be out of place; they should be taken seriously, and our collaboration with them should have other purposes besides agitating against their eating of matzo on Easter [!] and their synagogue attendance. *In Jewish matters* [i.e., in opposing traditional Jewish practice and signs of "nationalistic tendencies"], *we are always more Catholic than the Pope himself*. [...] From time to time, we conduct a campaign to sign up new subscribers for the *Folks-shtime*. Agitators go from door to door collecting money for subscriptions, but they are not in fact agitators, merely ordinary bill collectors whose role is exclusively to collect money. These campaigns are necessary only because the *Folks-shtime* is uninteresting and has nothing creative in it. The Polish press has been creative lately, and so it gets snatched up. The *Folks-shtime* does not provide true or comprehensive information about Israel, never writes about its positive aspects. Whenever it mentions the State of Israel, it only talks about strikes, arrests and the like. [...] As for Jewish books, I consider it absolutely unnecessary for Wrocław to receive copies for one thousand subscribers when in fact the books are read by at most 200 people and the rest treat them as wastepaper. There is no need to print so many copies that no one will read. Rather, we should focus on the quality of the printed word. We've been doing many things just for propaganda purposes, for example moving the Yiddish theater to Warsaw despite the fact that the Jewish population is predominantly concentrated in Lower Silesia. Yiddish writers should not reside in Warsaw, but in Lower Silesia. The TSKŻ is made up of both Party members and non-members, but both the Presidium of the Board and the executive bureau include only Party members. Changes must be made in the composition of the TSKŻ Board; in particular, Comrade Smolar must resign from the post of Chairman.⁸⁷⁵

The criticisms that Brecher had raised came up again and again in the remarks of the following speakers. Others also expressed disapproval of the attitudes of some members of the TSKŻ Board, particularly Smolar and Zachariasz. For example, a certain Brodt echoed Brecher's critique: "My colleagues harbor antipathy toward Comrades Zachariasz and Smolar because they always respond to bad behavior on the part of Jews by being more Catholic than the Pope."⁸⁷⁶

875 Minutes of the expanded TSKŻ plenum in Wrocław, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 74, unpaginated. Emphasis added.

876 Minutes of the expanded TSKŻ plenum in Wrocław, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 74, unpaginated.

When Zachariasz was asked at the TSKŻ congress whether internment camps were being prepared in Poland for Jews once again, he denied it categorically and without hesitation—despite the fact, as he later admitted in a letter to Aleksander Zawadzki, Chairman of the Council of State, that he had no concrete knowledge of the matter: “[...]Some delegates harbored a grievance against me over my categorical denial of the rumor, because [they knew that] at the meeting of Polish writers, a question about the same matter had been left unanswered: the representative of the [PZPR] Central Committee who was in attendance did not contradict the rumor.”⁸⁷⁷

Other speakers criticized the rigidity of the TSKŻ’s work and the exclusivity of its leadership. Multiple speakers raised the issue of anti-Semitism in Poland, although some discussants considered the problem to be somewhat exaggerated. A speaker named Bilander, however, argued convincingly that: “We must remember that any increase in anti-Semitism prompts an increase in nationalist sentiment among Jews. The fact that many of those present at today’s session have heretofore kept their distance from us is a sign of both.”⁸⁷⁸

Meetings in other cities took a similar course. Izrael Białostocki from Szczecin complained of the “severe atmosphere of terror against TSKŻ activists,” and he informed the gathering that the local Jewish population was demanding “authoritative explanations from Party officials,” and expressly not from TSKŻ officials, in whom they had lost confidence.⁸⁷⁹ TSKŻ activists were sometimes stigmatized as “members of the Judenrat.”⁸⁸⁰ A plenary session of the Lodz branch board, at which the central TSKŻ Board was represented by Smolar, was attended by a hundred people. Among other things, attendees reproached the Board for not doing its job and for the fact that Jews in Poland continued to be treated as second-class citizens. One Ursztajn complained: “At present, our Association [the TSKŻ] is involved in cultural work only—[taking the stance that], unfortunately, we cannot solve any social problems. How long will we have to bow down? Didn’t we fight ‘for our freedom and yours’ [a common Polish slogan: “za wolność naszą i waszą”]? The Poles have [their freedom]—what about ours? We must begin an official press campaign. Should there be a major Jewish

877 Note by Zachariasz to Aleksander Zawadzki, AAN, Papers of Szymon Zachariasz, call no. 476/21, p. 157.

878 Minutes of the expanded TSKŻ plenum in Wrocław, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 74, unpaginated.

879 Minutes of the national conference of TSKŻ secretaries, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 74, unpaginated.

880 Minutes of the expanded session of the Board, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 102, p. 174,

community in Poland? If so, we want to have equal rights. The TSKŻ must do everything possible toward that end.”⁸⁸¹ At another meeting in Łódź, this time with Sfarđ representing the Board, one attendee commented: “We are making the same mistake as in 1949 [the beginning of the period of Stalinist repressions in Poland]. We are repeating the same phrases. We have nothing to offer the Jewish community that is truly reassuring. I am and have always been an opponent of Zionism, but I am not opposed to emigration from Poland, because for eleven years running, the ‘Jewish problem’ has continued to exist, and there is no guarantee that things will improve. Can we get a guarantee?”⁸⁸² The barrage of criticism became so extreme that, as one of the Łódź activists complained in December 1956: “If anyone who wants to attend a plenary session can enter at will, that amounts to too much democracy. This last plenum turned into a Bund meeting with Zionist slogans.”⁸⁸³

TSKŻ activists defended themselves, arguing: “It is true that not everything happened the way it should have, but at least space existed and still exists for Jewish life to develop freely”; they emphasized the contrast on this front with the Soviet Union. They stressed that the priority now was to ensure that Jewish life in Poland continue to exist: “Our most important sociopolitical duty today is to emphasize that Jewish culture can and must be fostered in the socialist countries, and we are the only Jewish community that can prove it.”⁸⁸⁴ Dovid Szlosberg, a Party member and the vice-chairman of the Wrocław branch of the TSKŻ, made a characteristic declaration, which is worth quoting almost in its entirety because it captures the mindset of the members of the Board:

We social activists are living through a difficult period. Difficult not only because we are being criticized by the masses, but also because we ourselves are experiencing doubts, many of us. Our core activists, after all, have mostly dedicated their entire lives to this ideal. *If all our work thus far has been misguided, and that is why the masses are disconnected from us, then we have no choice but to ask ourselves whether we have a raison d'être at this point.* I think that most of the people who dislike us are those who do not identify with socialist Poland. If we were to tell Jews: ‘Leave Poland,’ perhaps they would like us. When conditions were bad [for Jews] in the Soviet Union, all of us lamented that fact; now that the Soviet Communist Party has revealed and explained everything, it should be easier for us. Of course, we lament the loss of so many precious people, among them

881 AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 102, p. 165.

882 Minutes of the expanded session of the Board, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 102, p. 177.

883 Minutes of the session of the TSKŻ presidium, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 102, p. 152.

884 Minutes of the expanded TSKŻ plenum in Wrocław, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 74, unpaginated.

many Jews, at the hands of ‘Beriovschchina.’ Yet we cannot draw the conclusion that if anti-Semitism still exists in the Soviet Union after all these years, it means that there is no place for Jews in the socialist bloc. Why should we give up our faith in socialism? [... W]e have devoted our entire lives to the struggle to realize it. We have to listen to what the masses are saying, but we also have to draw appropriate conclusions. [...]

Should we change the makeup of our Board? This raises a second question: Have we encouraged the development of new Zachariaszes, whether flawed or not, who are ready to step into leadership? We Communists have proved many times that we have the ability to correct our mistakes. Of course we cannot tell Jews: ‘Leave!’ On the other hand, if they want to leave, we cannot stop them by force. Rumors are circulating that internment camps for Jews were being set up. Even if this is true—it too is only a product of Beria [and thus will soon be halted now that Beria has been condemned]. We know after all that at a time when Jewish activists were being discriminated against in the Soviet Union, Jewish cultural activity was developing here unhindered. Our Association played no small part in this, and we must remember that. We are the only Jewish community carrying out such expansive cultural activity. We must see to it that the information in our publications about the State of Israel be objective and universal [...] Our purpose is and must continue to be to mobilize [the masses] to achieve the goals that our Party has defined.⁸⁸⁵

Attacked from all directions, the members of the Board found themselves in a difficult situation. They were being called to account for what not only they, but also the Party, had done and left undone over the years.

We Have to Let Somebody Go Too

Meanwhile, a conflict had arisen in the PZPR between the so-called Puławska group, a pro-reform faction, and the Natolin group, which was loyal to Moscow and embraced Polish nationalism. In March 1956 a PZPR Central Committee plenum was convened for the purpose of electing a new secretary general. There, Roman Zambrowski’s election to a position on the Secretariat of the Central Committee was subjected to scrutiny, considering that he was of Jewish origin, a fact that made him unpalatable to many delegates. At a session of the Politburo in May, Natolin group members laid their cards on the table: Aleksander Zawadzki described Jakub Berman as “a Jewish intellectual from a bourgeois family who did not grow up in revolutionary conditions”⁸⁸⁶ and accused him of favoring comrades of Jewish origin when appointing officials.

885 Ibid. Emphasis added.

886 Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm*, p. 230.

The result of the “battle on high” was, as Sfarid wrote, “a spontaneous outbreak of anti-Semitism” in the country.⁸⁸⁷ This was, of course, only one of the issues on the table in Polish public life in 1956; there can, however, be no doubt that it was the most important one for Jews. Anti-Semitic incidents took place in Łódź, Wałbrzych, Bytom, Dzierżoniów, Legnica, and elsewhere.

As Paweł Machcewicz writes, the outbreak intensified in parallel with the “thaws” underway in the overall political situation, with a particular uptick after it became known that Jakub Berman had left the Politburo and the government: the departure of a highly placed official of Jewish origin combined with the gradual discreditation of Stalinism to give the impression that official deterrents to the expression of anti-Semitic sentiments were on the wane.⁸⁸⁸ Another dangerous moment occurred when at a plenum of the PZPR Central Committee, convened in response to the massive anti-government protests in June 1956 in Poznań, Zenon Nowak criticized the “excessive” presence of Jews in high Party positions. He also suggested that the lack of public confidence in the Party was a result of the visibility of Jews in official positions.⁸⁸⁹

Despite the fact that Nowak did not speak these words in a public forum, rumors of anti-Semitic speeches at the Central Committee plenum quickly circulated throughout the country. Anxiety rose in the Jewish community. As Berendt writes: “[Once again,] the highest state dignitaries and Party decision-makers of Jewish origin avoided making reference to matters connected to the Jewish community, and they were not connected to its institutions; despite this, [the precariousness of] their situation was perceived by thousands of Jews to be an indicator of their own degree of safety.”⁸⁹⁰ Yet in a discussion of Nowak’s comment at a forum of the TSKŻ presidium, Zachariasz and a group of his devotees defended Nowak from accusations of anti-Semitism. According to Sfarid, Zachariasz posed the following rhetorical question: “What would you say if in Israel, most or many posts were held by Arabs?”⁸⁹¹

The anti-Semitic current surfacing in public life reminded some people of their Jewish origins and induced them to establish contact with the TSKŻ: “People who had until then passed for Poles and had had nothing to do with the Jewish community began to visit the TSKŻ presidium. These visitors included

887 *Mit zikh*, p. 200.

888 P. Machcewicz, “Antisemitism in Poland in 1956,” *Polin* 9, 1996, p. 172.

889 Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm*, pp. 236–237.

890 Berendt, *Życie żydowskie*, p. 313.

891 *Mit zikh*, p. 209.

high-ranking military officers who had rendered great service in the battle for a ‘new Poland,’ directors of state-owned factories, and even doctors who held responsible positions. They all came to the TSKŻ for the first time, in order to ask the presidium to intervene on their behalf in cases of anti-Semitic behavior by the authorities.”⁸⁹²

The “Berman case” became symbolic, as changes in personnel “on high” provoked changes “down below” as well. Instances of Jews being dismissed from their jobs began to multiply. A characteristic comment was heard at the Szczecin shipyard—a justification for firing a certain Szapiro, who ran a newsstand there—“Berman was let go, and so was [Hilary] Minc;⁸⁹³ we have to let somebody go too.”⁸⁹⁴

On the other hand, it is possible that some of the anti-Semitism in 1956 was in the eye of the beholder. It is difficult to estimate how many Jews were fired, and it is mostly impossible to determine which of these firings were motivated by anti-Semitic prejudice. Berendt notes that “the average consumer of media reports would have gotten the impression that no Jews had ever been fired before,” considering the outrage with which the firings were greeted. The fact that the Polish media had not previously discussed such cases would also have contributed to this impression.⁸⁹⁵ Undoubtedly, the loosening of the Stalinist corset allowed for the resurfacing of opinions and resentments that had previously been hidden for political reasons; yet Paweł Machcewicz casts doubt on how widespread displays of anti-Semitism in 1956 actually were, considering that during the massive workers’ protests against the Communist government in Poznań in June 1956, not a single anti-Semitic slogan was reported, nor were any launched in later commentary on the events.⁸⁹⁶ It is possible that, just as the Polish population in the Eastern Provinces in 1939 “anticipated” disloyal behavior on the part of Jews, Polish Jews in 1956 “expected” displays of anti-Semitic feeling on the part of the Polish population.

TSKŻ activists did all they could to calm the upset, anxious populace. At an expanded session of the board of the TSKŻ branch in Łódź, Sfarid assured those present that:

892 Ibid., p. 207.

893 Hilary Minc (1905–1974), economist and Communist politician, played a role in the top Polish Communist leadership from 1949 to 1956. In 1956 he was removed from the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Party.

894 Machcewicz, “Antisemitism in Poland in 1956,” p. 179.

895 Berendt, *Życie żydowskie*, p. 308.

896 Machcewicz, “Antisemitism in Poland in 1956,” p. 177.

[...] We rest in the knowledge that socialism and Communism are in complete contradiction to anti-Semitism. Yet there can be errors, which we must fight. We are encouraged by the fact that for twelve years, we have been building our lives in Poland without impediment. [...] It is unfair that now that mistakes have been uncovered, people are shouting that the situation is bad. It is, after all, much better than when Beria and his ilk were in charge. [...] It is impossible to solve the Jewish problem in Poland by leaving. This is what we said in the PZPR Central Committee. In a Marxist country, the Jewish problem can be solved only by means of the provision of equal rights. On the other hand, we consider it necessary to take a humanitarian stance toward those who must rejoin their families. We will continue to work for Jews who are staying in Poland. We also consider any hiring and firing on an ethnic basis to be in contradiction to Marxism, and we've said as much to the Central Committee. We take this position as socialists, not as Jews. [...] We are not fighting against Israel, only against the Zionist viewpoint that asserts that Jews cannot live in any other country. [...] Many Jews want to come back from Israel, and we will raise this matter [with the Central Committee] as well.⁸⁹⁷

Sometimes Sfarđ reacted to accusations violently: when he was once accused, as a representative of the TSKŹ, of dishonesty, he reacted by throwing a chair at the accuser.⁸⁹⁸

One of the effects of the events of 1956 was a new wave of Jewish emigration from Poland. De facto liberalization of emigration regulations had taken place earlier, in October 1955, but emigration rates spiked between July 1956 (in the wake of the Central Committee plenum at which Nowak had spoken) and April 1957 in particular. Cooperative workers and intellectuals predominated among the émigrés,⁸⁹⁹ along with many TSKŹ members and former members of the KPP. In the provinces, the TSKŹ was in collapse. In February 1957, the Tarnów branch reported:

It has gotten to the point where not only have 90 % of the members applied to emigrate to Israel, but almost all those on the Board (other than Citizen Broniec, who has also applied) have [not only applied but even already] received permission [to emigrate to Israel], as have very many members. *We do not know to whom to hand over the reins of the institution, since we do not foresee any new leaders arising.* Our instinct is to close up shop, particularly considering that the chairman, deputy and secretary are on the verge of leaving any day now. We request that you advise us on this matter. The self-creativity section has endured so far, but with every passing day it evaporates more as

897 AŹIH, TSKŹ, call no. 102, pp. 176–177.

898 As told by Leon Sfarđ, personal communication.

899 Stankowski, "Nowe spojrzenie," pp. 121, 125.

more parents with children emigrate; there is less and less interest [in TSKŻ activities], and in some cases nearly zero.⁹⁰⁰

With so many emigrating, the TSKŻ had no choice but to emphasize its support for their freedom to do so if it wanted to avoid appearing entirely out of touch. This was a decision made after some calculation—Jakub Wassersztrum, an activist from Silesia, noted, e.g., that “this is a portion of society that cannot possibly be persuaded to stay here, seeing as their desire to emigrate is so strong. [...] If we can get rid of this small number, then our work will be easier, and it will be easier to win over those who have only recently begun to have the urge [to emigrate] and who are still on the fence about it.”⁹⁰¹ TSKŻ leaders realized that if they continued to take a stand against emigration, the Association would simply lose the remainder of its membership. The TSKŻ began to assist those who wished to emigrate in obtaining permission to do so, particularly those who were elderly or sick or had close family members in Israel.⁹⁰²

Emigrants to Israel were motivated by various desires: to reunite with family members; to live in what some of them regarded as the Jewish homeland; to live in a Jewish state where they would be free to adhere to religious practices, including observing the Sabbath and kashrut; to take advantage of the opportunity to emigrate from Poland, which they did not believe could be reformed (especially considering the example of the unsuccessful Hungarian revolution of 1956); and to seek greater safety and stability for family members, especially children. Emigrant Noach Lasman wrote: “I am simply afraid of what could happen to my family if the authorities were to lose control for even a few days. I am afraid of the mob, which holds the Jews responsible for all the regime’s mistakes and nonsense.”⁹⁰³ The reintroduction of Catholic catechism classes into the schools after the “thaw” led to a relaxation of the pressure to adhere to the official stance of atheism and increased Jews’ fear for the fate of their children.⁹⁰⁴

900 Note from the TSKŻ Tarnów branch to the TSKŻ Board in Warsaw, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 75, unpaginated. Emphasis added.

901 Minutes of the plenary session of the TSKŻ Board in Łódź, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 102, p. 188.

902 Over a dozen appeals from the TSKŻ to the Ministry of the Interior on behalf of potential emigrants regarding passports or the slow pace of emigration procedures can be found in AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 3, unpaginated.

903 N. Lasman, *Wspomnienia z Polski (1 sierpnia 1944 – 30 kwietnia 1957)*, Warsaw 1997, p. 107.

904 F. Toruńczyk and F. Ben, “Żydzi polscy w nowej ojczyźnie,” *Kultura*, 1958, no. 11, p. 85.

Pessimism and Disappointment

In addition to the emigration of Jews from Poland, the TSKŻ was faced with a new challenge—the repatriation of Polish Jews from the USSR. Following extended negotiations between the Polish and Soviet governments, the Soviet government announced in January 1956 that it planned to streamline the process of applying to emigrate to Poland for “Soviet citizens of Polish and Jewish ethnicity as well as members of their families who did not take earlier advantage of the right to be evacuated to Poland [...] and who have close relatives in the Polish People’s Republic.”⁹⁰⁵ Jews were the only ethnic minority with origins in interwar Poland to be granted this right. Their repatriation procedure was required to be the same as that of Poles. However, their repatriation put a new kind of pressure on the TSKŻ.

The TSKŻ, the only legally functioning Jewish organization in Poland at the time other than the weak ZRWM, found itself compelled to provide an ever-growing group of people with food, shelter and care. Judging by the frequency of the notes written by TSKŻ representatives to Premier Józef Cyrankiewicz, the Association took to the task quite energetically. In late December, Sford and Smolar requested that the Ministry of Finance unfreeze Jewish organizational funds that the Ministry had previously appropriated so that they could be put toward aid for the repatriates.⁹⁰⁶ On February 16, 1957, representatives of the Board complained that they had been waiting for six weeks to be told when the premier would receive a TSKŻ delegation, which would present him with information about the situation of the Jewish repatriates, as well as about “a host of instances of harassment and discrimination taking place in the official emigration process [for Polish Jews leaving for Israel, presumably].”⁹⁰⁷ In their next note, dated five days later, they appealed to the premier to mention anti-Semitism in his upcoming address to the Sejm:

Jews in this country have high hopes for the new Sejm, for the role that it can play in stabilizing conditions for the Jewish population in Poland, among other things. The Jewish community requests that Comrade Premier, in his statement on behalf of the

905 M. Ruchniewicz, *Repatriacja ludności polskiej z ZSRR w latach 1955–59*, Warsaw 2000, p. 114. For more recent research see G. Estraikh, “Escape through Poland: Soviet Jewish Emigration in the 1950s,” *Jewish History* 31, 3–4 (2018), pp. 291–317.

906 Note from the TSKŻ Board to Prime Minister J. Cyrankiewicz, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 2, unpaginated.

907 Note from the TSKŻ Board to Prime Minister J. Cyrankiewicz, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 3, unpaginated.

government, take an explicit stand on the so-called Jewish problem, outline a plan to defeat all manifestations of ethnic discrimination, and assure Jews of their full personal safety, their real and clear-cut right to work, and the opportunity to continue to develop Jewish culture and social life.

As the Socio-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland, which is in daily contact with Jews in this country and abroad and is in touch with their mood and frame of mind, we are profoundly convinced that such an authoritative declaration by the government in the context of the Sejm would undeniably help to lighten the heavy atmosphere that has weighed upon Jews in the country for a long time, and would improve the reputation of Poland abroad, particularly among the millions of Jews living elsewhere.⁹⁰⁸

Several articles were published in the press around this time condemning anti-Semitism,⁹⁰⁹ and in April 1957, the Secretariat of the PZPR Central Committee issued a circular on anti-Semitism addressed to the provincial branches of the Party. Among other things, the circular included the following statement:

The Party interprets the aspiration of the Jewish population to emigrate from Poland as a result above all of our failure to guard actively against manifestations of anti-Semitism, including on the part of Party members and activists. Party agencies must urgently declare war on these manifestations and endeavor to explain the party line in such a way as to persuade the Jewish population to stay in this country.⁹¹⁰

It turned out to be difficult to put these recommendations into practice. Most of the Jews living in Poland had already decided to emigrate. Moreover, most of the new Jewish repatriates from the USSR made no bones about the fact that they regarded Poland as a mere waystation en route to Israel, which antagonized those repatriates who did intend to remain in Poland. Many documents from this period mention anti-Semitic reactions to newly arrived repatriates, many of whom spoke poor Polish and did not particularly identify with Poland.⁹¹¹

However, even those repatriates who planned to continue on to Israel as soon as possible needed food, shelter, and sometimes medical care during the six to eight weeks necessary for finalizing passport and transport details. The TSKŻ organized special centers for repatriates in Warsaw, Śródborów, Wrocław, Legnica, Świdnica, Dzierżoniów, Pieszyce, Kłodzko, Bielawa, Wałbrzych, Łódź and Katowice, which housed about 800–1,000 repatriates; about 150 more found lodgings elsewhere (most likely with the help of relatives or friends). Yet in their next note to the premier, TSKŻ organizers wrote anxiously that some repatriates,

908 Ibid.

909 Berendt, *Życie żydowskie*, p. 298.

910 Circular reprinted in: *Dzieje Żydów w Polsce*, p. 153.

911 See, e.g., Commission for Ethnic Affairs, AAN, KC PZPR, call no. 237/XIV–154, p. 13.

including children, were sleeping in train stations, and thus financial resources were urgently needed.⁹¹² Considering that summer was approaching, they also asked to be allowed to establish summer camps for several hundred repatriated children who spoke only Russian and Yiddish, and thus would not be comfortable at state-sponsored summer camps where the language of operation was Polish.⁹¹³ They also proposed to open cooperatives and workshops for repatriates who were having trouble finding employment.⁹¹⁴

TSKŻ leaders also continued to appeal for the simplification of emigration procedures, sometimes even emphasizing that it was in Poland's best interest to get rid of some of the repatriates: "The new arrivals include a number of sick, elderly and disabled people who are incapable of working. Since they could become a burden to society, they should be enabled to join their family members who are living outside of Poland."⁹¹⁵

Indeed, considering the difficulties posed by the prospect of absorbing the repatriates into Polish society, their widespread desire to leave immediately for Israel was more or less a relief from the point of view of the authorities. Their requests to emigrate were treated with unwonted liberalism: from mid-1956 to the end of March 1957, 3,500 repatriates were registered; 3,000 of them applied to emigrate, and 2,100 of their applications were granted.⁹¹⁶ On the whole, an estimated 266,187 people returned to Poland from the USSR in 1955–1959, including 18,743 Jews (about 7 % of the total).⁹¹⁷ During the same time period, over 51,000 Jews (of whom 13,000 were Soviet repatriates) left Poland; the majority of these emigrants (over 42,000 of them) settled in Israel.⁹¹⁸

The liberal attitude of the Polish authorities toward emigration to Israel underwent a change in 1957, almost certainly due to Soviet disapproval. On March 8, 1957, the Polish Ministry of the Interior placed a moratorium on the

912 Notes from the TSKŻ Board to Prime Minister J. Cyrankiewicz of February 28, 1957 and of May 28, 1957, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 3, unpaginated.

913 Note from the TSKŻ Board to the Ministry of Education, Department of Leisure for Children and Youth, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 3, unpaginated.

914 Commission for Ethnic Affairs, AAN, KC PZPR, call no. 237/XIV/138, p. 22; Note from the TSKŻ Board to the Minister of Light Industry and Crafts, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 3, unpaginated.

915 Commission for Ethnic Affairs, AAN, KC PZPR, call no. 237/XIV/138, p. 23; Note from the TSKŻ Board to Ministry of Interior, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 3, unpaginated.

916 Ruchniewicz, *Repatriacja ludności polskiej*, p. 229.

917 A. Stankowski, "Nowe spojrzenie," p. 129.

918 *Ibid.*, p. 131.

issuing of emigration permits for repatriates,⁹¹⁹ in connection with the renegotiation of the repatriation agreement with the USSR. A month later, the Ministry reported: “Jewish citizens are by and large feeling pessimistic and disappointed because of the impossibility of emigrating.”⁹²⁰ Permits to emigrate were once again issued beginning in autumn of 1957, but a year later, Soviet authorities declared that applications to repatriate to Poland submitted by Jews who had earlier applied to emigrate to Israel were “irrelevant,” thus unilaterally narrowing access to the rights set forth in the repatriation agreement.⁹²¹ Polish scholar Małgorzata Ruchniewicz argues that the two states entered into a “tacit agreement” to put the brakes on emigration, considering that the Polish government apparently did not attempt to intervene in defense of the right of Jews to be repatriated.⁹²²

One well-known figure who left Poland during this time period was theater director Michał Weichert. Accused of collaborating with the Nazis during the war and condemned by the Jewish Social Court of the CKŻP in 1949, he could no longer work in his profession. Thus, as soon as the borders were opened in 1956, he applied to emigrate. According to Weichert’s memoirs, several TSKŻ activists, including Julian Łazebnik, worked together to prevent him from working in the theater, and later stood in the way of his obtaining permission to emigrate. On the advice of an acquaintance, Weichert asked Sfarid to intercede. Sfarid’s intervention had the expected result: Weichert was granted a permit.⁹²³

The TSKŻ intervened in other individual cases as well, e.g., to expedite a request for a tourist passport for Marek Edelman, one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which would enable him to visit Israel.⁹²⁴ The TSKŻ likewise requested that Polish citizenship be reinstated for the poet Peysek Binecki, so that he could return to Poland from Israel.⁹²⁵

Indeed, a number of emigrants to Israel did not succeed in acclimating to life there and ultimately chose to return to Poland. Presumably, most such cases

919 Ruchniewicz, *Repatriacja ludności polskiej*, p. 232.

920 Ibid., pp. 232–233. See also: *Repatriacja ludności polskiej z ZSRR 1955–1959: Wybór dokumentów*, ed. B. Kącka and S. Stęпка, Warsaw 1994, p. 101.

921 A. Skrzypek, “O drugiej repatriacji Polaków z ZSRR (1954–1959),” *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, 1991, no. 4, p. 69.

922 Ruchniewicz, *Repatriacja ludności polskiej*, p. 234.

923 M. Weichert, *Zikhroynes*, vol. 4, Tel Aviv 1970, pp. 445–446.

924 Note from the TSKŻ Board to the Bureau of Foreign Passports, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 3, unpaginated.

925 Note from the TSKŻ Board to the Director of the MFA Consular Bureau, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 2, unpaginated.

involved people who had decided to emigrate on an impulse, and who as a result were quickly disappointed by living conditions in Israel,⁹²⁶ but there were also some cases of couples in mixed marriages (generally a Jewish man married to a non-Jewish woman) who returned to Poland after discovering that neither the non-Jewish wife nor her non-halachically Jewish children would be embraced by Israeli society. From July to early December 1957, about 1,200 people (about 350 families) applied for permission to return from Israel to Poland, mainly to Lower Silesia, Warsaw and Łódź. Mixed couples received priority, as did those on whose behalf Party or state officials intervened.⁹²⁷ The Secretariat of the PZPR Central Committee issued a statement emphasizing that those returning from Israel would not be treated as repatriates or offered the associated welfare benefits, and that former Party members would not be readmitted to the Party. The statement also recommended that Party authorities and the TSKŻ exploit the fact that Jewish emigrants were returning from Israel in propaganda aiming to encourage Jewish repatriates from the USSR to remain in Poland.⁹²⁸

What Did Sholem Aleichem Do Wrong?

October 1956 overturned the world of the Polish Yiddish writers: both their readership and some of the writers themselves began to leave Poland. Two of Sfar'd's close friends—Leyb Olitsky and Binem Heller—were among those who left (both of them for Israel). Heller emigrated in February 1957 in the midst of a minor scandal on account of his poem “Okh, hot men mayn lebn mir tsebrokhn” (Ach, How My Life has Been Destroyed), which he had written in November 1956 in Brussels (on a visit to Belgium and France on his way back from his first visit to Israel). The poem expressed profound frustration:

Ach, how my life has been destroyed!
The flag of battle and of victory
Has even been torn from my hand
And I'm left alone on the sidelines.
Mocking looks out from gray eyes
Hatred seethes upon thin lips

926 For example, emigrant Leyb Ackerman explained his desire to leave Israel and return to Poland as follows: “No work or apartment, I find myself in very unpleasant conditions and cannot stand the heat” (Note from Leyb Ackerman to Ministry of Interior, AŻIH, TSKŻ, call no. 3, unpaginated).

927 Commission for Ethnic Affairs, AAN, KC PZPR, call no. 237/XIV/137, p. 13.

928 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

I have been skinned alive
And my poetry has been humiliated.⁹²⁹

Sfard lost Heller and Olitsky, but he temporarily regained Moyshe Broderzon, who contacted him from Moscow on July 14, 1956, soon after his release from the Gulag.⁹³⁰ Broderzon arrived in Warsaw in late July 1956. After his several years of imprisonment, he looked—as the then-nine-year-old Leon Sfard now recalls—like a “living corpse.”⁹³¹ Less than a month later, on August 17, he died suddenly of a heart attack. His funeral at the Jewish cemetery on Okopowa Street seemed a bad omen for the future of Yiddish culture in Poland.

In 1957 Sfard published a book of poetry, his first in many years, titled simply *Lider* (Poems). The book is in the spirit of the “thaw”—it contains no poems akin to the earlier “Tsu mayn partye” (To My Party), nor any commemorative poems of the type that he had published in the intervening years in *Yidishe shriftn* and the *Folks-shtime*; many of the poems reveal Sfard’s reaction to the “thaw” of 1956. His poem “Mir viln mer nisht” (We No Longer Want) presents a complaint about the popular attitude toward Jews:

They enumerate all their services to humanity,
For the past, for the future and for all time—
They thank them, they praise them, and they bless them—
And then they direct them to stand a little off to one side.⁹³²

One of the most moving poems in the collection is untitled and undedicated, but is most likely a response to Binem Heller’s departure from Poland.⁹³³ The poem speaks of someone who “goes away from his old friends,” leaving behind echoes of his poetry and of his “bold and honest word.” The poem expresses the effort on the part of someone who has stayed behind to grant “absolution” to someone who has gone away. It is not clear what sort of relationship Sfard had with Heller after the latter’s departure. One way or another, none of Heller’s later poems were published in the Polish Yiddish press—but that was the case for almost

929 B. Heller, “Okh, hot men mayn lebn mir tsebrokhn,” in: idem, *Baym rand*, Jerusalem 1957, p. 152.

930 Letter to Sfard from Broderzon of July 14, 1956, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Papers of Dovid Sfard, call no. 932, unpaginated.

931 As told by Leon Sfard, personal communication.

932 D. Sfard, “Mir viln mer nisht,” in: idem, *Lider*, Warsaw 1957, p. 54.

933 The poem begins “All rivers flow into the sea,” with a footnote explaining that this is a line from a poem of Heller’s – apparently a camouflaged way of dedicating the poem to Heller (*ibid.*, p. 67).

all of those who left, including Leyb Olitsky and Hadasa Rubin. The only emigrant who continued to be published in Poland was Peysekhn Binecki—perhaps because he made active attempts to return to Poland, although he was ultimately not granted a permit to do so.

In comparison to Sfarď’s usual restrained, intellectual style, the poems in *Lider* are more passionate and even lyrical. His contemporaries also interpreted it as an “October book”—Moyshe Shklar situated it against the backdrop of the “Communists’ tragedy,”⁹³⁴ whereas Jakub Zonszajn read it as an examination of conscience and a settling of internal accounts.⁹³⁵

How did Sfarď relate to the events of 1956? It is difficult to know. Hardly any extant sources allow us to reconstruct his views, although in a letter to the writer Chaim Sloves in 1957, he described the period as *yomim neroim fun khesbhn-hanefesh* [Days of Awe of examining one’s conscience—a reference to the days of reflection and repentance in the Jewish year-cycle, beginning with Rosh-Hashanah and ending with Yom Kippur].⁹³⁶

It appears that Khrushchev’s speech did not come as a complete surprise to Sfarď. Nevertheless, it must have confirmed his worst fears. As we saw before, the TSKŻ activists had probably begun to suspect much earlier that the members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee had been arrested. Sfarď must have realized how close he had come to being sent, like Broderzon, to the Gulag. As such, it would not be surprising if he began at that time a gradual process of distancing himself psychologically from the Party. At the same time, it would also be unsurprising if he chose indifference and distance over open rebellion: in 1956, Sfarď was over fifty years old, and he had spent most of his life as a committed Communist. A complete and radical break with the Party and with the ideology of communism would have required him to call into question everything that he had believed up until then. It would have meant a concession of utter defeat.

Why did it take until 1956 for the participants in the Jewish Communist milieu in Poland to reach their breaking point? They certainly experienced doubts and skepticism earlier, during the Kremlin doctors’ case, among other moments. Yet it took the public revelation of the blow to Yiddish culture in the USSR to push them over the edge. Criticism of the State of Israel and the Zionist

934 M. Shklar, “Vegn nayem bukh *Lider* fun Dovid Sfarď,” *Folks-shtime*, March 22, 1958, p. 4.

935 J. Zonszajn, “Lider fun a shverer tsayt,” *Yidishe shriftn*, 1960, no. 7–8, p. 8.

936 Letter from D. Sfarď to Ch. Sloves of January 16, 1957, Bibliothèque Medem in Paris, Archive of Chaim Sloves, unpaginated.

movement for being “imperialistic” did not bother them so much—but an attack on Yiddishland and its language and culture was in their eyes a fatal sin.

Another question that arises is why Sford did not decide to emigrate soon after October 1956 (especially considering that, as we will see, his first visit to Israel made a major impression on him). One possibility is that even at that late date, he considered emigration to be a form of desertion that he could tolerate in others, but not in himself. Additionally, despite the events that aroused anxiety and disappointment in Polish Jews, many other events in the same time period provoked joy and hope; for example, Władysław Gomułka’s release from prison and readmission to the Party. Gomułka’s rehabilitation suggested that the Party was willing to acknowledge its mistakes. For a time, Gomułka radiated a sort of “national savior” image that restored a measure of hope to the Polish public sphere: after being named first secretary (despite a tense interaction with an enraged Soviet delegation headed by Nikita Khrushchev, who threatened a military intervention), he established greater independence from the Soviet Union (which enabled him, among other things, to dismiss Soviet advisors and pro-Soviet Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky); he also helped to repair relations between the Polish state and the Catholic Church and released Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński from prison. It is not insignificant that unrest in Poland never reached a scale comparable to that in Hungary. As Zbysław Rykowski and Wiesław Władyka wrote:

It was mainly the Gomułka phenomenon that prevented Warsaw from becoming Budapest. His life path, his personality, his return, which restored faith in the most basic values—all this caused people to see in him what they wanted to see and to hear in his speeches what they wanted to hear. [...] Revolutionary reformers perceived in him a Polish path to socialism; the working class a chance for a better life; [...] the peasants—a guarantee of landownership and of the removal of the yoke of administrative pressure; Catholics—hope for the release of Cardinal Wyszyński as well as for the normalization of relations with the Church; intellectuals—freedom of speech and artistic freedom; the state apparatus—the promise that they would retain the upper hand in the Party.⁹³⁷

What did Jewish Communists believe Gomułka could offer them? He was a former member of the KPP, and thus they assumed that he would look kindly upon the activities of the Jewish cultural milieu and support, or at least not suppress, Jewish schools and the Yiddish press and publishing industry. They assumed that considering that Yiddish institutions had survived the gloomy years of Stalinism, they were certainly under no threat in these newer, “more

937 Z. Rykowski and W. Władyka, *Polska próba: Październik '56*, Krakow 1989, p. 258.

enlightened” times. All the Jewish Communists, it seems—except for those who emigrated—agreed on this point. As Sfard said:

We trusted one another. Among us, the group of Jewish activists, there were never any arguments or conflicts. Naturally, Mark saw it one way, Łazebnik another, there were different approaches to Jewish affairs—but there were no arguments between us over work. But everyone thought that after the war, after the Jewish catastrophe, the attitude toward Jews would change in a certain sense. When we saw that after the war, a new Yiddish monthly, a Yiddish newspaper began to be published in the Soviet Union, that a group of Yiddish writers had become active, we thought that a change had taken place in the Soviet approach to the Jewish problem. And even though in 1948 all the Soviet Jewish writers and activists were arrested, we still thought that we were having an influence through our activities, that something was changing. That we were managing to convince [the authorities] that it was much better not to force Jews to stop being Jews. Not being forced to stop being Jews helps them to remain Communists; [in contrast,] coercion makes them become even more Jewish. Besides, we thought that the attitude toward us in Poland was even influencing [the attitude toward Jews in] the Soviet Union.⁹³⁸

Nevertheless, the situation facing Jews in the USSR did concern the TSKŻ activists. In March 1958, Smolar informed the Commission for Ethnic Affairs of the PZPR Central Committee about the prevailing mood among Jews in Poland. Smolar stated that religious circles were promoting emigration, in cahoots with the Israeli diplomatic mission, and he proposed subsuming the ZRWM under the TSKŻ as a “Department for Religious Affairs,” in order to restrain their propagandistic activity somewhat. Afterwards, the representatives of the Commission noted:

[There is] great anxiety in the TSKŻ Board that Party policy toward Jews in Poland is changing, that limits on sociocultural freedom will be introduced, that the situation of Jews in Poland is becoming more like the situation of Jews in the USSR, where according to them [i.e., the TSKŻ Board], an unjust model of integration is being enforced, which will lead to the destruction of Yiddish culture.⁹³⁹

This anxiety led the PZPR caucus within the TSKŻ Board, particularly Smolar and Sfard, to compose a letter to Nikita Khrushchev, the leader of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party. In March 1958 the activists delivered the letter to the Secretariat of the PZPR Central Committee in order to request permission to send it on to Khrushchev himself. In the letter, the activists asked

938 Interview with Dovid Sfard, private collection of Michał Chęciński, pp. 5–6.

939 P. Madajczyk, “Mniejszości narodowe a Październik 1956 roku,” *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 1995, no. 1, p. 104.

Khrushchev to agree to meet with a TSKŻ delegation in order to discuss “several matters of principle” significant to the Communist movement in general and to Jews in particular. The letter detailed the USSR’s “faulty manner of solving the Jewish problem,” contrasting it with the rights enjoyed by the Jewish minority in Poland, particularly the right to conduct sociocultural activity in their own language. They wrote, among other things:

The criminal activity of the Beria band in the sphere of ethnic policy was grist for the mill of Jewish reaction, and it took a fatal toll on the work of Jewish Communists, not only in Poland. It has been difficult to answer the following sorts of questions [from TSKŻ members]: “Even if it is true that a group of writers, actors or activists have made mistakes—why is *all of Soviet* Yiddish literature being punished for that? Why has the Yiddish word been completely prohibited? What did Sholem Aleichem do so wrong that earned him a ban on the publication of his works in the *original*? Why was the Yiddish theater closed?” It has also been difficult to answer the question of why religious Jews are privileged over Jews with a Communist worldview: the former have the right to their religious institutions, whereas the latter have had their Soviet, secular culture taken away from them. [...]

As such, it has become necessary to evaluate the Jewish problem in its totality, in light of the experiential developments in Marxist-Leninist theory over the past twenty years.⁹⁴⁰

It is impossible not to be struck today by the authors’ naiveté in believing that a few Jewish Communists from Poland could hope to influence the Soviet Union’s ethnic policies by appealing to Marxist-Leninist principles. However, the letter also serves as proof that Polish Jews still felt tied to Soviet Jews as fellow citizens of Yiddishland. Beginning in 1956, *Yidishe shriftn* and the *Folks-shtime* began to publish the work of Jewish writers, poets and journalists living in the USSR. Some of these writers, including Mark Rakowski and Shloyme Belis-Legis, were later repatriated to Poland, where they buttressed the significantly reduced numbers of the local circle of Yiddish writers.

After the wave of emigration in the late 1950s, only about 30,000–40,000 Jews remained in Poland, of whom a significant percentage were culturally and linguistically assimilated. Meanwhile, according to the census of January 1959, about 2.3 million Jews were living in the USSR, of whom 600,000 declared that they spoke Yiddish.⁹⁴¹ As time passed, the TSKŻ increasingly prioritized maintaining their ties to Soviet Jews and attempting to facilitate contact between

940 AAN, KC PZPR, call no. 237/XIV-149, pp. 82–86. Emphasis in the original. I thank Dr. August Grabski for drawing my attention to this document and making it available to me.

941 Berendt, “Udział Żydów polskich,” p. 155.

the latter and Jewish communities in the West. Gennady Estraiikh attributes this to a selfish motive: “Such veteran Communists as Smolar and Sfarid were primarily motivated by a desire to make amends for their devotion to Stalin, and sought to prove that their circle followed the Leninist principles, condemning the Stalinist deviations.”⁹⁴² Either way, Soviet Jews only profited from it.

Sfarid and Smolar most likely did not receive permission from the Secretariat of the PZPR Central Committee to send their letter to Khrushchev. Their proposal to send a TSKŻ delegate to Moscow to discuss the “Jewish problem” was rejected by the Commission for Ethnic Affairs, which went on to reproach them for “the TSKŻ’s unfair tendency to conduct polemics in the press on the subject of the Jewish problem in the USSR,”⁹⁴³ which is most likely a reference to critiques of Khrushchev that they had tried (and been forbidden to) print in the pages of the *Folks-shtime*.⁹⁴⁴

The Commission for Ethnic Affairs was concerned about the degree of the TSKŻ’s influence on the Jewish community. In May 1959, representatives of the Commission researched the situation of the Jewish population by conducting conversations with activists and Party members in the TSKŻ, as well as with representatives of municipal and provincial Party committees in Łódź, Wrocław, Wałbrzych and Legnica. The final report confirmed the existence of lively Zionist propaganda, which was contributing to the spike in the emigration rate, and which derived mainly from religious circles and from the Israeli diplomatic mission. The report suggested that repatriates from the USSR, who were claiming that anti-Semitism was going to come to Poland from the Soviet Union and therefore were expecting pogroms, were expressing a “defeatist” attitude. The propagandistic activity of the synagogues was supposedly financed by “religious and Zionist circles abroad,” with the Joint as ringleader; it was from these funds that illegal Hebrew classes were being organized, among other things. Synagogue members thought that TSKŻ activists had compromised themselves in the eyes of the population, thus forfeiting their right to represent Polish Jews. The report was very critical of the cooperation between the TSKŻ and local Party cells, which supposedly had a very poor understanding of the situation in the Jewish community. Neither the TSKŻ nor the Party cells displayed any desire

942 G. Estraiikh, “The Warsaw Outlets for Soviet Yiddish Writers,” in: *Under the Red Banner: Yiddish Culture in the Communist Countries in the Postwar Era*, ed. E. Grözinger and M. Ruta, Wiesbaden 2008, p. 222.

943 Madajczyk, “Mniejszości narodowe,” p. 105.

944 C.f. Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye*, p. 220.

to battle pro-Zionist propaganda. The authors of the report claimed that PZPR members were not very active at TSKŻ meetings: “They remain silent in the face of nationalistic and Zionist speeches; they are disoriented, and the bleak mood in the Jewish community weighs on them; they lack courage and faith in the importance and effectiveness of arguing with alarmist, Zionist and anti-Soviet elements.”⁹⁴⁵ Commission members had no illusions about TSKŻ political work among repatriates: “This work is characterized, as it were, by flight from ideological, difficult and sensitive problems. Jewish comrades themselves confirm this weakness, and they justify it (rightly) by citing insufficient aid from the Party and the fear that if they attempt to address these matters, the TSKŻ will completely lose its influence among the Jewish population.”⁹⁴⁶ The report concludes that synagogue activity must be placed under tighter control, and that the TSKŻ must join in the ideological counteroffensive using every means available.

Code Name: “Milieu”

In this rather tense atmosphere, an event took place that cast suspicion on some of the TSKŻ activists, although it is not certain whether the event was the cause or a consequence of a change in the mindset of the authorities. In January 1957, 16-year-old Bohdan Piasecki, son of Bolesław Piasecki, chairman of the PAX Association,⁹⁴⁷ was abducted in Warsaw.⁹⁴⁸ In December 1958, his

945 Commission for Ethnic Affairs, AAN, KC PZPR, call no. 237/XIV/138, p. 98.

946 Ibid.

947 PAX Association – a pro-Communist Catholic organization created in 1947 by Bolesław Piasecki; it supported the Stalinist regime in Poland and tried to win over Polish Catholics for Communism.

948 Although the murder of Bohdan Piasecki was a cause célèbre in its time and its circumstances have not yet been adequately explained, historians of the Polish People’s Republic have not dedicated much attention to it. The only existing monographs on the subject are *Sprawa zabójstwa Bohdana Piaseckiego* (London 1988) and *Mordercy uchodzą bezkarnie: Sprawa Bohdana P.* (Warsaw 2000) by Peter Raina, who takes a tendentious approach to the “Jewish trail”: for example, in *Mordercy uchodzą bezkarnie*, Raina cites a document from the Ministry of the Interior which reiterates the narrative that Bohdan’s murder was an act of revenge carried out by the Jewish community in reaction to his father’s activities during the Nazi occupation. Raina quotes this document without acknowledging that it is from the late date of 1966 and contains many inaccuracies which reveal that the author or authors were ignorant about the Jewish community (e.g., instead of the term “TSKŻ,” the enigmatic designation “Jewish Committee” is used). In their book *Bolesław Piasecki: Próba biografii politycznej* (London 1990), Antoni Dudek and Grzegorz Pytel rely mainly on sources by Raina in

body was discovered by chance in a building on Świerczewski Street. In their attempt to solve the murder, investigators began to pursue the so-called Jewish trail:—it turned out that the owner of the taxi in which the kidnappers had made their getaway with Bohdan was a certain Ignacy Ekerling, who had formerly worked as a driver for the Jewish Historical Institute. Investigators suspected that he had made the taxi available to the kidnappers with full knowledge of their plan to abduct and murder Bohdan. Ekerling was stopped at the border when he attempted to leave for Israel. He was arrested and charged with aiding and abetting. No trial ever took place—the indictment was withdrawn from the court on a motion by the prosecution after the trial date had already been set, supposedly as a result of an intervention on the part of then-secretary of the Central Committee, Jerzy Albrecht.⁹⁴⁹ In 1975, in a memo by prosecutor Józef Gurgul from the General Public Prosecutor’s Office, the intervention on Ekerling’s behalf was associated with Premier Józef Cyrankiewicz’s name as well.⁹⁵⁰

In early 1966, Bernard Mark noted in his diary that the Ministry of the Interior was taking a renewed interest in Ignacy Ekerling. “I am under the impression,” he wrote, “that this is connected to the hue and cry against Schaff⁹⁵¹ and against Jews in general: see, one Jewish murderer is believed to reflect upon the entire Jewish community.”⁹⁵² Mark’s intuition turned out to be right. In September 1966—nine years after Bohdan Piasecki’s abduction—the Public Prosecutor’s Office officially accepted the hypothesis that the perpetrators were operating under instructions from “the Jewish nationalist milieu.” The incident was given the code name “Środowisko” [Milieu]. The note on the subject found in the archives of the Ministry of the Interior declares that Bohdan Piasecki’s abduction and murder was an act of retaliation by Jewish circles for his father’s activities during the Nazi occupation. The note takes at face value hypotheses advanced in articles in the foreign press by journalists of Jewish origin. For example, an article by David

writing about the abduction of Bohdan Piasecki. For more recent research on Piasecki, see M. S. Kunicki, *Between the Brown and the Red: Nationalism, Catholicism, and Communism in Twentieth-Century Poland – The Politics of Bolesław Piasecki*, Athens, OH, 2012.

949 Raina, *Mordercy uchodzą bezkarnie*, p. 61.

950 *Ibid.*, p. 219.

951 This refers to the reaction to Adam Schaff’s book *Marksizm a jednostka ludzka* (see Chapter 7).

952 B. Mark, “Dziennik (grudzień 1965 – luty 1966),” translated from Yiddish with footnotes by J. Nalewajko-Kulikov, *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów*, 2008, no. 2, p. 172. An English translation of the diary is forthcoming in *East European Jewish Affairs*.

Harten in a February 1961 issue of the Polish-language Israeli newspaper *Nowiny i Kurier* is quoted as follows: “Bohdan’s abduction and murder *was supposedly an act of revenge*, against the backdrop [of his father’s wartime actions], and the perpetrator is supposedly hiding in Israel.” On the basis of this quotation, the note concludes: “The above formulations provide *unambiguous* confirmation that Bohdan Piasecki’s murder *was revenge* for his father’s supposed anti-Jewish acts.⁹⁵³ The comparison of the note’s conclusion with the sentence quoted from the article itself is telling: the skepticism that is expressed in both cases has been shifted from the motives of the murderers to the question of whether Bolesław Piasecki really committed those “supposed” anti-Jewish acts during the Occupation.

The same note charges that Sfard intervened actively to get the accusation against Ekerling withdrawn, and that he was “in a still-unexplained way” involved in assisting Ekerling to obtain the passport he needed in order to leave the country.⁹⁵⁴ In his memoirs Sfard claims that Ekerling, who was fired from his job after applying to emigrate to Israel, came to ask the TSKŻ to intercede on his behalf (either to get him his job back or to obtain for him an emigration permit). After Sfard agreed that the TSKŻ would help, a presidium member, Chaim (Henryk) Cieszyński, interceded on Ekerling’s behalf for the emigration permit. The permit was granted, but, as noted above, Ekerling was ultimately stopped while crossing the border.⁹⁵⁵ The Security Service investigated who had interceded in the Passport Office on Ekerling’s behalf, and hit upon the TSKŻ and Cieszyński, who declared that he had interceded under express instructions from Sfard. Sfard did not deny this, but claimed that he had not attributed any particular importance to Ekerling’s request, considering it a routine matter. Nevertheless, Sfard continues, at that moment there began an extended attempt to frame the TSKŻ for Bohdan’s Piasecki’s abduction and murder. Multiple presidium members, but especially Sfard himself and Cieszyński, were called in for interrogation, and they worried that the incident would lead to a wave of anti-Semitism in the country.⁹⁵⁶ Raina also stresses the anxiety of the Jewish activists at this juncture, which led “the Jewish lobby in Poland,” as he calls them,

953 Raina, *Mordercy uchodzą bezkarnie*, p. 110. All emphasis added.

954 *Ibid.*, p. 112. Sfard’s intervention in the Ekerling matter is confirmed in Mark’s diary (“Dziennik,” p. 179).

955 *Mit zikh*, p. 233.

956 *Ibid.*, p. 234.

to intervene in order to prevent Ekerling from being tried, which they feared could lead to a pogrom atmosphere.⁹⁵⁷

The unease in the TSKŻ must have been very great: the activists immediately made an (unsuccessful) attempt to get help from the upper reaches of the government, namely from Władysław Gomułka and Zenon Kliszko (the activist tasked with approaching them was Mateusz Oks, a classmate of Sfarđ’s from the high school in Lutsk and a member of the PZPR Central Committee). When that did not work, they appealed to Premier Cyrankiewicz, who was more understanding and whose intercession was apparently effective.⁹⁵⁸

To this day, the case of Bohdan Piasecki’s abduction and murder has not yet been solved, although in 1975 the authorities attempted to influence Mr. and Mrs. Ekerling by means of their daughter and her fiancé when the latter two sought permits to emigrate from Poland.⁹⁵⁹ Ignacy Ekerling died in 1977, which stymied efforts to continue the investigation.

Antoni Dudek and Grzegorz Pytel, the authors of a political biography of Bolesław Piasecki, argue that the perpetrators of the abduction and murder likely came out of one of two circles that bore both Piasecki and the PAX Association ill will: “the milieu of liberalizing intellectuals and journalists” or the Puławski caucus in the PZPR. In their opinion, the latter is more likely.⁹⁶⁰ They point out likewise that the “perpetrators of the abduction, even if they themselves were not security officials, must have had very strong support from some of them.”⁹⁶¹ This is a logical assumption—the murder of the son of an important politician in a country like the Polish People’s Republic could not have taken place without the participation of, or at least a guarantee of neutrality on the part of, the security services. (Indeed, the direct involvement of the Soviet security services cannot be ruled out.)

As far as the “Jewish trail,” none of the extant theories is fully convincing. The documents in the archives of the Ministry of the Interior cannot be assumed to be objective, considering that they were created during a time when an anti-Semitic campaign was underway; on the other hand, it is also problematic to base a theory exclusively on Sfarđ’s and Smolar’s⁹⁶² memoirs dating from many years later. Was the “Jewish trail” a setup designed to compromise the TSKŻ (“they

957 Raina, *Mordercy uchodzą bezkarnie*, p. 47.

958 *Mit zikh*, p. 235.

959 Raina, *Mordercy uchodzą bezkarnie*, pp. 220–221.

960 Dudek and Pytel, *Bolesław Piasecki*, p. 257.

961 *Ibid.*, p. 255.

962 For Smolar’s opinion on the Piasecki affair see *Oyf der letster pozitsye*, pp. 283–289.

want to provoke a new Beylis trial,” wrote Mark⁹⁶³), or was it an effect of intra-Party intrigues? The words that ring the truest are those of politician and journalist Mieczysław Rakowski, who wrote in his diary in 1958: “This is the most secret of cases. I have asked various highly-placed comrades many times who is hiding behind the murder, and none of them has been able (or perhaps willing) to provide me with an answer.”⁹⁶⁴

And a Communist to Boot!

October 1956 brought renewed contact not only with Soviet Jews, but also with Jews in the West. At the turn of the year, with the consent of Party authorities who were eager to garner the favor of prominent leaders in the Jewish Diaspora, the TSKŻ renewed its contact with the Joint, ORT and the World Jewish Congress. Sfard, Smolar and Mark advocated for contact with the latter; Zachariasz and Mirski were opposed.⁹⁶⁵

In 1956, the State Yiddish Theater troupe in Warsaw, under the direction of Ida Kamińska, was permitted for the first time to leave Poland for a series of performances abroad (between September 1956 and November 1958, the Theater visited the Netherlands, Great Britain, and East Germany, as well as Belgium and France twice). On this first trip, to Paris, Brussels and Antwerp in September 1956, Sfard accompanied the Theater as literary director. A much more significant experience, however, both for him and for the Theater, was the later triumphant tour in Israel. The tour took place from November 20, 1959 to January 11, 1960, and included six cities: Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa, Beer Sheva, Rehovot and Akko.⁹⁶⁶ This was Ida Kamińska’s second visit to Israel (she had visited family members there in 1957), which perhaps explains why she described the experience so tersely in her memoirs:

Our theater visited Israel in December 1959 and January 1960. At this point I should mention my visit to the president of Israel, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, which took place in

963 Mark, “Dziennik,” p. 186.

964 M.F. Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1958–1962*, Warsaw 1998, p. 65 (entry dated December 11, 1958).

965 For more on TSKŻ contact with the World Jewish Congress see: G. Berendt, “Starania organizacji działających w Polsce o przystąpienie do Światowego Kongresu Żydowskiego (1945–1961),” in: G. Berendt, A. Grabski and A. Stankowski, *Studia z historii Żydów w Polsce po 1945 roku*, Warsaw 2000, pp. 9–66.

966 *Państwowy Teatr Żydowski im. Ester Rachel Kamińskiej: Przeszłość i teraźniejszość*, ed. S. Gąssowski, Warsaw 1995, p. 242.

Jerusalem at the end of 1959. He and his wife received our entire ensemble. The late President Ben-Zvi displayed much affection for us, posed for photographs, talked with us at length about various problems and showed profound understanding for the reasons why we were maintaining our cultural work in Poland. It was an unforgettable experience.⁹⁶⁷

From the suspicious perspective of the Polish security services, this “profound understanding” amounted in fact to “trying to persuade the Theater ensemble that it was ‘the bearer of the national idea among the Jews of the East[ern Bloc],’ and that its visit to Israel should be treated not like a visit abroad, but as a homecoming, to the ‘homeland of all the Jews of the whole world.’”⁹⁶⁸ In a secret note about the State Yiddish Theater’s tour of Israel (perhaps drawn up on the basis of reports from the Polish embassy in Tel Aviv, or in fact written by an embassy employee), much space is devoted to the person of Dovid Sfarđ. The note says, among other things:

The very fact that an official representative of Poland ‘accompanied’ the Theater created conditions in which the theater was drawn into encounters of an official character, all the more so because, as observed, Dr. Sfarđ did not at all avoid ‘displays’ such as press conferences and conversations with officials. He presented himself as a kind of plenipotentiary, and it is quite obvious that he went further than he was authorized to go.⁹⁶⁹

Examples of Sfarđ’s behavior were listed: a conversation with Anselm Reiss, cofounder of the World Jewish Congress, about reclaiming Jewish property in Poland; attempts at interceding on behalf of Polish emigrants who wished to return to Poland; and meetings with official Israeli personages as well as with the “Israeli Section of the World Congress of the Jewish Agency.”⁹⁷⁰

Sfarđ’s memoirs tell a similar story. He arrived in Israel three days earlier than the troupe did expressly in order to make the acquaintance of “social factors”; above all, the Federation of Polish Jews, whose representative, Stefan Grajek, met him at the airport. He conducted numerous meetings with desperate emigrants from Poland who were besieging the Polish embassy in Tel Aviv in order to demand to be allowed to return to Poland, and who accused Gomułka of

967 I. Kamińska, *My Life, My Theater*, ed. and transl. Curt Leviant, New York 1973, p. 242.

968 Note on the visit of the State Yiddish Theater to Israel, AIPN, microfilm 12599/2, microfiche no. 1, frame A11.

969 *Ibid.*, frame A12.

970 It is uncertain what the author of the note had in mind when he wrote the “Israeli section of the World Congress of the Jewish Agency.” It may have been a simple typographical error conflating two separate meetings – one with the World Jewish Congress and one with the Jewish Agency.

“selling” them to Israel. Returning to his hotel late one evening, Sfarid was greeted by the most determined of the emigrants—as well as by piles of letters from the rest of them, appealing to him for help. He was well aware that these were the same people who had caused a ruckus shortly before in Poland, demanding to be allowed to emigrate to Israel.⁹⁷¹

One of the most difficult meetings was with representatives of the Israeli Communist Party, which was under pressure due to the recent influx of immigrants from the USSR, who were mostly very critically disposed toward the Soviet reality. Before Sfarid’s visit, Meir Vilner, the leader of the Israeli Communist Party, had published a pointed article accusing the Jewish Communists in Poland of standing on the opposite side of the barricades from the Soviet Union. He also reproached them for criticizing the Soviet Union and thus “interfering” in its internal affairs. During the meeting, Sfarid retorted that expressing solidarity with black people who were facing discrimination in America was not considered interference in American internal affairs, so why should critiques of the Soviet attitude toward Jews be held to different standards? He was unable to persuade Vilner or his allies. Of the Israeli Communists, only Shmuel Mikunis sided with Sfarid, but even he cautioned: “I consider Comrade Sfarid to be in the right, but every critical word will immediately be picked up by our enemies.”⁹⁷²

Representatives of the Polish embassy in Tel Aviv were displeased with Sfarid’s public appearances, but Sfarid justified his behavior by “claiming to be operating in coordination with the PZPR Central Committee, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior. He refused to offer any explanations and declared that after his return to Poland, he would put together the appropriate reports for these [institutions].”⁹⁷³

In his memoirs, Sfarid writes that he did prepare such a report after returning to Poland. He initially thought that the report was for the use of the Commission for Ethnic Affairs and the Cultural Department of the Central Committee only, but to his surprise, representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, the Security Service, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee also showed interest in it.⁹⁷⁴ He also spoke about his trip at a session of the TSKŻ presidium, and some of its members

971 *Mit zikh*, p. 213.

972 *Ibid.*, pp. 263–264.

973 Informational note on the visit of the State Yiddish Theater to Israel, AIPN, microfilm 12599/2, microfiche no. 1, frame A12.

974 *Mit zikh*, p. 259.

proposed that he publish an account of the problems he had observed in the Jewish State, such as unemployment, the desire of Polish emigrants to return to Poland, etc. Yet Sfard refused, fearing that anything he wrote would be distorted beyond recognition by the censor.⁹⁷⁵

Sfard's visit to Israel made an enormous impression on him. At long last he was face to face with the vision which he had carried within since childhood, which had been ingrained in him by his rabbi father and reinforced by his reading and religious studies. One of his recollections of that first trip is poignantly humorous: on his first morning in Israel, Sfard went for a walk on the seashore: "It was a mild, sunny, Israeli winter morning, similar to one of the nicest autumn days in Poland. It seemed to me that something secret and infinitely good and comforting was filling the air. [...] I felt that my cheeks were wet, and I said to myself: 'And [you call yourself a] man! And a Communist to boot!' I got up and went back to the hotel."⁹⁷⁶

Sfard's refusal to publish an account of his visit to Israel reveals how much his ideological orientation had shifted. October 1956 did not squash his allegiance to Communism, but it did shake his faith in it to its foundations. It was only a matter of time before the walls would fall.

975 *Ibid.*, p. 266–267.

976 *Ibid.*, p. 212.

Chapter Seven : The Paths Diverge (1960–1969)

Written Down in a Yiddish Poem

A new chapter in Sfar'd's life began with his return from Israel in 1960. As it turned out, it would be the last chapter of his biography set on Polish soil. Years later, he would claim in his memoirs that he had come back to Poland a different person, profoundly changed by his visit to the Jewish State.⁹⁷⁷

Upon his return, Sfar'd did not immediately start thinking about emigrating from Poland; Poland, the Jewish Poland, as viewed from the perspective of Jewish history and culture, continued to serve as his most basic point of reference. In 1966, Sfar'd wrote in the pages of *Yidishe shriftn*:

This is the Poland that has lived for generations in Polish Jewish culture, through which Polish Jews have wandered; the Poland that offers the fragrance of meadows, Friday and Saturday nights in Asch's and Weissenberg's *shtetlekh*, Opatoshu's Polish forests, Peretz's old marketplaces and Kaganowski's Warsaw streets. This is the Poland belonging to countless Jewish artists, whose incinerated bodies have become one with the Polish earth and the Polish sky. This is the Poland of hundreds of thousands of Jewish workers, who have given birth to a free, equal Poland in their dreams and in reality.⁹⁷⁸

For Sfar'd, Poland also meant family. Dovid's wife, Regina Dreyer-Sfar'd, worked as a film studies scholar at the Art Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw and at the Łódź Film School, and she defended her dissertation on Sergei Eisenstein in February 1963.⁹⁷⁹ Their son Leon was a student at the Jarosław Dąbrowski High School in Warsaw. Jakub, Regina's son from her first marriage, had by then grown up and left the family dwelling.

It is perhaps surprising that despite Sfar'd's commitment to the development of Yiddish-language culture, Polish predominated in his household. According to Leon Sfar'd's recollections, his parents spoke with him in Polish only; they spoke to each other in Polish and Yiddish. They spoke Polish to bilingual guests, such as Ida Kamińska or Bernard Mark, when those guests brought Polish-speaking children with them. Regina used to read every new poem of Dovid's to

977 D. Sfar'd, *Mit zikh un mit andere: Oytobiografye un literarishe eseyen*, Jerusalem 1984 [henceforth: *Mit zikh*], p. 266.

978 D. Sfar'd, "Nokh dem kongres fun poylisher kultur," *Yidishe shriftn*, 1966, no. 10, p. 2.
979 *Institut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk (1949–1999)*, ed. E. Krasieński, J. Czubek-Olejniczak, Warsaw 2000, p. 367.

Leon out loud in Yiddish, then translate it orally into Polish, then read it to him again in Yiddish. Why didn't the Sfards simply teach their son to speak and read Yiddish, their native language? The answer probably has to do with the extent of linguistic assimilation present among secular Jews in Poland at the time, even among those who identified strongly with Jewish culture. It appears that the Sfarid family had this aspect of their family life in common with most members of the TSKŻ milieu, which prompts the following question: did TSKŻ activists have any vision of a future for the organization beyond their own tenure in it? The TSKŻ was established partly for the purpose of ensuring that Jews would continue to have a "cultural outlet" in their own language—namely, Yiddish. If even the children of the organization's top leaders were being raised in Polish, what would that mean for the TSKŻ's next generation?

It is difficult to assess today how conscious the decision was to raise the first postwar generation in Polish, versus how much it was simply a result of feeling powerless to do further battle with the trend of rapid cultural and linguistic assimilation that was underway. In the late 1940s, sociologist Irena Hurwic-Nowakowska noted about one of the families that she encountered in Dzierżoniów, which was in many respects traditional (the father was religious and both father and son were tailors): "Both the father and son talk to me in Polish, even though they are not fluent in it. *All the adults in the family speak Yiddish among themselves; Polish is spoken by the parents and the grandfather only when addressing the nine-year-old daughter.* The girl is enrolled in a Jewish school, and her Polish is correct."⁹⁸⁰ For context, recall that at this time, Jews made up a significant percentage of the residents of Dzierżoniów, and Yiddish could easily be heard in the streets.

Perhaps this generation of parents, who had been raised at a time when acquiring several languages was as natural as breathing, did not realize at first that it would be necessary to make a much greater effort if they wanted their own children, who were growing up in completely different conditions, to be at least bilingual. By the time they finally did realize, it was already too late. In his poem "Tsu mayn zun" (To My Son), Sfarid wrote:

... But I've written all this down in my Yiddish poem—
Will you understand it?⁹⁸¹

980 I. Hurwic-Nowakowska, *A Social Analysis of Postwar Polish Jewry*, Jerusalem 1986, pp. 99–100. Emphasis added.

981 D. Sfarid, "Tsu mayn zun," in: idem, *A zegl in vint*, Warsaw 1961, p. 69.

Most of the Sfards' friends were other Jews with similar life experiences, due at least in part, it seems, to their shared political values. But degree of similarity of political views was not the basic determinant of intimacy. Among the core TSKŻ activists, Sfard and Mark were in the closest contact, and it seems that theirs was a real friendship, not just a collegial relationship based in a common ideology. In contrast, Sfard was not intimate with Mirski, Smolar or Zachariasz; his communications with them were limited to work matters.⁹⁸²

Aside from Edwarda and Bernard Mark, regular guests at the Sfard apartment on Krakowskie Przedmieście Street, and later on Na Rozdrożu Square, included Leyb Olitsky and his wife; Binem Heller and his wife, the actress Hadasa Kestin; Ida Kamińska and Marian Melman; Irena and Stanisław Wygodzki; and the director Jakub Rotbaum and his sisters Lia and Sara Rotbaum. In particular, the premieres at the State Yiddish Theater were major social events—"secular Jewish holidays," which on some level replaced the religious holidays, which the Sfards did not observe, other than by eating a symbolic apple with honey on Rosh Hashanah.⁹⁸³

Sfard kept up an extensive written correspondence, with Leyb Olitsky, S.L. Shneiderman, Chaim Sloves, Ester Markish (the widow of Peretz Markish), and others. Dovid always wrote in Yiddish; Regina often added a few lines in Polish. These letters were part of the web that helped to maintain Yiddishland, whose territory contracted more and more with the passage of time.

In Poland in the 1960s, Yiddishland was made up of several Jewish institutions, and Sfard played a role in all of them—as the editor-in-chief of *Yidish Bukh* and *Yidische shriftn*, as a contributor to the *Folks-shtime* (he published feature articles in its pages under the pen name I. Rut as well as under his real name),⁹⁸⁴ as a member of the Advisory Board of ŻIH, as the literary director of the Yiddish

982 As told by Leon Sfard, personal communication; Jacob S. Dreyer confirmed: "It is worth noting that both in Łódź and later in Warsaw, Dovid had close social connections with other literary and artistic figures (Binem Heller, Leyb Olitsky, Ida Kamińska, Bernard Mark), somewhat looser contacts with administrators (Hersh Smolar, Marek Bitter, Salo Fiszgrund) and little or no contact with political activists (Zachariasz, Mirski, Łazebnik, Cieszyński)." He also notes that the women in these circles tended to speak much better, more refined Polish than their husbands (letter from Jacob S. Dreyer, dated July 4, 2006, personal communication).

983 As told by Leon Sfard, personal communication.

984 M. Shklar, "The Newspaper *Folks-shtime* (People's Voice), 1948–1968: A Personal Account," in: *Under the Red Banner: Yiddish Culture in the Communist Countries in the Postwar Era*, ed. E. Grözinger and M. Ruta, Wiesbaden 2008, p. 139.

Theater, and as a member of the presidium of the TSKŻ Board (by the early 1960s, he had transitioned from the role of secretary general to vice-chairman).

The Red ONR

At the end of the 1950s, Sfar's path finally began to diverge from that of the Party. His trip to Israel was only one of the factors that prompted that process.

After the events of October 1956, the TSKŻ established a relationship with the Israeli diplomatic mission in Warsaw (which was granted the status of "embassy" in 1962).⁹⁸⁵ As of 1959, Sfar was in regular contact with the Israeli diplomats, meeting with them for both social and professional purposes. He was invited to the embassy for various ceremonies, although it appears that he accepted invitations only to events of a secular nature.⁹⁸⁶

The contact between Sfar (and other TSKŻ representatives) and the Israeli diplomats aroused the suspicion of the Ministry of the Interior and the Security Service. Although Stalinism was a thing of the past, the authorities continued to consider regular contact with foreigners undesirable. While it was not new for the Ministry of the Interior to take an interest in potentially "deviant" behavior, this particular scrutiny was undoubtedly connected with the trend toward "tightening the screws" after the October events: according to Henryk Dominiczak, beginning in 1958 the security apparatus shifted its focus to combatting opposition within the country.⁹⁸⁷ As part of this shift, the Ministry of the Interior began to take more interest in the Home Army veterans as well as in the Catholic Church.

As of the early 1960s, the Jewish milieu had been placed under purposeful scrutiny; the Security Service took detailed notes for eventual future use against

985 B. Szaynok, "Polska i Izrael w czasie rządów Gomułki 1956–1970," in: *Między Październikiem a Grudniem: Polityka zagraniczna doby Gomułki*, ed. K. Ruchniewicz, B. Szaynok and J. Tyszkiewicz, Toruń 2005, p. 60. For more recent research see B. Szaynok, *Poland-Israel 1944–1968: In the Shadow of the Past and of the Soviet Union*, transl. Dominika Ferens, Warsaw 2012.

986 Most TSKŻ leaders behaved similarly. In 1965, an informer with the pseudonym "Poniatowski" (see discussion later on in chapter) reported about Shmuel Hurwicz: "At that time, he [Hurwicz] was invited to an evening at the embassy on the occasion of the Hanukkah holiday – but neither he nor his colleagues went. They only attend events pertaining to secular, not religious dates, such as events celebrating the liberation [i.e., Israeli Independence Day]." Report by the informer "Poniatowski," AIPN, call no. 0231/230, vol. 16, p. 121.

987 H. Dominiczak, *Organy bezpieczeństwa PRL 1944–1990*, Warsaw 1997, p. 134.

particular individuals.⁹⁸⁸ Much of this scrutiny was focused on seeking “evidence” of Jews’ disloyalty to Poland, signs of “double loyalty,” and connections to “agencies of world Zionism”—such as, for example, the Israeli embassy in Warsaw.

Why did heightened scrutiny of Jews begin at the beginning of the 1960s, when, after the big wave of emigration from 1956 to 1959, there were barely 30,000 of them left in the country?⁹⁸⁹ The answer lies in an internal reshuffling that was taking place within the security and state apparatuses. In 1960, Mieczysław F. Rakowski noted in his diary that the old cadre, which had been driven out in 1956, was systematically returning to power.⁹⁹⁰ The so-called Partisans (*partyzanci*), who collected around Mieczysław Moczar, Vice Minister of the Interior, took center stage. These were Party and state functionaries, many of whom had participated in the Communist resistance movement during the Occupation. Nationalistic discourse—anti-Semitic, anti-German and in a veiled manner anti-Soviet—strongly appealed to them.⁹⁹¹ As Marcin Zaremba has put it, their worldview was “a peculiar variant of nationalism expressed in the language of Communist doctrine.”⁹⁹² In his diary, Bernard Mark defined it in two words: “Red ONR!”⁹⁹³

The “Partisans” eagerly contrasted their “homegrown” version of Communism with the version introduced into the country by prewar KPP members who had spent the war years in the USSR, many of whom were Jews. This attitude resonated positively with Władysław Gomułka, who supposedly had bad memories of security officers of Jewish origin who had interrogated him during his

988 C.f. J. Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, Warsaw 2006, p. 101.

989 L. Olejnik, *Polityka narodowościowa Polski w latach 1944–1960*, Łódź 2003, p. 64.

In 1960, Jews made up the third largest ethnic minority in Poland, after Ukrainians (200,000–210,000) and Belarussians (165,000–180,000). In March 1967, the Socio-Administrative Department of the Ministry of the Interior estimated the number of Jews in Poland at 25,000 (E. Mironowicz, *Polityka narodowościowa PRL*, Białystok 2000, p. 229).

990 M.F. Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1958–1962*, Warsaw 1998, p. 188 (entry dated April 17, 1960), p. 200 (entry dated May 22, 1960).

991 Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, p. 25.

992 M. Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm: Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce*, Warsaw 2001, p. 287.

993 B. Mark, “Dziennik (grudzień 1965 – luty 1966),” transl. from Yiddish with footnotes by J. Nalewajko-Kulikow, *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów*, 2008, no. 2, p. 162. ONR, short for Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny (National Radical Camp): a fascist and anti-Semitic Polish political movement active in the 1930s.

trial and imprisonment in 1948.⁹⁹⁴ The resignation of Antoni Alster (who was of Jewish origin) from the post of Vice Minister of the Interior 1962, the assumption of the post by Franciszek Szlachcic, and the nomination of Moczar to the same post in 1964, served as evidence of the growing strength of the “Partisans.”

The “Partisans” attracted the support of mid- and low-ranking Party officials who had been too young to assume leadership positions in earlier years, and later found themselves unable to advance in rank because most positions were already occupied by officials with lifetime appointments.⁹⁹⁵ In 1960, Rakowski noted in his diary: “Key positions in the state and Party apparatus are occupied by people from the prewar generation. In a word—the old cadre. Those who wish to justify this explain that they have more social and political experience, which is not unreasonable [...]. However, the Party leadership, which also belongs to this group, has not noticed, and perhaps does not want to notice, that a postwar generation of Communists, raised under different conditions, now exists.”⁹⁹⁶ In 1966, Mark wrote:

Of all the classes fundamental to a socialist state, the urban intelligentsia and officials are currently facing the worst conditions, although the workers are not much better off. What can the authorities offer up [to appease] the intelligentsia and officials? The Jews. Apparently, the Jews occupy the best or better posts. Jews are foreigners; they're not part of the national community [...] and we must fight to see to it that the most important posts be occupied by 'pure-blooded Poles.' This will resolve the situation in which Polish officials and intellectuals find themselves. These theories circulate especially among Party functionaries, young writers, officials in the ministries, teachers. This means—national unity can emerge only at the expense of the Jews.⁹⁹⁷

The “tightening of the screws” and the abandonment of the ideals of the “October thaw” made themselves felt especially in the literary and cultural milieu. In December 1961, the journalist Henryk Holland died during an inspection of his apartment. Everyone assumed that he had been assassinated for political reasons, and attempts to “clean up” the incident backfired as far as public opinion was concerned.⁹⁹⁸ In 1962, the “Klub Krzywego Koła,” a meeting place for many

994 M.F. Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1967–1968*, Warsaw 1999, p. 84 (entry dated October 18, 1967).

995 Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm*, p. 288; Z. Bauman, “O frustracji i o kuglarzach,” *Kultura*, 1968, no. 12, pp. 5–21; M. Kula, *Narodowe i rewolucyjne*, London–Warsaw 1991, p. 219.

996 Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1958–1962*, p. 197 (entry dated May 15, 1960).

997 Mark, “Dziennik,” p. 167.

998 Recent research shows that in fact, it was probably an accident. See K. Persak, *Sprawa Henryka Hollanda*, Warsaw 2006.

intellectuals with a “revisionist” (critical, liberal, reform-oriented) reputation, was closed.⁹⁹⁹ In 1964, the writer Antoni Słonimski spearheaded the writing of the so-called Letter of 34 (“List 34”), in which a small group of writers and scholars protested against censorship and demanded changes in cultural policy. The authorities reacted to this appeal only after the contents of the letter were made public by Radio Free Europe. Their response was to punish some of its signatories and to publish the so-called Letter of 600, which was supposedly evidence of the literary and scholarly milieu’s support for the Party’s cultural policy.¹⁰⁰⁰ Yiddish writers who were members of the Union of Polish Writers were among the 600 signatories. Each of them received a reminder via telephone of his or her “obligation” to sign.¹⁰⁰¹ Among those on the list were Shloyme Belis-Legis, Bernard Mark and Dovid Sfar.¹⁰⁰²

Why did Yiddish writers agree to sign the “Letter of 600”? Party discipline alone does not explain it, for among those who did refuse to sign were 57 PZPR members, including such popular authors as Stanisław Jerzy Lec, Julian Strykowski, and Tadeusz Konwicki.¹⁰⁰³ Perhaps they were afraid of the potential consequences of refusing—Jerzy Eisler mentions the “unforeseeability of the authorities’ reaction to any open gesture of opposition, no matter how small.”¹⁰⁰⁴ They may also have feared that, in keeping with the principle of collective responsibility in a totalitarian system, the TSKŻ as a whole or even the entire Polish Jewish community would be forced to bear the consequences of a few individuals’ decision to refuse to bow to official pressure. The core circle of Yiddish writers was small and thoroughly dependent on cultural institutions financed by the state (needless to say, non-Jewish cultural circles were also completely dependent on state-financed institutions, but their options were at least less limited). And the Yiddish writers did not have any leader who was charismatic enough to be capable of resisting pressure from above. In general, Smolar was not perceived as

999 Klub Krzywego Koła (literally: the Bent Wheel Club) – a discussion club for the Polish liberal intelligentsia, active in Warsaw from 1955 to 1962.

1000 K. Rokicki, “Literaci a partia 1945–1968,” in: *PRL: Trwanie i zmiana – Księga jubileuszowa prof. Marcina Kuli*, ed. D. Stola and M. Zaremba, Warsaw 2003, pp. 390–391; idem, “Sprawa ‘Listu 34’ w materiałach MSW,” *Polska 1944/45–1989: Studia i materiały*, vol. 7, 2006, pp. 213–214.

1001 H. Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye mit der letster hofenung*, Tel Aviv 1982, p. 342.

1002 “Dalsza lista oportunistów,” *Kultura*, 1964, no. 7–8, pp. 199–200, reprinted from *Trybuna Ludu* of May 24, 1964.

1003 J. Eisler, *List 34*, Warsaw 1993, p. 89.

1004 *Ibid.*, p. 90.

authoritative; Sfar, “an ideal Jewish Party intellectual,”¹⁰⁰⁵ was considered to be smart but tended to be diplomatic rather than charismatic as a leader.

These events and the growing popularity of the “Partisans” and their interpretation of history elicited discomfort and anxiety in the Jewish Communist milieu. “Are we not back to a cult of personality, a different one, but still peremptory, arbitrary, dictatorial, fixated on itself, evil, with no sense of humor (as everyone describes Wiesław Gomułka)?” reflected Mark in his diary.¹⁰⁰⁶ Their anxiety only increased when in 1965, the philosopher Adam Schaff published *Marksizm a jednostka ludzka* (Marxism and the Human Individual). In the book, Schaff criticized Marx for underestimating the importance of ethnic identity. He also criticized the failure of socialist countries to address and prevent anti-Semitism, which he referred to as a form of racism typical of socialist countries. During a discussion at the Department of Propaganda and Agitation of the Central Committee, Central Committee officials, led by Zenon Kliszko, attacked the book.¹⁰⁰⁷ This was perceived as a serious warning sign by the Jewish Communists. The core TSKŻ activists, who spent the end of 1965 at the TSKŻ center in Śródborów (outside Warsaw), were upset by the official reactions to Schaff’s book. “Everyone who was at Śródborów was nervous, desperate and dejected,” Mark wrote. “Smolar said something terrible that is worth remembering: ‘When we [living Jews] are no longer here [in Poland], they will drag out the dead bodies of Jews and shoot them.’ And he added gloomily, as was his wont: ‘I don’t envy our children.’”¹⁰⁰⁸

Yet this was not the first such warning sign. An earlier one was the Naftali Herts Kon case. Kon, a Yiddish poet from Chernivtsi (now in Ukraine), was repatriated, with help from his friends, including Leyb Olitsky, Dovid Sfar and Hersh Smolar, from the USSR to Poland in the 1950s, despite never having

1005 Joseph Sobelman, a former journalist at the *Folks-shtime*, described Sfar this way in an interview with me (Krakow, November 7, 2006).

1006 Mark, “Dziennik,” p. 156. “Wiesław” was the Party pseudonym of Władysław Gomułka, often used by his Party colleagues.

1007 Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm*, pp. 298–299; M.M. Chęciński, *Jedenaste przykazanie: Nie zapomnij*, Toruń 2004, p. 396. In his diary, Mark characterized Kliszko as “a narrow-minded chauvinist in silk gloves,” i.e., in the final reckoning, a chauvinist, even though he pretended not to be one (Mark, “Dziennik,” p. 157).

1008 *Ibid.*, p. 162. Agent “Poniatowski,” who was present in Śródborów, also mentions the discussions of Schaff’s book in his report (Report of informer “Poniatowski,” AIPN, call no. 0231/230, vol. 16, p. 124).

officially been a Polish citizen. After years in a Soviet camp, Poland seemed to him to be an oasis of freedom and liberty, a sentiment which he publicly and frequently expressed. Apparently, too publicly and too frequently: in late 1960, he was arrested. The witnesses for the defense were Smolar, Sfar and Mark. Eventually, Kon was given permission to leave for Israel; however, Smolar and Sfar were reproached by the Central Commission of Party Control for having helped to bring him to Poland.¹⁰⁰⁹

Another warning sign was the change in the authorities' attitude toward the TSKŻ. When a delegation of Jews from Israel and Western countries visited Poland in July 1960, they were only allowed an informal visit to the TSKŻ Board: no speeches were given nor any joint resolutions adopted, and TSKŻ activists were instructed on how to answer the guests' questions. "There had never before been such a demonstrative display of lack of confidence in the Party activists running the TSKŻ," writes Eugeniusz Mironowicz.¹⁰¹⁰

The TSKŻ's contact with the Joint, which financed many TSKŻ activities, aroused particular suspicion.¹⁰¹¹ According to Smolar, the TSKŻ's finances were scrupulously reviewed in the early 1960s, but no irregularities were discovered.¹⁰¹² At the Fourth TSKŻ Congress in December 1961, Smolar rejoined the Board. In his memoirs he writes that he was summoned several times to the

1009 Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye*, pp. 314–316. According to Smolar, Zachariasz, a member of the Central Commission of Party Control, was the main figure who reproached them. In his critique of Smolar's memoirs, Jakub Wassersztrum questions whether Smolar portrayed Zachariasz's role in this incident accurately ("Oyfklungen un bamerkungen," in: *Der tsadik in pelts...: Zamlung fun artiklen*, ed. M. Mirski, Tel Aviv 1985, p. 22). On N.H. Kon, see K. Auerbach, "The Fate of a Yiddish Poet in Communist Eastern Europe: Naftali Herts Kon in Poland (1959–1965)," in: *Żydzi a lewica: Zbiór studiów historycznych*, ed. A. Grabski, Warsaw 2007, pp. 307–328.

1010 Mironowicz, *Polityka narodowościowa PRL*, p. 227.

1011 Of all the ethnic minority organizations in Poland, the TSKŻ received the largest amount of funding from the Ministry of the Interior: 2,620,000 zlotys in 1960, in comparison to the Ukrainian Socio-Cultural Association, which received 950,000, and the Russian Cultural-Educational Association, which received 722,000 (*ibid.*, p. 203). The magnitude of the funding provided to the TSKŻ was partly a response to its broadly developed organizational infrastructure (a network of clubs, two periodicals, a publishing house, schools), but the large numbers might also have resulted from the inclusion of monies sent to the TSKŻ by the Joint via the State Treasury.

1012 Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye*, pp. 317–318.

PZPR Central Committee, where his activities to date were scrutinized and it was “suggested” to him that he give up the chairmanship of the TSKŻ. When the new Board reelected him to the post (Sfard and Shmuel Hurwicz remained vice-chairmen and Leyb Domb secretary general),¹⁰¹³ pressure from the authorities, represented in the person of Gen. Kazimierz Witaszewski, increased even more.¹⁰¹⁴ This tension was partially caused by the TSKŻ’s refusal to accept the oversight of the Ministry of the Interior’s Socio-Administrative Department, a change from the Association’s previous status as a project under the aegis of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers;¹⁰¹⁵ supposedly, Julian Łazebnik was the Ministry of the Interior’s pick for the post of TSKŻ chairman.¹⁰¹⁶ Finally, Smolar did yield to the pressure to resign, out of fear that otherwise his own stubbornness could harm the entire Association.¹⁰¹⁷ Leyb Domb was named the new chairman, and Edward Rajber took over the post of secretary general.

Not having had access to the materials regarding the TSKŻ in the archives of the Institute of National Memory, I cannot compare Smolar’s report of being pressured by the authorities to step down from the position of TSKŻ chairman with the documentation of the incident kept by the Ministry of the Interior, but his account is credible. The Ministry of the Interior tended to attempt to influence the Jewish milieu by means of influencing who would serve as its representatives, rather than by making policy recommendations. One of the reasons for this tactic was that influencing who served in the upper leadership of the TSKŻ meant potential opportunities to plant informers at a high level; informers with high levels of access and influence were otherwise hard to come by. As of July 1967, the Ministry of the Interior’s Socio-Administrative Department proposed

1013 Leyb Domb (Leopold Trepper, 1904–1982) directed the so-called Red Orchestra, a Soviet intelligence network in occupied Western Europe and Germany during World War II. After the war, he was arrested and sent to the Gulag. He was repatriated to Poland in 1957 and was named director of the publishing house Yidish Bukh.

1014 Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye*, pp. 320–322.

1015 According to E. Mironowicz, this shift took place in March 1960. Gen. Kazimierz Witaszewski was named director of the Ministry of the Interior’s Socio-Administrative Department, which oversaw the Commission for Ethnic Affairs of the Central Committee. However, Mironowicz does not mention any relationship between this shift and the shuffling of leadership on the TSKŻ Board (*Polityka narodowościowa PRL*, p. 200).

1016 Interview no. 27 with Hersh Smolar, private collection of Michał Chęciński, p. 3. Julian Łazebnik was then vice-chairman of the GUKPPiW; he retired in 1966 (M.F. Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1963–1966*, Warsaw 1999, p. 366).

1017 Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye*, p. 323.

to implement “fundamental changes in the leadership of the organization” (i.e., the TSKŻ); if that didn’t work out, the backup plan was to suspend or terminate the activity of the TSKŻ entirely.¹⁰¹⁸

Another sign that the authorities’ attitude toward the Jewish community was changing was the surveillance in the early 1960s of Bernard Mark, then-director of the Jewish Historical Institute, described as an “ardent Jewish nationalist, a decided enemy of socialism and the Polish People’s Republic.”¹⁰¹⁹ Around the same time, the character of Polish-Israeli diplomatic contact shifted. As Bożena Szaynok has remarked, a certain imbalance began to surface—Israeli representatives displayed initiative in establishing closer contact, whereas Polish representatives reacted with distance. Meanwhile, the Polish government began to conduct “far-from-discreet” surveillance of the Israeli diplomatic offices in Warsaw and their contact with the Polish Jewish community¹⁰²⁰—the data from which was shared with the security services in the USSR and compared with similar data that the latter collected about the Israeli diplomatic service there.¹⁰²¹

We Take Our Example from You

In the 1960s, the Polish government not infrequently viewed Soviet Jews visiting Poland as potential informers—an issue which has not yet been subjected to adequate study. In the previous chapter, I mentioned that Polish and Soviet Jews were able to resume contact in the latter half of the 1950s; numerous articles in the *Folks-shtime* and *Yidische shriftn* about Soviet Jewish concerns and activities testify to the great interest Polish Jews took in what was happening across the border. The liveliness of this exchange did not escape the notice of Polish and Soviet authorities, who decided to exploit it for their own purposes. According to Ministry of the Interior documentation, seven Soviet agents visited Poland in 1963–1964 in order to identify the Israeli embassy’s network of Polish contacts;

1018 Mironowicz, *Polityka narodowościowa PRL*, p. 253.

1019 See: D. Libionka, “Apocrypha from the History of the Jewish Military Union and its Authors,” *Holocaust: Studies and Materials* (2008), 147–176.

1020 Szaynok, *Polska i Izrael*, p. 66.

1021 See, e.g., “Note, strictly secret,” AIPN, call no. 0231/230, vol. 23, pp. 407–413. This is a description from the KGB Second Chief Directorate of “sabotage activity on the part of the Israeli intelligence service under cover of the Israeli embassy.” The note describes the activities of embassy employees, their means of shielding themselves from surveillance technologies, the passwords they used, etc.

at least four of the agents managed to collect information that was considered useful by the security service.¹⁰²²

One of them, whose trip was later evaluated as having been “positive and useful,”¹⁰²³ was an agent with the pseudonym “Zeldin.” His visit to Poland in autumn 1963 took place under an agreement between the Polish and Soviet security services.¹⁰²⁴ After he returned to the USSR, “Zeldin” gave a detailed report on his stay, a copy of which was sent to the Polish authorities.

From Zeldin’s report, it is evident that he was involved with the monthly journal *Sovetish heymland* (which I will discuss later in this chapter). He was to deliver a letter and greeting from the writer Yosef Kerler to Naftali Herts Kon in Warsaw.¹⁰²⁵ In addition to his encounter with Kon, he visited the editorial offices of the *Folks-shtime* in Warsaw, where he met with the editor of the literature section, Shloyme (Salomon) Belis-Legis, to whom he gave a manuscript of his short stories. Belis-Legis inquired about Yiddish writers that he knew in Moscow, and in addition: “He said that he had lived in the Soviet Union for a long time and that he was very lucky to be living in Poland now. He feels sorry for those writers who could not make their way to Poland.” In their conversation, which lasted over three hours, Belis-Legis criticized the treatment of Jewish culture in the USSR, citing particularly the issues of forced assimilation and a lack of Yiddish theaters and clubs.¹⁰²⁶

Zeldin also met with Sfard, who spoke with him openly (Zeldin reminded him that they had met in 1942 at a writers’ club in Almaty): “In a two-and-a-half hour conversation, Sfard repeated the same ideas that Belis had, which gave me the impression that that had been Sfard speaking through Belis’s mouth. He likewise strongly condemned Soviet policy toward the Jews, spoke at length about anti-Semitism in the USSR, and praised Poland in comparison. He said that he had visited Paris and met with prominent activists there, all of whom had expressed criticism of the Soviet government for not allowing Jewish culture to develop. In short, he quite literally repeated everything that Belis said.”¹⁰²⁷ During his visit to Warsaw, Zeldin met with Mark as well.

1022 “List of secret agents from the Soviet security services, temporarily in Poland, active in 1963–1964, secret,” AIPN, call no. 0231/230, vol. 23, p. 269.

1023 AIPN, call no. 0231/230, t. 13, p. 116–117.

1024 Note by P. Yeromin to R. Matejewski, AIPN, call no. 0231/230, vol. 9, p. 150–151.

1025 AIPN, call no. 0231/230, vol. 9, p. 122.

1026 *Ibid.*, p. 139.

1027 *Ibid.*, p. 141.

A list of questions prepared for an agent with the pseudonym “Pobeda” (Russian: “victory”), who spent autumn 1963 in Poland, provides insight into what interested the Polish and Soviet security services. (In addition to being given the list, the agent was also instructed to tell contacts that he wished to bring some “Zionist literature” back to his relatives in the USSR, in the hopes that this would cause Zionists to come out of the woodwork.¹⁰²⁸) The list reads as follows:

1. What is their [= Polish Jews’] view of Jewish repatriation from the USSR to Poland?
 - a. How easy do they believe it is for repatriates to get established in Poland?
 - b. How easy do they believe it is to get permission to emigrate to Israel?
 - c. To what extent do Jewish organizations in Poland aid Jews who emigrate to Poland from the USSR in getting settled in Poland or continuing on to Israel?
2. Are any propaganda campaigns being conducted in order to win the emigrants over for Israel, such as:
 - a. Circulation of brochures, books, and newspapers that inform them about life on Israel?
 - b. Meetings, gatherings, personal contact designed to encourage them to emigrate?
3. Are Jewish organizations in Poland distributing financial aid, and in what form, to Jews intending to emigrate to Israel or to any Western country?
4. Are Jewish organizations in Poland trying to facilitate contact between Jews living in the USSR and those in Western countries, and if so, in what way?
5. Do Polish Jews believe that there is anti-Semitism in Poland? If so, what do they believe is its cause, and why?
6. Describe the commemorations of the ghetto uprising anniversary [this is probably a reference to the twentieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising]? Did many foreign delegations attend, and from where? Were there opportunities to exchange viewpoints and to make connections?
 - a. What do they think of such commemorations? How are they received, evaluated by [non-Jewish] Poles? Has any anti-Semitism surfaced on these occasions?¹⁰²⁹

1028 “Information no. 2, secret,” AIPN, call no. 0231/230, vol. 9, p. 68–71.

1029 AIPN, call no. 0231/230, vol. 9, p. 79. Very similar subjects of conversation were also proposed to Agent “Zeldin” (AIPN, 0231/230, vol. 9, p. 93–96).

Judging from Security Service documentation, the Soviet Jewish agents succeeded in eliciting the confidence of their interlocutors, who eagerly raised the subject of the state of Jewish culture in the USSR. The file kept on Sfarid by the Ministry of the Interior contains an excerpt from a report delivered in May 1963 by a secret agent with the pseudonym “Firsowa.”¹⁰³⁰ “Firsowa” supposedly attended a meeting of the presidium of the TSKŻ Board in Mark’s apartment. Besides the host and “Firsowa,” Domb, Sfarid, Smolar, Hurwicz and Mirski attended. Mirski proposed that a session of the World Jewish Congress be convened in order to discuss the difficult situation of Soviet Jews and to put pressure on the USSR to give them the freedom to emigrate. According to “Firsowa,” Mirski’s proposal was approved by all those present.

“Firsowa” spoke with Sfarid several times about Soviet anti-Semitism:

During the first conversation, when “Firsowa” asked whether Sfarid had read the article in the Soviet newspaper *Izvestia* on anti-Semitism in the United States, the latter answered that [Russians] should first write about anti-Semitism in the USSR and combat anti-Semitism and nationalism in their own country, and only after that in others. [...] Sfarid declared that anti-Jewish discrimination had been brought to Poland from the Soviet Union: “We take our example from you. We feel it too. We have more and more troubles coming to us from the Soviet Union. The TSKŻ exists and is active in Poland only owing to the existence of a group of longtime [Jewish] Communists who have good relations with the Central Committee.”¹⁰³¹

Likewise, a report by an informer from Grodno (Hrodna, now in Belarus) with the pseudonym “Poniatowski” also mentions Polish Jews’ interest in the fate of Soviet Jews. “Poniatowski,” who met with Artur Eisenbach and Bernard Mark at the ŻIH, among other things, wrote in his report:

Every interlocutor has raised the following questions about Jews [in the USSR]:

1030 Three of the four reports by agents from the USSR that I have examined here are from 1963. This is coincidence; reports from other years undoubtedly exist as well. It is known, e.g., that in 1965–1967, three other Soviet Jews acting as KGB agents visited Poland (Note on collaboration with KGB organs from June 1965–May 1967, AIPN, call no. 0231/230, vol. 18, p. 135–136). However, it is possible that the commemorations of the twentieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the resulting contact with Jewish delegations from around the world provided an additional motivation to the Ministry of the Interior to conduct intensified surveillance of the Polish Jewish community in 1963. Incidentally, Vice Minister of the Interior Mieczysław Moczar attended the commemorations, which came as a surprise to some. See Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1963–1966*, pp. 53–54.

1031 Excerpt from a report by secret agent “Firsowa,” AIPN, microfilm 12599/2, microfiche no. 1, frame A9 – A10.

1. Why is there no Yiddish newspaper in the USSR?
2. Why is there no state Yiddish theater in the USSR?
3. Why do subscribers in the USSR have access to the entire [Polish-language] Polish press, but not to the *Folks-shtime*?¹⁰³²

It is not certain that the reports quoted here are authentic or that their authors consciously agreed to cooperate with the security services of both Poland and the Soviet Union. However, there is no doubt that the fate of Soviet Jews was of great concern to TSKŻ activists, so it is not surprising that they would express displeasure about the lack of a Yiddish press and theater in the USSR. Some of the information in the reports is possible to verify, e.g., the discussion mentioned in “Poniatowski’s” report of Adam Schaff’s book, which took place in Śródborów in late 1965, is confirmed in Mark’s diary, as we saw above. Of course, full verification of these reports would be feasible only upon determining the identities of the informers, which for the time being is impossible due to the inaccessibility of Soviet-era personnel files (if they have even been preserved); without that information, it is not even possible to speculate reliably about the identities of the various informers.

Did the informers realize for what purposes and against whom the information they provided could be used? It appears that at least some of them did act consciously, considering that they accepted pay from the Soviet Security Service for their trips to Poland.¹⁰³³ Were Sfard, Mark, Hurwicz and the other TSKŻ representatives mentioned in the reports aware that whatever they said to their Soviet guests would be passed along to other ears? Probably not. Mark does not mention any concern about this in his diary, although he does speculate about which ŻIH employee(s) might be cooperating with the Polish Security Services.¹⁰³⁴ Sfard does not mention this concern in his autobiography either (although it is necessary to keep in mind that there are other things he doesn’t mention either which he certainly did know about). Smolar, who does mention repeatedly in his memoirs that there were government informers in the TSKŻ, does not express similar concerns regarding contact with Soviet Jews. Is this apparent lack of concern about potential Soviet informers a sign of naivete among the TSKŻ leadership? Or could it be explained by the very skillful selection of informers, such that each one of them appeared to be absolutely trustworthy?

1032 Report of the informer “Poniatowski,” AIPN, call no. 0231/230, vol. 16, p. 123.

1033 AIPN, call no. 0231/230, vol. 9, p. 67 (receipt of Agent “Pobeda” for 500 zlotys); pp. 116–119 (receipt of Agent “Zeldin” for a total of 2,660 zlotys).

1034 Mark, “Dziennik,” p. 184.

If “Firsowa’s” report is true, then she was allowed to participate in an unofficial session of the presidium of the TSKŻ Board in Mark’s apartment, which would mean that the participants in the meeting had no qualms about considering her an insider.

Despite the fact that I have drawn attention here to the role of informers in conveying information about the TSKŻ to the Polish and Soviet secret services, it is important not to lose a sense of proportion. Within this particular time period, I am aware of official reports from four informers—not at all a large number, considering how large both the Polish and Soviet Jewish communities were at the time. I have emphasized this motif not in order to overstate the phenomenon, but rather because it is one important component of the relationship between the Polish and Soviet Jewish communities, as well as the relationship between the Polish People’s Republic and the USSR vis-a-vis their Jewish minorities. In the informers’ reports, TSKŻ activists are portrayed as, to use the language of contemporary propaganda, first-class “Jewish nationalists.” In 1967–1968, this epithet became the equivalent of an act of character assassination.

As Young as Dorian Gray

In February 1961, an announcement appeared in the *Folks-shtime* of the publication of the first issue of a new literary periodical in Yiddish in the Soviet Union, *Sovetish heymland* (Soviet Homeland). It is clear that the editors of the *Folks-shtime* considered this to be important news, considering that they printed the announcement on the front page of the newspaper, not in the literary section.¹⁰³⁵ They undoubtedly considered it to be a hopeful sign of the further rehabilitation of, and a return to normalcy for, Yiddish culture in the USSR.

Poet Aron Vergelis was named editor-in-chief of the new magazine. Born in 1918, he was a product of the Soviet system, free of the prerevolutionary and immigrational “encumbrances” with which his older colleagues were saddled. He spent many years in Birobidzhan, and by some miracle managed to weather the purges of the ranks of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (which caused some to suspect that he had collaborated with the security services).¹⁰³⁶ After 1956, when the “thaw” in Moscow led to the first visits by emissaries from various Western Jewish organizations, Vergelis functioned as the leader of the remaining Soviet

1035 “Yidisher literarisher zhurnal dershaynt in gikhn in Moskve,” *Folks-shtime*, February 18, 1961, p. 1.

1036 G. Estraiikh, “Aron Vergelis: The Perfect Jewish *Homo Sovieticus*,” *East European Jewish Affairs* 27, 1997, no. 2, pp. 3–4.

Yiddish writers, although he was completely unknown at the time in Yiddish literary circles outside the USSR. When in 1959 the first Yiddish book after a long hiatus was published in the USSR, a collection of short stories by Sholem Aleichem, Vergelis was the one to write the preface.¹⁰³⁷

In spite of the fact that the *Folks-shtime* was enthusiastic about the creation of *Sovetish heymland* and regularly reviewed its issues, relations between the two editorial boards were fraught. The *Folks-shtime* and *Yidische shriftn* continued to publish the work of Yiddish writers from the Soviet Union, especially those who were not particularly welcome to publish in *Sovetish heymland*, such as Yosef Kerler.¹⁰³⁸ Because of this, a conflict arose with Vergelis, who demanded that the *Folks-shtime* editorial board consult him before publishing work by Soviet authors.¹⁰³⁹ Meanwhile, the *Folks-shtime*, which in Poland was perceived as being completely subordinated to the authorities, was viewed in the Soviet Union as suspiciously independent, especially after the famous article about the murdered JAC writers.¹⁰⁴⁰ For their part, Polish Jews suspected that the Soviet authorities were not truly supportive of *Sovetish heymland*, but rather allowed it to exist only in order to quiet Western Jewish Communists' calls for the resurrection of Jewish culture in the USSR: in 1963, Shloyme Belis-Legis commented to agent "Zeldin" that *Sovetish heymland* was founded "not for Soviet Jews, but for Zionists living abroad, to stop them from shouting so much."¹⁰⁴¹

In the 1960s, the work of Soviet Yiddish writers began to comprise an even more significant proportion of the contents of the *Folks-shtime* and *Yidische shriftn*. One reason for this was that the widows of the murdered writers saw in the Polish Jewish periodicals an opportunity to publish their late husbands'

1037 Ibid., p. 5.

1038 Ibid., pp. 8–9. Agent "Zeldin" reported that in 1963 Kerler asked him to inform Kon that he (Kerler) was being banned from publishing in *Sovetish heymland*, and that he suspected Vergelis of collaborating with the KGB ("Agent's report, strictly secret," AIPN, call no. 0231/230, vol. 9, p. 122).

1039 Reminiscence by Smolar, published in: *Dos sovetishe yidntum in shpigl fun der yidisher prese in Poyln: Bibliografye 1945–1970*, ed. M. Altshuler, Jerusalem 1975, p. 38 in the Yiddish portion of the book.

1040 On this subject see G. Estraikh, "Literature Versus Territory: Soviet Jewish Cultural Life in the 1950s," *East European Jewish Affairs* 33, 2003, no. 1, pp. 30–48.

1041 "Agent's report, strictly secret," AIPN, call no. 0231/230, vol. 9, p. 139, October 18, 1963. Indeed, *Sovetish heymland* was not an independent institution, but a department of the publishing house Sovetskiy Pisatel (see G. Estraikh, "The Era of *Sovetish Heymland*: Readership of the Yiddish Press in the Former Soviet Union," *East European Jewish Affairs* 25, 1995, no. 1, p. 18).

works as well as articles about them.¹⁰⁴² Another reason for the increasing importance of Soviet contributors was the need for an influx of “fresh blood,” considering that, as acknowledged in an editorial on the occasion of the 200th issue of *Yidische shriftn*, “the Jewish population in Poland has recently decreased by half, and it has lost more than half of its intellectual powerhouses [...]”¹⁰⁴³ Emigration made possible by the “thaw” had greatly thinned the ranks of the Polish Yiddish writers. In 1960, the poet Hadasa Rubin left for Israel, and in 1962 the poet Jakub Zonszajn died. Gravely ill with diabetes and practically blind toward the end of his life, Bernard Mark died in 1966. On the eve of the events of 1967–1968, the Polish Jewish literary milieu had shrunk to encompass only Sfard, Elye Rajzman, Kalmen Segal, Mendl Tempel, Moyshe Shklar and journalist Lili Berger (who also wrote in the Polish press under the name Liliana Gronowska).

For Sfard, the 1960s were a period of intensive poetic development. He published two new books of poetry, both of which were warmly received. His volume *A zegl in vint* (A Sail in the Wind), which came out in 1961, was greeted by Shklar as “deeply moving.”¹⁰⁴⁴ Mark, in a lengthy review in *Yidische shriftn*, wrote:

The poetic experiences of Dovid Sfard are the experiences of all of us. *All of us*: the entire generation that shares one turbulent past; a generation that has been subjected to shocks in recent years. In the gusty winds of history, this generation is looking for an explanation of what has taken place [...]. Regardless of the specificity of Sfard’s experiences as an individual, his new poems serve as [a more general] documentation of our times, almost the only extant documentation of its kind. [...] [Sfard is] a fully mature, original poet.¹⁰⁴⁵

Sfard’s preceding volume, *Lider*, had documented the shock of the October transformations; for its part, *A zegl in vint* documented the search for a release from the chaos that had followed the shock. The title of the book reflects this theme: a “sail in the wind” is wobbly, uncertain, liable to change direction suddenly, subject to forces much larger and more capricious than itself. Yet it is also a symbol of renewal, forward motion, freedom of movement. In the book’s title poem, the sail that has been spread again is an indication that the speaker is setting out on his way once more:

1042 Sfard’s archive includes correspondence from the following writers’ widows: Betty Kvitko, Ester Markish, Feyge Hofshteyn and Sheyne Miryem Broderzon (Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, call no. 932).

1043 “200 numern *Yidische shriftn*,” *Yidische shriftn*, 1964, no. 1, p. 1.

1044 M. Shklar, “*A zegl in vint*,” *Folks-shtime*, September 30, 1961, p. 8.

1045 B. Mark, “*Dos lid fun zayne lider*,” *Yidische shriftn*, 1961, no. 10, pp. 8–9. Emphasis in original.

I am once again as young as Dorian Gray;
Only my image in the mirror of the times is old.¹⁰⁴⁶

One of the most moving poems in this collection is entitled “Biblish” (Biblical). It is Sfard’s own credo: catastrophe is never total—a handful of survivors always endure, and they are obliged to keep the faith. Sfard’s imagination of catastrophe in this poem can be interpreted as either historical or psychological: as referring to an incident either of physical destruction or of disillusionment about an idea or ideology.

A *zegl in vint* drew the attention of the censors due to the “nationalist overtones” of some of the poems contained in the volume, perhaps poems that were written under the influence of Sfard’s visit to Israel. However, thanks to an intervention on the part of Julian Łazebnik, the manuscript was ultimately allowed to be published as submitted.¹⁰⁴⁷

Sfard’s subsequent book, *Borvese trit* (Barefoot Steps), was published in 1966. The book opens with the characteristic poem *Gebet* (Prayer), in which he writes:

Take away the pain of precarious days,
Of getting lost in the dark margins,
Give back the certainty of the path
Toward that beautiful young land,
Where diverging is falling off,
And believing is understanding,
And word is deed.¹⁰⁴⁸

Borvese trit also enjoyed enthusiastic reviews. “I read poem after poem, and it seemed to me that I was reading a book of Psalms written by a modern person, full of wisdom from the heart,” wrote Belis-Legis.¹⁰⁴⁹ As Belis-Legis later wrote in an obituary of Sfard, he was so impressed by the book that when he finished reading it long after midnight, he called Sfard immediately in order to congratulate him, thereby awakening him from sleep.¹⁰⁵⁰ The famous New York poet Jacob Glatstein reviewed the book for the *Tog-morgn-zhurnal*, expressing his appreciation for the “warm, national tone” of Sfard’s latest poems.¹⁰⁵¹ He offered as an

1046 D. Sfard, “A zegl in vint,” in: idem: *A zegl in vint*, Warsaw 1961, p. 95.

1047 AAN, GUKPPiW, call no. 713, unpaginated.

1048 D. Sfard, “Gebet,” in: idem, *Borvese trit*, Warsaw 1966, p. 7.

1049 S. Belis-Legis, “Loytere lirik: Dovid Sfards lider-zamlung *Borvese trit*,” *Folks-shtime*, January 7, 1967, p. 4.

1050 S. Belis-Legis, “Tsum toyt fun Dovid Sfard,” *Folks-shtime*, October 17, 1981, p. 7.

1051 J. Glatstein, “Vegn di lider fun Dovid Sfard,” reprinted in the *Folks-shtime*, May 6, 1967, p. 5.

example the poem “In dir, mayn folk” (In You, My People)—an expression of attachment to Jewish belonging:

[...] In you, my people, I am millennia old,
 And every sound is light, and every word—image.
 Separated from you, I am nothing but an instant
 A passing shadow, a silent letter.¹⁰⁵²

The book's title is also an allusion to Sfard's attachment to Jewish culture and history. A reader familiar with the Old Testament will catch the echo of God's commandment to Moses: “Cast off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place upon which thou art standing is holy ground” (Exodus 3:5). What was Sfard's “holy ground”? Perhaps the “goldene keyt” (golden chain), the cultural heritage of Ashkenazi Jews? Or could it have been Poland, sanctified by the blood of Holocaust victims, but also by centuries of flourishing Jewish life and culture?

Many of Sfard's poems were translated into Polish by Arnold Ślucki in the 1960s. Ślucki also published an enthusiastic review of *Borvese trit* in *Yidische shriftn*: “As the son of a rabbi and a graduate of the University of Nancy, Sfard merges Jewish culture with European knowledge in his poetry, mobilizing the highest values of Polish poetry as well in order to create a poetry that is national in form and melody, but at the same time universal, profoundly relevant to all of humanity. [...] Artistic purity and intellectual focus grant his latest book, *Borvese trit*, a high stature.”¹⁰⁵³

Both volumes of poetry, illustrated by the well-known artist Mane Katz, were published by Yidish Bukh, which had been directed by Leyb Domb (Leopold Trepper) since his repatriation from the USSR in late 1957. Along with Domb, Sfard (editor-in-chief), Shmuel Likhtenshteyn (technical director) and Shimen Gruber (secretary) also worked for Yidish Bukh during this time period. The editorial board included, besides Domb and Sfard: Mark (until his death in 1966), Binyomen Nadel, Michał Mirski, Shmuel Hurwicz and Shloyme Belis-Legis.¹⁰⁵⁴ Following the decline in subscriptions from 1956 to 1959, the number of subscribers now increased once again—in late 1961, it reached over two thousand¹⁰⁵⁵—and it appears to have stayed steady from then on, until the publishing house closed its doors in 1968.

1052 D. Sfard, “In dir, mayn folk,” in: idem, *Borvese trit*, Warsaw 1966, p. 57.

1053 A. Ślucki, “Di poezye fun Dovid Sfard (notitsn funem iberzetsner),” *Yidische shriftn*, 1967, no. 3, p. 7.

1054 “Der yidisher farlags-vezn in folks-Poyln (in di yorn 1945–1968),” AŻIH, Papers of Leopold Trepper, call no. 3, p. 117.

1055 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

Yidish Bukh changed its publishing profile somewhat in the 1960s. The press began to publish literature for children and youth, undoubtedly as a result of the generational shift in the TSKŻ. The political changes that followed the “thaw” made it possible to publish books that could not have been published earlier, including certain works by Sholem Asch, Dovid Bergelson and Peretz Markish. In 1961, the first volume of Emanuel Ringelblum’s *Ksovim fun geto* (Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto), an extremely important historical source, was published. The second volume came out two years later, on the twentieth anniversary of the Ghetto Uprising. Yidish Bukh also began to correspond with Yiddish publishing houses in New York, Moscow, Paris and Bucharest.

However, the genres of Yidish Bukh publications still did not match readers’ interests. At a gathering of Yiddish writers in May 1962, Domb said that the publishing house had an entire array of manuscripts ready for publication, but they were mostly poetic and Holocaust-related works, rather than works of contemporary prose.¹⁰⁵⁶ The publishing house grappled with this problem throughout the rest of its existence.

Yidish Bukh continued to seek new readers. In 1967, Domb wrote: “We realize that we are far from reaching all potential customers in cities with relatively large Jewish populations (Warsaw, Łódź, Wrocław, Krakow, Szczecin, etc.).”¹⁰⁵⁷ In Warsaw in particular, a significant percentage of the Jewish population was linguistically assimilated; thus most Yidish Bukh readers and subscribers were recruited from western Poland, where repatriates from the Soviet Union had been settled after the war.

There is no doubt that Yidish Bukh was at the forefront of Yiddish publishing worldwide during this time period. According to Domb’s data, all the Yiddish publishing houses in the United States combined (IKUF, CYCO, Undzer Tsayt, Matones) published a total of 28 books in 1959, whereas Yidish Bukh alone published 19 books that same year.¹⁰⁵⁸ In 1967, Yidish Bukh publications reached customers in 24 countries. Thirty books were slated for publication in 1967–1968, including anniversary-themed publications (honoring the 25th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution, etc.) and Bernard Mark’s posthumous works.

1056 “Oyf a baratung fun yidishe pen-mentsshn,” *Folks-shtime*, May 12, 1962, p. 4.

1057 L. Domb, “Undzere oyfgabn un perspektivn (tsum forshteyendikn yoyvl fun XX yor ‘Yidish Bukh’),” *Yidishe shriftn*, 1967, no. 1, p. 3.

1058 AŽIH, Papers of Leopold Trepper, call no. 3, p. 138–139.

The joint twentieth anniversary of Yidish Bukh and *Yidishe shriftn* was honored in 1967 at a ceremony in Wrocław. The habit when writing or speaking of Yidish Bukh's successes was to emphasize that they would have been impossible to achieve under a system other than socialism, and to praise the Polish People's Republic for guaranteeing Jews the opportunity to "find cultural fulfillment" in their own language.¹⁰⁵⁹ However, at the twentieth-anniversary ceremony on June 3, 1967, the discourse took a different turn. According to a report in the *Folks-shtime*, Sfarad began his opening address by mentioning the "turbulent days that we are living through," and "the threat to world peace." He then characterized Yiddish publishing in Poland as "necessarily an exemplar of *ubiquitous hereness* [a muster fun umetumiker doikayt], grounded in spiritual and physical effort [...]; a challenge to all our enemies, always and everywhere; an insistence that we will continue to reside on every bit of earth where we have contributed our blood, our efforts and our ideas. To all their rebukes and insinuations that we are foreigners and we are superfluous, we answer: no!"¹⁰⁶⁰

It is clear from this quotation that Sfarad was aware of the black clouds that were gathering above the heads of Polish Jews. Two days later, the Six-Day War broke out.

Jews in Poland Are Part of the Jewish People

As historian Jerzy Eisler writes, the Six-Day War "detonated the 'explosives' that had been amassing in Poland for years."¹⁰⁶¹

In spring of 1967, Egypt blockaded the Gulf of Aqaba, thereby cutting off the access of the Israeli port of Eilat to the Red Sea, and thus cutting Israel off from

1059 See, e.g., S. Likhtenshteyn, "Di antviklung un tetikayt fun farlag 'Yidish Bukh' in bafraytn Poyln," *Bleter far Geshikhte* 7, 1954, no. 2–3, p. 46.

1060 Y. Opatshinsky, "Lekoved di yubiliarn 'Yidish Bukh' un *Yidishe shriftn*," *Folks-shtime*, June 10, 1967, p. 5. Emphasis in the original.

1061 Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, p. 104. There is a rich literature about the relationship between the Six-Day War and the events of March 1968. Among the most important secondary sources, in addition to Eisler's monograph, are: D. Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna w Polsce 1967–1968*, Warsaw 2000; *Marzec 1968 trzydzieści lat później*, ed. M. Kula, P. Osęka and M. Zaremba, vol. 1–2, Warsaw 1998; P. Osęka, *Syjniści, inspiratorzy, wicrzyciele: Obraz wroga w propagandzie marca 1968*, Warsaw 1999; and *Oblicza Marca 1968*, ed. K. Rokicki and S. Stępień, Warsaw 2004. For more recent research see J. Eisler, "1968: Jews, Antisemitism, Emigration," *Polin* 21, 2009, pp. 37–61; D. Stola, "The Hate Campaign of March 1968: How Did It Become Anti-Jewish?," *Polin* 21, 2009, pp. 16–36.

direct access to the Far East. In retaliation, Israeli troops invaded Egypt on June 5. A local Middle Eastern conflict turned into a worldwide conflict when Israel, supported by the US, managed a lightning-fast defeat of the Egyptian forces, who were backed by the USSR. For Soviet leaders, Egypt's defeat was almost personal. On June 9, at a session of the Warsaw Pact powers in Moscow, it was decided that all member countries would break off diplomatic relations with Israel (or at least all of them except Romania, which dissented). On June 12, Polish Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Marian Naszkowski informed the Israeli ambassador to Poland, Dov Sattath, of this decision. A few days later, when the Israeli diplomatic personnel departed from Warsaw, demonstrators shouting anti-Israel slogans saw them off at the airport.¹⁰⁶²

At first, pro-Israel feelings predominated in Polish society, in reaction to the official pro-Arab and anti-Israel propaganda.¹⁰⁶³ From the very beginning, the Ministry of the Interior, now almost completely under the control of Mieczysław Moczar, collected data on expressions of sympathy and appreciation for Israel and celebrations of its victory. Władysław Gomułka received daily reports from the Ministry of the Interior emphasizing that pro-Israeli sentiments were particularly widespread among people of Jewish origin, which stoked his increasing concern that Polish Jews identified with Israel more than they did with Poland.¹⁰⁶⁴

Gomułka was particularly irritated by a report of a meeting of the Jewish student club "Babel" at the TSKŻ in Warsaw at which Mieczysław F. Rakowski, the editor-in-chief of *Polityka*, spoke. According to the notes taken by the Ministry of the Interior: "On June 7, about 200 people gathered for a lecture. Most attendees were youth aged 20–30. Those present expressed exceptionally joyful sentiments at the military victories of the Israeli forces, news of which circulated by word of

1062 A. Stankowski, "Zerwanie stosunków dyplomatycznych z Izraelem przez Polskę w czerwcu 1967 roku," in: *Rozdział wspólnej historii: Studia z dziejów Żydów w Polsce ofiarowane profesorowi Jerzemu Tomaszewskiemu w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, ed. J. Żyndul, Warsaw 2001, pp. 363–365.

1063 For more on this subject, see: B. Szaynok, "Reakcja społeczeństwa w Polsce na konflikt na Bliskim Wschodzie w czerwcu 1967 r. w świetle dokumentów Ministerstwa Spraw Wewnętrznych," in: *Studia z historii najnowszej: Profesorowi Wojciechowi Wrzesińskiemu w 65 rocznicę urodzin – najmlodszy uczniowie*, ed. K. Ruchniewicz, B. Szaynok and J. Tyszkiewicz, Wrocław 1999, pp. 110–124.

1064 Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna*, pp. 34–35.

mouth.” This statement is followed by a summary of some remarks of a “provocative character” that were heard during the discussion.¹⁰⁶⁵

Rakowski described the evening in his diary: “Yesterday, I attended a meeting of the ‘Babel’ Student and Young Intelligentsia Club of the Warsaw Branch of the TSKŻ. The evening had been arranged several weeks earlier. The mood in the hall was combative. Everyone tried to outshout one another. The discussion, or rather the declarative statements, were very emotional. The Soviet Union was passionately accused of supporting Nasser, the fascist. This information has reached our leaders. A difficult conversation took place. I fear that the consequences will be sad.”¹⁰⁶⁶

Rakowski’s fears were realized. On June 19, Gomułka took advantage of the Congress of Trade Unions assembly to make a proclamation about what had happened. Instead of speaking about labor matters, he spoke almost exclusively about the conflict in the Middle East. Dariusz Stola describes the speech as “a lengthy lecture—twenty printed pages—on the history of Israel and its habit of ‘conspiring with the Anglo-American imperialists against the progressive Arab forces.’ [The speech] ended with a comparison of the Israeli army to that of Nazi Germany.”¹⁰⁶⁷ The final words of Gomułka’s speech became (in)famous over the course of the coming months and years: “We insist that every citizen of Poland have only one homeland—the People’s Poland. [...] [We do not want a fifth column in our country.]¹⁰⁶⁸ We cannot remain indifferent towards people who in the face of a threat to world peace, and thus to Poland’s safety as well [...], take the side of the aggressor [...]. Those who feel that I am addressing them [—regardless of their ethnic background—] should draw the appropriate conclusions.”¹⁰⁶⁹

Gomułka’s speech established a model for how the Six-Day War would be discussed in the coming months. The Organizational Department of the PZPR Warsaw Committee reported contentedly: “Comrade Wiesław’s [i.e. Gomułka’s] speech at the Sixth Congress of Trade Unions decidedly enriched the content of

1065 “Notes of the Ministry of the Interior on the meeting of the student club ‘Babel,’” Warsaw, June 8, 1967, in: *Marzec ‘68: Między tragedią a podłością*, introduced, selected and edited by G. Sołtysiak and J. Stępień, Warsaw 1998, p. 11.

1066 Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1967–1968*, p. 61 (entry dated June 8, 1967).

1067 Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna*, p. 40.

1068 This sentence was removed from the official published version of the speech.

1069 Transcript of Władysław Gomułka’s speech at the Congress of Trade Unions, June 19, 1967 (excerpt), in: *Ibid.*, p. 274. The words “regardless of their ethnic background” were added in the official published version of the speech.

our meetings. It gave a significantly broader sweep to our work, and it increased the vigor of our condemnation of the aggressor and its allies.”¹⁰⁷⁰ In Stola’s words: “The anti-Israel campaign became an anti-Zionist campaign; the Cold War crisis took on a local Polish-Jewish dimension.”¹⁰⁷¹

In this atmosphere, the TSKŻ Board was likewise expected to take an official stance condemning Israel as the aggressor.¹⁰⁷² A discussion of this matter took place in the Central Committee, led by representatives of the Commission for Ethnic Affairs, chairman Zygfryd Sznek and secretary Aleksander Skrzypczak, as well as a representative from the Ministry of the Interior.¹⁰⁷³ The delegation representing the TSKŻ included Sfar, Edward Rajber, Ignacy Felhendler and Jakub Wassersztrum. Sfar was the main spokesman for the delegation.¹⁰⁷⁴ The TSKŻ delegation sought a way to diffuse the crisis. Twice they offered to issue an official declaration that would call upon both sides of the Middle Eastern conflict to conclude a truce, without condemning Israel unambiguously. However, the Central Committee representatives considered anything less than a round condemnation to be unsatisfactory and insufficient.¹⁰⁷⁵ In Ministry of the Interior documents, both TSKŻ statements proposing a call for a truce are described as deriving “from cosmopolitan and pro-Israeli positions,”¹⁰⁷⁶ and in particular, it

1070 Introductory information on the activity of the Warsaw Party branch with respect to Israeli aggression, APW, Komitet Warszawski PZPR, call no. 469, p. 59.

1071 Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna*, p. 43.

1072 Already in April 1967, at a session of the Ministry of the Interior devoted to the activity of minority organizations, the TSKŻ was brought up for discussion – particularly the fact that it was partially financed by Western Jewish organizations. The need to place “strict demands on the [TSKŻ] Board” and “corresponding demands on Party members” was asserted at that time (P. Osęka and M. Zaremba, “Wojna po wojnie, czyli polskie reperkusje wojny sześciodniowej,” *Polska 1944/45–1989: Studia i materiały*, vol. 4, 1999, p. 210). The Six-Day War turned out to be an ideal opportunity to put forward these demands.

1073 *Mit zikh*, p. 286; interview with Dovid Sfar, private collection of Michał Chęciński, p. 18. In neither of these sources does Sfar mention the name of the Ministry of the Interior representative; in the interview, he identifies him as “a director of the Jewish Section of the Ministry.”

1074 *Mit zikh*, p. 286.

1075 *Ibid.*, p. 287.

1076 This is an excellent example of the construction of a particular image of the Jews during this time period. As Dariusz Stola writes: “A noteworthy aspect of the March image of the Jew is that he is a *chimera*. In texts from that era, mutually contradictory traits are often linked together in the [imagined] ‘Zionist,’ e.g., he is both Jewish-nationalist and cosmopolitan or both a Stalinist and an agent of American

follows from them that Jews in Poland are part of the Jewish people, the TSKŻ is a section of the Israeli Communist Party, and the blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba was an Egyptian act of aggression against Israel.”¹⁰⁷⁷ According to Smolar, the TSKŻ representatives proposed only one resolution, written by Sfard, which was rejected.¹⁰⁷⁸

On June 22, the presidium of the TSKŻ Board gathered in Warsaw, apparently at Sfard’s initiative. At the meeting, activists who were no longer formally part of the presidium were also present, including Michał Mirski, Yudel Korman-Barszczewski and Shmuel Hurwicz. In the absence of Leyb Domb, who was on vacation in Bulgaria, Sfard led the meeting. He recalled:

Not only did everyone at the meeting support my stance of refusing to condemn [Israel], but they even expressed their belief that I should not negotiate with [the Party] at a time when [it was] conducting an anti-Semitic campaign. Only one person declared at the meeting that he was ‘neutral.’ One person also [...] told me that he disagreed with me, but that he did not want to say so because he did not want to annoy me. Thus, the presidium, by a majority of everyone against two, rejected the proposal of the Central Committee to condemn Israel as the aggressor.¹⁰⁷⁹

The Ministry of the Interior immediately learned what had happened at that meeting thanks to a conversation between a certain lieutenant colonel J. Sosnowski and an attendee, designated in the report as “[female] citizen ‘W.’”¹⁰⁸⁰ According to “Citizen W.,” the text of a proposed TSKŻ declaration

imperialism. [...] In reality, these traits cannot be reconciled, but that did not weaken the power of the reproach expressed by the propagandistic image; rather, it strengthened it, because it intensified the moral hideousness of the adversary. A figure who is divided internally to that extent must necessarily elicit fear and disgust” (D. Stola, “Antyżydowski nurt Marca 1968,” in: *Oblicza Marca 1968*, ed. K. Rokicki and S. Stepień, Warsaw 2004, p. 69, emphasis in the original). The juxtaposition of the mutually contradictory traits “cosmopolitan” and “pro-Israeli” here gives the impression that the officials of the Ministry of the Interior were susceptible to the propaganda that they themselves had created.

1077 Note on the political stance and activities of the vice-chairman of the TSKŻ Board, Dr. David Sfard, AIPN, microfilm 12599/2, microfiche no. 2, frame B12.

1078 Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye*, p. 358.

1079 *Mit zikh*, p. 287.

1080 Despite certain differences between Sfard’s memoirs and the report compiled based on the information from “Citizen W.,” (e.g., the latter did not mention that anyone was present other than active members of the presidium), it appears that both sources are referring to the same meeting, considering that there is no evidence that the presidium discussed this issue more than once in the period between Gomulka’s speech and the publication of the TSKŻ declaration “per the party line.”

on the Middle East conflict was discussed at the meeting. Presidium members emphasized that the declaration had been written (by Sfard) under pressure from the PZPR Central Committee and the Socio-Administrative Department of the Ministry of the Interior. The declaration described “the reactionary policies of the Israeli government; the influential role of right-wing forces, i.e., [Moshe] Dayan and [David] Ben-Gurion; the incorrect solution to the problem of the Palestinian Arabs. The last part of the declaration stated that the policies of the Israeli government had prompted the Israeli military to stray beyond the Arab [...] border.” The resolution did not mention “aggression.” According to “Citizen W.,” the proposed resolution was approved by those in attendance; however, Sfard called for a plenum of the TSKŻ Board, claiming that the presidium by itself was not authorized to put forth this sort of declaration. Smolar agreed, whereas Rajber, the secretary general, was opposed to calling a plenum.¹⁰⁸¹

Judging from the report, “Citizen W.” was not a fan of Sfard’s approach:

Citizen W. claims that Sfard attempted to prolong the matter, in order to avoid having to publish the TSKŻ’s stance. He also emphasized that the members of the plenum were opposed to signing onto a condemnation of Israeli aggression, just as he was—which would mean that the responsibility for refusing to do so would lie with a broader group of members of the plenum of the TSKŻ Board [and not Sfard alone].

Additionally, Sfard proposed a consultation with ŻIH director [Artur] Eisenbach, Mirski and [Yudel] Korman-Barszczewski about the text of the declaration. Presidium members agreed that they should be consulted, even though they were not members of the presidium.

“Citizen W.” foresees that none of those consulted will recommend that the TSKŻ condemn Israeli aggression. Sfard is to undertake the consultation, and to inform the members of the presidium of its results at 12:00 on June 23, 1967.

“Citizen W.” defined Sfard as a Zionist agent who was actively defending Israel’s reactionary and chauvinistic policy; who gets the job done by hook or by crook and will stop at nothing.

“Citizen W.” declared that in this situation, she felt that pressure from Zionist agents was influencing the attitudes of members of the presidium of the TSKŻ Board. She states that an atmosphere has been created in which if the presidium condemns Israeli aggression, it will be deemed a “Judenrat.”

The members of the TSKŻ expect that the authorities will dissolve the presidium, expel some of its members from the Party, and possibly even go so far as to arrest them for having openly pro-Israeli attitudes. Therefore, the prevailing mood among the presidium members is one of dejection, *yet nevertheless, none of them are eager to officially condemn Israeli aggression.*¹⁰⁸²

1081 AIPN, microfilm 12599/2, microfiche no. 1, frame E10 – E11.

1082 Ibid., frame E11. Emphasis added.

This report presents Sford not only as the main opponent of condemning Israeli aggression, but in fact as the sole force behind the opposition. Needless to say, this could have been a result of personal animosity, or perhaps the official compiling the report heard what he wanted to hear. However, it is possible that Sford did indeed take a conspicuously “Zionist” position (from the perspective of the propaganda of the time) very early on in the “anti-Zionist campaign.”

In the June issue of *Yidishe shriftn*, Sford published three short tales in verse: *Shakaln* (Jackals), *Der leyb* (The lion) and *Der ber* (The bear). The first seemed to carry a particularly “Zionist” overtone: it told of jackals attacking a goat that was threatening them.¹⁰⁸³ An unsigned and undated Ministry of the Interior note summing up Sford’s political position stated:

These tales immediately began to circulate in the Jewish community in Poland and abroad, and they can be considered Sford’s protest against the Party’s and the Polish government’s condemnation of Israel as the aggressor [...].

Considering that this was one of the first publications in the Polish Yiddish press on the subject of Israeli aggression, and that it was published in the TSKŻ Board organ specifically, and that its author was vice-chairman of the TSKŻ Board—these tales were considered [by the public] to reflect the honest stance of the TSKŻ leadership with respect to Israeli aggression.¹⁰⁸⁴

In June 1967, the Third Department of the Ministry of the Interior put together a report titled “Evaluation of the Situation in Poland in Connection with the Middle East Conflict.” The report states that the TSKŻ, and the ZRWM too, were characterized by “Zionist and chauvinist tendencies,” and that the presidium of the TSKŻ Board continued to refuse to sign onto an official condemnation of Israeli aggression. “Moreover, the promulgation of any potential declaration is being delayed, which communicates to the public that [the TSKŻ is] being pressured by the authorities to take a stance not in keeping with their views.”¹⁰⁸⁵

1083 The three tales were later reprinted in *Brenendike bleter*, Tel Aviv 1972, pp. 169–171.

1084 “Note on the political stance and activities of the vice-chairman of the TSKŻ Board, Dr. David Sford,” AIPN, microfilm 12599/2, microfiche no. 2, frame B9. It appears that the publication of these tales drew the attention of Ministry of the Interior officials to Sford’s literary work; an analysis of two of his poems is found in his file (“Note of Major J. Caban, secret,” AIPN, microfilm 12599/2, microfiche no. 2, frame A8 – A9).

1085 Report by the Third Department of the Ministry of the Interior, “Ocena sytuacji w Polsce w związku z konfliktem na Bliskim Wschodzie,” July 1967, in: Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna*, p. 284.

In conclusion, the report recommended imposing consequences upon the leadership of the TSKŻ and the *Folks-shtime* for demonstrating a pro-Israel stance.¹⁰⁸⁶

At a TSKŻ meeting on June 27, the PZPR Warsaw Committee's brochure on the conflict in the Middle East was read aloud. In response, Sfarid claimed that the joy which Jews took in Israel's victory was a personal matter, not a political one. He also expressed surprise that diplomatic relations had been broken off with Israel, but not with the United States after the American intervention in Vietnam. "Sfarid declared that he had not received a clear answer either at that meeting or elsewhere. He added that he had expressed his personal opinion, which he was prepared to repeat anywhere," wrote Major Józef Caban, who was leading the Sfarid investigation.¹⁰⁸⁷

In late June Sfarid decided to take a short trip with his family to the Writers' House in Sopot. On the eve of Sfarid's departure, Leyb Domb returned from Bulgaria. After a conversation with him, Sfarid felt reassured that the presidium had taken the right stance and would not diverge from it.¹⁰⁸⁸

An Ignominious End to Beautiful Work

In the coming days, the Central Committee continued to exert pressure on the TSKŻ to publish a resolution condemning Israeli aggression. Local TSKŻ branches were also pressured to put forth their own declarations, under the assumption that individual branches would feel too vulnerable to refuse. Then Domb was summoned for a meeting with Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki at the Commission for Ethnic Affairs. At the meeting, it was discreetly but explicitly made clear that further resistance would result in expulsion from the Party and the dissolution of the TSKŻ. That was the turning point.¹⁰⁸⁹ Smolar prepared an appropriate statement; Shmuel Tenenblatt and Ignacy Felhendler revised it.¹⁰⁹⁰ On July 15, 1967, a declaration appeared on the front page of the *Folks-shtime*, signed by "the Presidium of the TSKŻ Board":

1086 Ibid., p. 290.

1087 "Note on the vice-chairman of the TSKŻ Board and editor-in-chief of the monthly magazine *Yidishe shriftn*, secret," AIPN, microfilm 12599/2, microfiche no. 2, frame A11.

1088 *Mit zikh*, p. 287.

1089 Ibid., p. 287; Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye*, p. 360.

1090 Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye*, p. 360. Shmuel Tenenblatt was the TSKŻ director of youth programming, and he was popular as an instructor and director of various summer camps.

We wholeheartedly condemn the aggression on the part of the Israeli authorities. The policy of aggression of Moshe Dayan and other militarists and the ultra-reactionaries headed by Menachem Begin is alien and hostile to the true interests of the Israeli people, and it makes it impossible to achieve a peaceful solution to the matters at hand [...].

We express solidarity with the stance of the Party and government of our homeland—the People's Poland.¹⁰⁹¹

The editorial board of the *Folks-shtime* did not add any comment to the declaration. Up until that point, the *Folks-shtime* had managed to resist all pressure from above on this issue; no articles had even included the term “Israeli aggression.” Prior to the publication of the declaration, Smolar (still the editor-in-chief of the *Folks-shtime* at the time) had been summoned to the presidium of the Central Committee Press Bureau for a talk. There, he was reproached for evaluating Middle East events differently from the party line—as the Press Bureau knew, at a briefing of the editorial board, Smolar had declared that he would not publish any articles condemning Israel as the aggressor, and also that the policy of the socialist countries toward Israel was unobjective and wrong.¹⁰⁹² During the meeting at the Press Bureau, Smolar defended himself by claiming that these views were the private opinion of a few employees, not the official stance of the editorial board. He also declared that if the *Folks-shtime* presented the anti-Israel position of the Party, it would provoke many reader protests, and some readers would even boycott the newspaper.¹⁰⁹³

For some, the TSKŻ presidium's publication of a declaration under coercion was a shock as great as, or perhaps even greater than, Gomulka's speech. Sfar'd's reaction was “very bitter.”¹⁰⁹⁴ Ida Kamińska found out about the declaration from the television news, and she was shocked: “I felt ashamed in front of my housekeeper, who soothed me with these words: ‘They probably had to do it.’”¹⁰⁹⁵

Sfar'd stopped taking part in presidium meetings, with the exception of one meeting about the future of the publishing house Yidish Bukh. In July 1967, the GUKPPIW informed the editors of the *Folks-shtime* that as of August 1,

1091 “Derklerung fun prezidium fun der hoypt-farvaltung fun kultur-gezelschaftlekhn farband fun di yidn in Poyln,” *Folks-shtime*, July 15, 1967, p. 1.

1092 AIPN, microfilm 2776/SK, microfiche 2776/SK SUSW-4, vol. 2, frame B4.

1093 Confidential note by Andrzej Weber from his conversation with Smolar, AAN, KC PZPR, Press Bureau, call no. 237/XIX-191, p. 1-2.

1094 *Mit zikh*, pp. 287-288.

1095 I. Kamińska, *My Life, My Theater*, ed. and transl. Curt Leviant, New York 1973, pp. 257.

in accordance with paragraph 21 of the GUKPPiW instructions, materials in Yiddish intended for publication would be accepted by the censor only if accompanied by a Polish translation. The only exceptions to this rule were to be reprints of previously published works of literature and Yiddish translations of political columns and official communiqués that had previously appeared in Polish.¹⁰⁹⁶ This order was aimed not only at the *Folks-shtime*, but also at *Yidishe shriftn* and Yidish Bukh—in a word, everything published in Poland in Yiddish. Domb and Rajber tried to appeal to GUKPPiW chairman Józef Siemek:

- I. In our opinion, the publications *Folks-shtime*, *Yidishe shriftn* and Yidish Bukh cannot be treated as “foreign-language publications.” The historical legacy of Yiddish is intimately connected to Poland. [...] Yiddish cannot be declared a “foreign” language when it is used in daily life, in both speech and writing, by several tens of thousands of people who are citizens of this country. [...]
- II. We are perfectly aware that the Press Control Bureau is obligated to oversee our publications, just like all other publications in the country. However, the burden of translating, etc., in order to perform this supervision should, in our opinion, be shouldered by the Bureau itself and its executive apparatus. If only for reasons of principle, we should not be asked to take on this burden, for that would be an extra demand on us, and thus a kind of denial of equal rights to the Yiddish press. *And after all, that certainly is not the Bureau’s intention towards us.*
- III. In addition, we would like to call your attention to the practical impossibility of carrying out this order. We have extremely limited staff, and in general we have great difficulty obtaining adequate material for publication, and what we do receive usually arrives right before the printing deadline. Under these conditions, the requirement to present almost 90 % of our materials (that is the percentage of original material contained in our publications) accompanied by a Polish translation would in practice mean bringing our work to a standstill. In all earnestness, and out of our sense of responsibility for the role we play, we want to emphasize that this outcome—if the order remains in force—is extremely likely.¹⁰⁹⁷

1096 Note by T. Ratajski to Smolar AAN, KC PZPR, Press Bureau, call no. 237/XIX-191, p. 7.

1097 Note by the TSKŻ Board to GUKPPiW, AAN, KC PZPR, Press Bureau, call no. 237/XIX-191, p. 31. Emphasis added.

At the presidium meeting about the future of Yiddish publishing in Poland, Sfard proposed that all presidium members demonstratively resign for as long as it took to get the GUKPPiW to withdraw its order. Supposedly, everyone agreed to this suggestion, but no one was eager to put it into practice.¹⁰⁹⁸ Nor did an attempt by Domb, Sfard and Smolar to intercede at the Press Bureau meet with success: “We asked how it was possible that in the most reactionary times in Poland, there was a Yiddish censor that the authorities trusted, and now, in a people’s democracy, the authorities could not find a single Jew they could trust?”¹⁰⁹⁹ The GUKPPiW upheld its earlier decision, which Siemek justified in a note to the Socio-Administrative Department of the Ministry of the Interior with a reference to the pro-Israeli stance of the *Folks-shtime* editorial board.¹¹⁰⁰ For TSKŻ activists, this was conclusive proof of the ill will of the authorities. As Sfard recalled, “I knew that those were the last days of so-called ‘Nusekh Poyln’; that what would ensue would be a shameful intrigue before the world, [...] and I was sick at heart throughout the entire period, because the beautiful work that we had all done for over twenty years was coming to such an ignominious end.”¹¹⁰¹

Further signs of the end of “Nusekh Poyln” were found in the developing “anti-Zionist campaign,” which in practice turned out to be an anti-Semitic campaign. Some people, including representatives of the authorities, spoke indulgently of “popular anti-Semitism” (i.e., anti-Semitism that was “harmless” insofar as it was not state-sponsored and, if it showed signs of getting out of hand, was supposedly easily suppressed by the intervention of law enforcement). “This may be an accurate description,” noted Rakowski, “but conditions have undeniably been created in which this ‘popular’ anti-Semitism can be revealed with impunity.”¹¹⁰² The PZPR Warsaw Committee compiled lists of people who had adopted stances opposed to that of the Party and government, and these people were interrogated in order to verify their loyalty to the party line (such interrogations also took place during a campaign to get Party members to renew their Party ID cards in

1098 *Mit zikh*, pp. 289–290.

1099 *Ibid.*, p. 289. The incident was also mentioned by Smolar (*Oyf der letster pozitsye*, p. 399) and Leon Sfard (personal communication).

1100 Note by J. Siemek to Z. Orłowski, AAN, KC PZPR, Press Bureau, call no. 237/XIX–191, p. 23.

1101 *Mit zikh*, p. 289.

1102 Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1967–1968*, p. 68 (entry dated June 26, 1967).

late 1967).¹¹⁰³ Those accused or even only suspected of “Zionism” were fired from their jobs and often expelled from the Party.¹¹⁰⁴

The purging of “Zionists” from Party ranks lasted for at least several months. After Moczar warned subordinates that “Zionists” could disguise themselves and successfully pass as loyal Party members, the witch hunt began to target not only political views but also ethnic background.¹¹⁰⁵ In October 1967, Rakowski noted:

In the last few months, I have heard more than once of anti-Semitic views being openly demonstrated in Party ranks, but I know of no instance in which someone has been relieved of his Party card for such views. On the other hand, many have been expelled for pro-Zionist sympathies. It is also a fact that this entire clamor over Zionism, Israeli aggression, and the like has become an opportunity for various scoundrels who are pursuing their own interests. In general, these are people of no talent who have suddenly discovered that their career trajectories are being blocked by Jews. [...] It is fitting to add that most instances of comrades of Jewish origin being expelled are based on insinuations and provocations.¹¹⁰⁶

A large number of Party members took an active part in the meetings at which Gomulka’s speech was discussed and accounts were settled with “Zionists”: “At a majority of the meetings, attendees displayed forceful reactions, made forceful statements, participated in large numbers.”¹¹⁰⁷ Some “disagreeable incidents”

1103 List of people who have adopted stances opposed to the Party’s and government’s, APW, Komitet Warszawski PZPR 469, pp. 105–115. The name of Dovid Sfarad appears on the list (p. 108).

1104 The 1967–1969 purge, which swept through workplaces and institutions of various types, including upper Party circles, is often considered an argument for the likelihood that the Ministry of the Interior kept special files on Jews, or perhaps even convened an entire Jewish Department, or even a Bureau or Division. (Some have speculated that this agency was directed by Col. Tadeusz Walichnowski, the author of books “unmasking” Israeli policy whose prose can be compared to “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.”) However, historians working on the subject of March 1968 have not yet found any archival sources that confirm this hypothesis. It is not out of the question that such materials existed and were destroyed at some point. On the other hand, it is known that the Third Department of the Ministry of the Interior was charged with surveillance of the Jewish population, and produced many documents along the way which are now available in the archives, e.g., reports based on surveillance of correspondence, official records kept by the Polish embassy in Tel Aviv, etc.

1105 Osęka and Zaremba, “Wojna po wojnie,” p. 228.

1106 Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1967–1968*, p. 83 (entry dated October 18, 1967).

1107 Introductory information on the activity of the Warsaw Party branch in connection with Israeli aggression, APW Warszawy, Komitet Wojewódzki PZPR 469, p. 62.

took place: some of those making statements in keeping with the party line “found it necessary to preface their statements with the request they not be taken for anti-Semites.”¹¹⁰⁸

Some have hypothesized that the events of 1967–1968 were instigated by the Soviet authorities. Jerzy Eisler does not discount the possibility that the ideological roots of the anti-Zionist campaign could have come from the USSR;¹¹⁰⁹ Dariusz Libionka has drawn attention to the role of anti-Zionist literature imported from the USSR.¹¹¹⁰ It is also known that a letter condemning Israel and signed by prominent Soviet Jews, including Aron Vergelis, was planned for the pages of the Soviet press; the letter was never published, but in July 1967, *Sovetish heymland* did publish an appeal signed by thirty writers for peace in the Middle East and withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Occupied Territories.¹¹¹¹ Much space was devoted in the Soviet press to information about the Polish situation; among other things, the Soviet press reprinted Gomulka’s speech of March 19, 1968.¹¹¹²

Who Knows What a Zionist Looks Like?

As Eisler writes, barely 500 Jews left Poland in 1967.¹¹¹³ The mere awareness that “Nusekh Poyln” was on its last legs would not have ultimately motivated most TSKŻ activists to emigrate. Let us not forget that prominent TSKŻ leaders were mostly over sixty years old at this point—an age at which it is difficult to call into question everything to which one has dedicated one’s life and permanently leave behind a homeland. The coming exodus would take place not because of the bankruptcy of “Nusekh Poyln,” but because the events of winter and spring 1968 would threaten the safety and well-being of the next generation.

1108 Ibid., p. 65.

1109 Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, p. 109.

1110 D. Libionka, “Brakujące ogniwo: Sowiecka literatura antysyjonistyczna w Polsce przed i po Marcu 1968,” in: *Komunizm: Ideologia, system, ludzie*, ed. T. Szarota, Warsaw 2001, pp. 272–288.

1111 M. Altshuler, “New Documentation on Public Opinion and the Jewish Reaction in the USSR to the Six-Day War,” in: *The Six-Day War and World Jewry*, ed. E. Lederhendler, Bethesda 2000, pp. 281–285.

1112 As Jonathan Frankel notes, the publication and dissemination of this speech had a rather unexpected result: it reinforced Soviet Jews’ hopes of leaving the USSR (“The Soviet Regime and Anti-Zionism: An Analysis,” in: *Essential Papers on Jews and the Left*, ed. E. Mendelsohn, New York and London 1997, p. 461).

1113 Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, p. 115.

The Jewish youth (or youth of Jewish origin) who could tentatively be called “TSKŻ children” have not yet been subjected to serious sociological study.¹¹¹⁴ The TSKŻ began to organize youth-specific programming only in 1956. In 1957, the *Folks-shtime* began to publish a Polish-language supplement, *Nasz Głos* (Our Voice), intended for youth and edited by youth representatives. It was no coincidence that this supplement was published in Polish—“TSKŻ children” might have heard Yiddish at home or even studied it in school (in cities such as Łódź, Wrocław, and Szczecin), but their first and often only language was Polish. In general, the community of “TSKŻ children” was bound together by close social ties; these ties were formed at youth club meetings at local TSKŻ branches, as well as during winter and summer camps. One of Joanna Wiszniewicz’s interlocutors stated years later: “There was something left unsaid in these Jewish camps. These camps were Jewish, because, after all, they brought us Jewish children together! The grownups [TSKŻ activists, camp organizers] seemed to understand that Jewish children were different,—and perhaps even wanted us to be different.”¹¹¹⁵

“TSKŻ children” differed from their peers in three ways: they were aware of and cultivated their Jewish identities; most of their families were secular; and Yiddish was simultaneously present and absent in their homes. Their awareness of their Jewish origins was a legacy from their parents.¹¹¹⁶ The secularity of their families was often linked to the leftist convictions and/or Party membership of one or both parents. It was a factor that distinguished them from the rest of Polish society and constituted an additional barrier between them and their Polish peers from non-Jewish homes (based on the lack of religious experiences such as catechism classes, First Communion, confirmations, and church weddings and funerals). Finally, their parents tended to speak Yiddish

1114 Until recently, the only research to be conducted about this generation was by Joanna Wiszniewicz, on the basis of interviews: J. Wiszniewicz, “Dzieci i młodzież pochodzenia żydowskiego w szkołach śródmiejskich Warszawy lat sześćdziesiątych XX wieku (O sposobach doświadczania żydowskości – na podstawie wywiadów przeprowadzonych trzydzieści lat później),” in: *Żydzi Warszawy: Materiały konferencji w Żydowskim Instytucie Historycznym w 100. rocznicę urodzin Emanuela Ringelbluma*, ed. E. Bergman and O. Zienkiewicz, Warsaw 2000, pp. 259–312; idem, “Pierwsze powojenne pokolenie polskich Żydów: Rodzicielski przekaz pamięci Holocaustu a tożsamość żydowska,” *BŻIH*, 1999, no. 3, pp. 40–47.; idem, *Życie przecięte: Opowieści pokolenia Marca*, Wołowiec 2008. For more recent research on the “TSKŻ children,” see Piotr Pęziński, *Na rozdrożu: Młodzież żydowska w PRL 1956–1968*, Warszawa 2014.

1115 J. Wiszniewicz, *Życie przecięte*, p. 106, testimony of Małgosia Tal. Emphasis added.

1116 Wiszniewicz, “Dzieci i młodzież,” p. 277.

with one another and with their friends, and they read Yiddish newspapers and books, but they conversed with their children primarily in Polish. Thus, from the children's perspective, Yiddish was on one hand familiar, intimate, part of family life, but on the other hand had no direct bearing on their own lives, apart from singing Yiddish songs at summer camp (the words to some of the songs were printed, with Polish transliteration, in *Nasz Głos*).

The famous “Babel Club” was the primary social milieu for “TSKŻ children” of high school and college age in Warsaw during its years of operation, from 1962 to 1967.¹¹¹⁷ As Joanna Wiszniewicz describes, it functioned as an “extension of the Jewish summer and winter camps.”¹¹¹⁸ It was known for its dance parties, bridge tournaments and meetings with artists and writers. Actor and writer Henryk Grynberg wrote rather tartly about the club's habitués in the Paris journal *Kultura*: “They came to meet with [Sława] Przybylska, Wiech and [Gustaw] Holoubek,¹¹¹⁹ but could not be persuaded to come to the Yiddish Theater. They did not understand a word of Yiddish and were not at all interested in our performances [...]. And yet it was they, the Babel Club, the Warsaw Jacobins of 1968, who ultimately played such a major role in the political life of the country!”¹¹²⁰

These “Warsaw Jacobins” soon became the main victims of a new phase of the “anti-Zionist campaign,” which was triggered by the cancellation of the Polish Theater's production of Adam Mickiewicz's classic drama-in-verse *Dziady* (Forefathers), directed by Kazimierz Dejmek.¹¹²¹ The governmental order to shut down the production of *Dziady*, allegedly because it was too “anti-Russian,” came as a shock, above all for students and the intelligentsia. On January 30, 1968, after the play's last performance, several hundred people marched from the theater building to the Mickiewicz monument on Krakowskie Przedmieście Street, where they demonstrated before being forcibly dispersed by the police. Several dozen people were arrested and interrogated. Particular attention was paid to the arrestees' ethnic background, and many of them were subjected to

1117 Ibid., p. 287.

1118 Ibid., p. 303.

1119 Major figures in Polish popular culture in the 1960s: Sława Przybylska (b. 1932), singer; Stefan Wiechecki (“Wiech,” 1896–1979), author, especially popular for his humorous short stories and feuilletons about daily life in Warsaw; Gustaw Holoubek (1923–2008), actor and director, played the main role in Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (Forefathers) in 1968.

1120 H. Grynberg, “Wygnanie z Polski,” *Kultura*, 1968, no. 11, p. 52.

1121 For more about the *Dziady* incident, see Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, pp. 164–190.

anti-Semitic remarks. “Thus we can assume,” Dariusz Stola concludes, “that by January 1968, the thesis that a secret Jewish conspiracy was behind the students’ actions had already been accepted, and an effort had begun to collect evidence to support it.”¹¹²²

Now events began to move quickly. On February 29, the Warsaw Branch of the Union of Polish Writers convened a special general meeting. There, a resolution was adopted calling for *Dziady* to be restored to the theater under Dejmek’s direction, as well as for constraints on censorship.¹¹²³ Meanwhile, the temperature was on the rise at the University of Warsaw, where students on one hand and the Security Service on the other were engaged in a leaflet war; the Security Service leaflets included openly anti-Semitic texts.¹¹²⁴ At the beginning of March, students Adam Michnik and Henryk Szlajfer were expelled from the university. The students reacted by calling for a protest meeting, to be held in the university courtyard on March 8; the dramatic course of the ensuing meeting has been described many times.¹¹²⁵

However, the turning point was reached on March 11, when an explicitly anti-Semitic motif appeared in the media. “Two articles in the morning press,” writes Stola, “fired the opening salvo of a propagandistic attack, especially on Jews, and served as an example of how to conduct that attack.”¹¹²⁶ The articles indicated that the student incidents had been inspired by Zionists, who were also to be held responsible for the mistakes and deviations of the Stalinist era; the instigators of the recent incidents were the children (in spirit, if not in fact) of these “Zionists.” Specific instigators were named, and in particular instigators of Jewish origin, including some with recognizably Jewish surnames. To drive the point home, the articles mentioned that some of the students had met at the Babel Club. This was the beginning of a brutal campaign in the press, the climate of which has been summed up by historian Piotr Oseka in four words: “Here’s our big chance” (to go after the Jews).¹¹²⁷ There is no doubt that Ministry of the

1122 Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna*, pp. 82.

1123 For more details about the meeting, see: Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, pp. 195–204.

1124 It is worth mentioning that earlier events also contributed to the growing unrest at the University of Warsaw: e.g., the distribution of the “Open Letter to the Party,” written by young scholars Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski, as well the meeting on the tenth anniversary of the October events with the participation of Leszek Kołakowski.

1125 The most extensive description can be found in: Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, pp. 224–251.

1126 Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna*, pp. 90–91.

1127 Oseka, *Syjonści, inspiratorzy, wiczychyiele*, p. 22. For a classic analysis of the March 1968 propaganda, see: M. Głowiński, *Marcowe gadanie: Komentarze do słów 1966–1971*, Warsaw 1991.

Interior directives were behind the emphasis on Jews, to the exclusion of other potential scapegoats.¹¹²⁸

The events of March 1968 unfolded the way they did because of the interaction between an emerging social revolt and a deep conflict in the government apparatus.¹¹²⁹ The latter factor was no secret even at the time. Rakowski interpreted the March events through the lens of a power struggle “on high”:

There are forces that aspire to exploit student demonstrations in order to create an extremely tense political atmosphere [...] a new generation is preparing to take power, a new group that cynically and unforgivably leverages anti-Zionist slogans, which in our country are read as no more and no less than anti-Jewish. Who knows what a Zionist looks like? Where are all these Polish Zionists about whom we are suddenly hearing so much?¹¹³⁰

On March 19, in the Congress Hall of the Palace of Culture and Science, Gomułka gave a speech that sealed many Polish Jews’ decision to emigrate.¹¹³¹ In his speech, Gomułka discussed the *Dziady* incident and the subsequent writers’ protest, launching an unprecedented attack on Stefan Kisielewski and Paweł Jasienica, two of the central participants of the February meeting at the Warsaw branch of the Union of Polish Writers. Next, he spoke of the “revisionist” and “reactionary” roots of the student rebellion, and finally addressed the matter of “Zionism”:

This past year, during the incident in June of Israeli aggression against the Arab states, a certain number of Jews demonstrated in various forms the desire to leave for Israel in order to take part in the war against the Arabs. There is no doubt that these Jews, who are Polish citizens, identify emotionally and intellectually not with Poland but with the State of Israel. There is no doubt that they are Jewish nationalists. Should we hold a grudge against them? Only the kind of grudge that Communists harbor against all nationalists, regardless of their ethnic background. I suppose that this group of Jews will leave our country sooner or later. [...] We are prepared, as soon as today, to issue exit passports to those who consider Israel to be their homeland.¹¹³²

1128 Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna*, pp. 91–93.

1129 A. Friszke, “Miejsce Marca 1968 wśród innych ‘polskich miesięcy,’” in: *Oblicza Marca 1968*, ed. K. Rokicki and S. Stępień, Warsaw 2004, p. 18.

1130 Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1967–1968*, p. 160 (entry dated March 16, 1968).

1131 For more on Gomułka’s speech, see: Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, pp. 550–559; Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna*, pp. 115–119; c.f. also Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1967–1968*, pp. 164–165 (entry dated March 19, 1968).

1132 Władysław Gomułka, “Stanowisko partii – zgodne z wolą narodu,” *Trybuna Ludu*, March 20, 1968, reprinted in: Oseka, *Syjniści, inspiratorzy, wicherzyciele*, p. 163.

Gomułka then continued on to define two more groups of Poles of Jewish origin: cosmopolitans, who felt themselves to be neither Polish nor Jewish (he gave the poet Antoni Słonimski as an example), and those whose sole homeland was Poland. Finally, he assured the audience that there was no room in the Party for anti-Semitism.

Stola emphasizes that Gomułka's speech was far more anti-intellectual than anti-Jewish, and even the portion about Jews was nowhere near as violently anti-Semitic as the rhetoric currently in play in the media and at demonstrations: "True, it was crass and spurious to divide Jews into three categories [...], but what a subtle maneuver that was, when we compare it to condemnations of all Jews under the rubric of 'Zionist.'"¹¹³³ Yet the audience's impression was that the speech was shockingly anti-Semitic, not only because of Gomułka's words in and of themselves, but also because of the reaction of the Warsaw Party cadres present in the hall, who spurred Gomułka on with shouts of "Keep going! Keep going, Wiesław, give us their names," as well as "Do it today," in response to his remark about issuing exit passports. To Smolar, it felt like a "Hitlerist party convention."¹¹³⁴ Janina Bauman, wife of the philosopher Zygmunt Bauman, felt as if Poland were on the verge of a pogrom: "In our cozy room, in our peaceful home, we suddenly felt ourselves to be in mortal danger. The enraged rabble would soon leave the Congress Hall and pour out onto the streets. If they were sober now, they would not be so for long."¹¹³⁵

The anti-Zionist media campaign continued on after Gomułka's speech. The sins of the fathers continued to be visited upon the children, and vice versa.¹¹³⁶ Among those involved in the incidents at the university were Leon Sford and Smolar's sons. According to Ministry of the Interior documents, an informer with the pseudonym "Horzyca" reported on March 13 on a conversation with Ida Kamińska: "She said that Sford was very upset about what his son had done; his son had been elected delegate of a student group. She did not elaborate on the significance of this, but in any case, Sford was afraid that his son would be arrested." A handwritten note was appended to this paragraph of the report: "Add to the list."¹¹³⁷ Leon Sford was arrested on March 27.¹¹³⁸ Immediately

1133 Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna*, p. 118.

1134 Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye*, p. 376.

1135 J. Bauman, *A Dream of Belonging: My Years in Postwar Poland*, London 1988, p. 189; c.f. also Kamińska, *My Life, My Theater*, p. 267–268.

1136 Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, p. 534; Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna*, p. 111.

1137 AIPN, microfilm 12599/2, microfiche no. 2, frame B3.

1138 As told by Leon Sford, personal communication. For more information on the events that affected student circles, see: Appendix to the Internal Bulletin of the Ministry of

afterward, his was mentioned as being among the children of “parents who from their public positions [...] agreed to be duplicitous and hypocritical in order to clear a path for their offspring to be granted privileges.”¹¹³⁹ Was this an attack on the sons or on the fathers?

A Zionist, but a Decent One

I was unable to determine the exact date of Sfarid’s expulsion from the Party. Smolar wrote that he and Sfarid were expelled at the same time. Smolar was accused of “causing political harm in the Jewish community,” among other things; the accusations against Sfarid included his “literary offenses.” Smolar wrote: “Dr. Sfarid responded in his usual style—calmly, drawing upon his sophisticated sense of humor, which the representatives of the Central Commission of Party Control did not understand at all. The result was the same: expulsion from the Party.”¹¹⁴⁰ Smolar was dismissed from his position as editor-in-chief of the *Folks-shtime* on March 31, which gives an approximate date for his expulsion from the Party.¹¹⁴¹ Sfarid’s file in the IPN archives contains a report of a conversation with “Citizen E.,” dated April 26, 1968, in which Sfarid is described as “recently expelled from the PZPR for Zionist activity.”¹¹⁴²

The same file also contains a five-page-long, unsigned and undated “Note on the political stance and activities of the vice-chairman of the TSKŻ Board, Dr. David Sfarid.” This document sums up much of the information contained in the Ministry of the Interior documentation and concludes with an indictment; it is possible that this is the document that was prepared for the Central Commission of Party Control in order to formalize Sfarid’s expulsion. The note

the Interior, March 24–27, 1968, in: *Marzec 68 – trzydzieści lat później*, vol. 2: *Aneks źródłowy: Dzień po dniu w raportach SB oraz Wydziału Organizacyjnego KC PZPR*, ed. M. Zaremba, Warsaw 1998, p. 238; Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, p. 445.

1139 A. Reutt, Z. Andruszkiewicz, “Bananowe jabłka,” *Walka Młodych*, March 31, 1968, quoted in: Oseka, *Syjniści, inspiratorzy, wicherzyciele*, p. 212.

1140 Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye*, pp. 405–406.

1141 Note of the Press Bureau of the PZPR Central Committee on the staffing changes in the publishing houses, editorial boards and businesses of the Workers’ Publishing Cooperative “Prasa,” May 25, 1968, in: *Marzec ‘68: Między tragedią*, p. 327. For more on Smolar’s dismissal, see: A. Leszczyński, “Sprawa redaktora naczelnego ‘Folks-shtime’ Grzegorza Smolara na tle wydarzeń lat 1967–1968,” *BŻIH*, 1995/1996, no. 3–2, pp. 131–152.

1142 “Official note of a meeting with Citizen E., April 26, 1968, secret,” AIPN, microfilm 12599/2, microfiche no. 2, frame C3.

begins by introducing Sfard as a Yiddish poet who is well-known in Poland and abroad, and who draws the interest of the Jewish population and plays a major role in influencing its viewpoints and opinions. According to the note, his efforts to develop “a sense of Jewish culture and historical traditions,” especially among the youth, contributed to the deepening of the Polish Jewish community’s isolation. When the Six-Day War broke out, Sfard revealed himself to be dedicated to “applying the decisions and guidelines of the World Zionist Movement within the Polish Jewish Community”; the three tales that he had published in *Yidishe shriftn* were presented as evidence of this, and described as a camouflaged formulation of the honest TSKŻ stance toward the Six-Day War. The note continues with a discussion of Sfard’s reaction to the pressure that had been placed on the TSKŻ to sign onto a condemnation of Israeli aggression, and his opinions are quoted as evidence that his views on the matter were not in keeping “with the party and government line.” The note then describes the “demonstrative character” of his withdrawal from TSKŻ activity after the publication by the presidium of the TSKŻ Board of the declaration condemning Israeli aggression. The note concludes:

In sum, it must be stated that D. Sfard, a sociopolitical TSKŻ activist, has in the end crossed over to the Zionist position, broken with the party line on Israeli aggression, in both opinion and behavior; by means of his actions, he has fomented anti-Party and anti-state sentiment within the Polish Jewish community, and has caused harm to the Party abroad by means of the publication of his libelous political tract titled “Shakaln” in the [Paris] Zionist paper *Undzer vort*.

In light of the above, it is no coincidence that Sfard’s son has been arrested as one of the ringleaders of the excesses at the University of Warsaw.¹¹⁴³

Of course, this does not mean that Sfard would not have been expelled from the Party if not for his son’s political activism; nor does it mean that Leon would not have been arrested if not for his father’s position in the TSKŻ. Nevertheless, the two incidents were interconnected in the authorities’ eyes: according to the official viewpoint, both father and son had “crossed over to the Zionist position.” To be sure, the Ministry of the Interior was convinced of this even prior to March 1968. A note about a business trip which Regina Dreyer-Sfard took to the USSR

1143 Note on the political stance and activities of the vice-chairman of the TSKŻ Board, Dr. David Sfard, AIPN, microfilm 12599/2, microfiche no. 2, frame B8-B12.

in early 1968 stated that “the Sfard family has decidedly stepped onto Zionist ground.”¹¹⁴⁴

It appears that Leon’s imprisonment was a tremendous blow for Dovid.¹¹⁴⁵ It is possible that he tried to use his influence in order to get Leon released. The report of the conversation with “Citizen E.” contains the following sentence: “Sfard says that his son will be released from prison after May 1.”¹¹⁴⁶ Meanwhile, the May 1968 issue of *Yidishe shriftn* contains five poems written by Sfard in honor of May Day.¹¹⁴⁷ Did Sfard feel that his son had been arrested for his own sins, and was he trying to show in this desperate way that he was still “on the right side”? Or did Sfard wish to assert that despite having been expelled from the Party, he still considered himself a Communist, and the symbols and ideals of the Communist movement were still dear to him?¹¹⁴⁸

Leon Sfard was released from prison in late June 1968. At his release, Dovid Sfard burst into tears.¹¹⁴⁹ The Ministry of the Interior documentation notes that although Sfard condemned the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, both he and Smolar, whose son, like Leon Sfard, was also awaiting trial then, were in general very cautious in voicing their opinions over the course of the following months.¹¹⁵⁰

It is difficult to determine precisely when the Sfard family decided to leave the country. Leon felt that he could not allow his elderly, exhausted parents to emigrate alone; for their part, they believed that if the family stayed in Poland, it would ruin his life.¹¹⁵¹ Some historians believe that the anti-Zionist campaign

1144 AIPN, microfilm 12599/2, microfiche no. 2, frame A6. The case of Jakub S. Dreyer, who as of 1965 was living in Paris, is also discussed during this time period in the Ministry of the Interior documents.

1145 Evidence of this can be found in a cycle of five poems titled “Ikh ruf dikh in der mit fun nakht” (I Call You in the Middle of the Night), written between March and June 1968 (D. Sfard, *Brenendike bleter*, Tel Aviv 1972, pp. 31–34).

1146 “Official note of a meeting with Citizen E., April 26, 1968, secret,” AIPN, microfilm 12599/2, microfiche no. 2, frame C3.

1147 D. Sfard, “Lider tsum ershtn may,” *Yidishe shriftn*, 1968, no. 5 (246), p. 3.

1148 C.f. the words of K. Kersten: “In 1968, some intellectuals within the Party had not yet completely cut off their ideological connection to Communism; they considered current events to be deviations from the correct path, which Poland would also figure out, sooner or later” (“Marzec 1968 a postawy intelektualistów wobec komunizmu,” in: *Marzec 1968 – trzydzieści lat później*, ed. M. Kula, P. Osęka and M. Zaremba, vol. 1, Warsaw 1998, p. 174).

1149 As told by Leon Sfard, personal communication.

1150 AIPN, microfilm 12599/2, microfiche no. 2, frame C5.

1151 As told by Leon Sfard, personal communication.

was intended to target not the TSKŻ but rather other high-profile Poles of Jewish origin who were perceived as a threat to the Party,¹¹⁵² but in either case, those who ultimately emigrated were primarily former TSKŻ members. One of the emigrants recalled the rapid emergence of the trend: “People were leaving and inspiring one other to leave. They talked to one another and made the decision together; many of them had been connected since prewar times—they were a sort of family. It was obvious that they would succeed in persuading one other.”¹¹⁵³ Another emigrant recalled: “The atmosphere was full of one goodbye after another. I had the feeling that indeed, everyone was leaving. That my entire Jewish world, to which I was so emotionally attached, was leaving.”¹¹⁵⁴ The silver lining for the Sfards, so to speak, was that because their social and professional milieu consisted mostly of other TSKŻ members, they did not have to cope with the letdown of discovering the indifferent or anti-Semitic attitudes of their non-Jewish acquaintances and friends (unlike those emigrants whose social and professional milieu was primarily composed of non-Jews).¹¹⁵⁵ There was no humiliating feeling of “inferiority” to endure, since everyone among the Sfards’ close acquaintances and friends found themselves in the same position.¹¹⁵⁶

1968 was a tragic year for Sfar. His son’s arrest most likely brought back memories of the Stalinist practice of collective punishment of family members. The dismissal of people of Jewish origin from their jobs, the expulsion of Jewish Communists from the Party, the closing of Jewish schools and cooperatives—all this gave the impression of a “total liquidation of all signs of Jewish cultural and social life,” as Leyb Domb, who had been forced to resign from his post as chairman of the TSKŻ, wrote in an alarmed letter to Gomulka.¹¹⁵⁷ In addition

1152 “The actual goal of the anti-Zionist campaign was, of course, not the TSKŻ, but thousands of well-known and influential people considered by the Ministry of the Interior to be Jewish” (Osęka and Zaremba, “Wojna po wojnie,” p. 229).

1153 Magda, “Tak się złożyło,” in: J. Wiszniewicz, *Z Polski do Izraela: Rozmowy z pokoleniem* ‘68, Warsaw 1992, p. 51.

1154 Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna*, p. 224.

1155 Janina Bauman writes quite a lot about this in her memoirs (Bauman, *A Dream of Belonging*).

1156 This does not mean that Sfar did not feel disappointed or even betrayed by the actions of some members of the Presidium of the TSKŻ Board. However, it is worth noting that even in his autobiography (which, as we know, is more of a rough draft, not the version that he intended to publish), he avoids naming names and pointing an accusing finger (in contrast to Smolar, for example).

1157 Letter by Leopold Domb, former chairman of the TSKŻ Board, to Władysław Gomulka, reprinted in: Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna*, p. 380.

to the bad news from “on high,” it was disheartening to observe the reactions of non-Jewish Poles. One of the March emigrants recalled: “My father felt that some Poles were pleased that Jews were being expelled. Other Jews got that same impression. And that was unbearable.”¹¹⁵⁸

The decision to emigrate emerged from a state of utter despair: everything that the TSKŻ members had worked to build no longer had any meaning, because everything was now being destroyed. In the last chapter of his memoirs, Sfard wrote: “My sociopolitical activity, which I had begun in my youth with such fervor and hope, ended on this sad note. Not only my own life, but also the ideas that were for me and for hundreds of thousands like me a pillar of fire that was to light the way to the redemption of all humanity, including the redemption of the Jewish people, stood in absolute ruin.”¹¹⁵⁹

Sfard’s decision to emigrate may have also been motivated by increasing feelings of isolation, in addition to the aforementioned harassment at the hands of the Party and government. Among Sfard’s close friends, Mark was dead, Ida Kamińska was leaving Poland, and Olitsky and Heller had long since left for Israel. Among the TSKŻ activists who still lived in Poland, Sfard perhaps no longer had any close friends. On top of the loneliness, he also felt betrayed by some former colleagues—those who had agreed to the publication of the TSKŻ resolution against Israeli aggression.

For some time, Sfard entertained the idea of emigrating to France first and leaving from there for Israel, perhaps in order to lessen the impression that his emigration, as a well-known poet and long-time active Communist, would make in the Polish Jewish community. In the end, however, the Sfard family applied in autumn 1968 to emigrate directly to Israel. Many other leading TSKŻ activists did the same (although Domb, Smolar and others ultimately had to wait for several years to be allowed to emigrate).

Of the old guard of Jewish Communists in Poland, only Szymon Zachariasz remained behind, undoubtedly due to his advanced age and deteriorating health (he died in 1970). Sfard later recalled their last conversation: “As we were strolling, [Zachariasz] said to me: ‘You know, I’ll tell you something, I had a talk [with some upper-level Party members] about you. They consider you a Zionist, but a decent one—you tell the truth as you see it. And they trust you. And I have

1158 Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna*, p. 221. As Marcin Zaremba has remarked: “In 1968, Jews were declared renegades, opponents of the system, at a time when the system had to some extent been accepted by a relatively large part of Polish society” (Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm*, pp. 350–351).

1159 *Mit zikh*, p. 291.

no complaints about your leaving, but just one request: when you get there, be a writer, not a journalist. Don't talk, because we're still here.'"¹¹⁶⁰

In the final issue of *Yidishe shriftn*, Sfar'd's name did not appear anywhere. The ceremonial article on the first page (in honor of the occasion of the 250th issue) began with the sentence "The 250 issues of *Yidishe shriftn*—are now history." On the same page, a communiqué from the TSKŻ Board announced that the magazine would cease publication.¹¹⁶¹

Historians estimate that as a result of the "anti-Zionist campaign" from 1967 to 1971, 12,000–15,000 Jews emigrated from Poland.¹¹⁶² Over 11,000 of the applications to emigrate were submitted between early 1968 and the end of August 1969. According to data kept by the Ministry of the Interior, this batch of applicants included about 70 employees of Jewish organizations (24 of whom were from the TSKŻ).¹¹⁶³

Before his departure, Sfar'd was most likely summoned for a so-called prophylactic conversation with the Security Service. His file in the IPN archives contains a list of agenda items prepared by the Ministry of the Interior for this conversation: Jacob Dreyer's job with the Russian section of Radio Free Europe, his own long-standing relations with the Israeli embassy in Warsaw, as well as the poem "Shakaln." During the talk, Sfar'd would be warned that "any actions unfavorable to Poland would meet with consequences."¹¹⁶⁴

On January 17, 1969, carrying "travel documents" confirming that they had been stripped of their Polish citizenship, and in the presence of a large number of acquaintances, friends and colleagues who had gathered to bid them farewell, Dovid, Regina and Leon boarded a train for Vienna at Gdańsk Station in Warsaw. On January 29, their plane landed in Lod, and they disembarked onto Israeli soil.

1160 Interview with Dovid Sfar'd, private collection of Michał Chęciński, p. 22.

1161 "250 numern *Yidishe shriftn*," *Yidishe shriftn*, 1968, no. 9 (250), p. 1.

1162 Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, p. 131; Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna*, p. 213; A. Stankowski, "Nowe spojrzenie na statystyki dotyczące emigracji Żydów z Polski po 1944 roku," in: G. Berendt, A. Grabski and A. Stankowski, *Studia z historii Żydów w Polsce po 1945 roku*, Warsaw 2000, p. 143. For more recent research see D. Stola, *Jewish Emigration from Communist Poland: The Decline of Polish Jewry in the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, *East European Jewish Affairs* 47, nos. 2–3, 2017, pp. 169–188.

1163 K. Lesiakowski, "Emigracja osób pochodzenia żydowskiego z Polski w latach 1968–1969," *Dzieje Najnowsze*, 1993, no. 2, p. 122.

1164 "Note on the planned prophylactic conversation with the former vice-chairman of the TSKŻ Board and editor-in-chief of the literary monthly *Yidishe shriftn*, secret," AIPN, microfilm 12599/2, microfiche no. 2, frame D3.

Postscript

Over the course of Dovid Sfard's life, he underwent many crises that turned his stable world upside down and forced him to begin again from square one: when he left his family home during World War I, when he fled to Białystok at the outbreak of World War II, when he was evacuated from Białystok deep into the USSR, and then again when he returned to a Poland that had been annihilated by the Nazis. Despite the magnitude of these earlier events, Sfard's emigration to Israel can be viewed as the greatest and most dramatic crisis of his life—not only because it required him to adopt a new language, climate and landscape, and not only because he was compelled to confront all of this at an advanced age—but because his emigration was linked to the painful realization that his lifelong ideology had been compromised and vanquished. Leaving Poland, no matter how logical it was as a next step, was nonetheless an admission of defeat and a resignation from further battle.

Luckily, Sfard already knew Hebrew. He began to work at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, publishing articles and studies on the life of Jews in postwar Poland (e.g., entries in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*), contributed to and edited the literary journal *Yerusholaymer almanakh*, contributed to other periodicals (e.g., *Yidishe kultur*), and worked for the Yiddish section of Israeli public radio. He drafted his memoirs (which were ultimately published posthumously), and he published two additional volumes of poetry: *Brenendike bleter* (Burning Pages; Tel Aviv, 1972) and *Shpatsirn in der nakht* (Strolls in the Night; Tel Aviv, 1979).

Brenendike bleter is a poetic record of Sfard's last months in Poland and his first few years in Israel. Some of the poems included in the volume are dated, so we know that they were written between 1966 and 1971. The poems are grouped into five series. The volume opens with "Toye-voye" (Chaos), which mainly includes poems devoted to the events of 1967–1968. The penultimate series in the collection, about Israel, its history and landscape, is titled "Breyshtis" (Genesis). In this way, the poet records his own return to the roots of Jewish history and culture—the expressions *toye-voye* and *breyshtis* (in Israeli Hebrew, pronounced *tohu-vavohu* and *bereshit*) are both derived from the first two verses in the Pentateuch, from the moment of world-creation. Out of the chaos of his life, a world had emerged that was both old and new.

The dominant motif in the series "Toye-voye" is loneliness, bitterness, a feeling of loss and betrayal. This is evident from the titles of the poems, including "Farrat" (Betrayal), "Ruf in dem midber" (A Call in the Wilderness), "Shrek"

(Fear), “Ir hast mikh” (You Hate Me), and others. In contrast to his earlier volumes, *Brenendike bleter* includes “Polish” poems that explicitly indicate the link between Poland and Sfarđ’s personal history or the history of Polish Jews, for example “Baym Shopen-stav” (At Chopin Pond), wherein Chopin sets Yiddish poems to music, and “Poyln” (Poland), in which we read:

Whom will Elul¹¹⁶⁵ winds
now tell in *mame-loshm*¹¹⁶⁶
of the loneliness of neglected cemeteries?
With whom will Polish forests
and rivers shining blue
like moons
speak Yiddish?¹¹⁶⁷

The “Polish” poems in this series also include the poem “Benkshaft” (Longing), written in Jerusalem in 1971. Here, the symbol of the Poland left behind is the Vistula, which appears to the poet in a dream.

I consider *Brenendike bleter* to be one of Sfarđ’s best books, if not his very best. His poetry, generally cool, intellectual, distanced, is more emotional here, yet without losing its characteristic reserve. Perhaps this was the kind of poet best loved by readers—after the volume was published, Sfarđ enjoyed a “series of very successful author’s appearances,” as Regina wrote to Jakub Rotbaum.¹¹⁶⁸

Shpatsirn in der nakht was also warmly received. The book is dominated by a feeling of transitoriness, of looking backwards, settling internal accounts. In addition to a return to the places and events of his childhood, as in the poems “Di toyte kale” (The Dead Bride) and “Shtetelekh Voliner” (Little Volhynian towns), the poet also looks back at the choices he made in his youth. About his father’s religious faith he writes:

And that is how it happened
That in the same generation
Both failed—

1165 Elul – the last month of the Jewish calendar, which falls in late summer or early autumn. It is a tradition to visit relatives’ graves then in preparation for the Days of Awe.

1166 *Mame-loshm* (literally: “mother tongue”) – a sentimental term for the Yiddish language.

1167 D. Sfarđ, “Poyln,” in: idem, *Brenendike bleter*, Tel Aviv 1972, p. 50.

1168 New Year’s card from Regina Dreyer-Sfarđ dated December 1972, AŽIH, Papers of Jakub Rotbaum, call no. 962, unpaginated.

The father and his pious community
And the son with his flaming dawn.¹¹⁶⁹

In another poem, he takes an inventory of his own past stance, confessing:

I am not free of sin,
I cannot praise all my actions—
I too once blindly
Betrayed a lonely person
Out of fear—I did not tell the truth,
I passed over falsities in silence,
I chased after honors,
And allowed myself to be rocked to sleep
By hypocrisy.¹¹⁷⁰

The poems in this volume reveal his awareness of his own elderly age, his transitoriness, his inevitable approaching death: in the beautiful poem “Tsuzamen” (Together), dedicated to his wife, the poet admits that “any moment now / the end of all days may arrive.”¹¹⁷¹

Sfard was honored by the Union of Yiddish Writers in Israel with an award for *Shpatsirn in der nakht*. In a letter to Jakub Rotbaum, Regina wrote: “He had a very congenial book party when the volume came out, which really raised his spirits. [...] He continues to publish, but rarely appears in public before an audience.”¹¹⁷²

Regina and Dovid’s letters to Jakub Rotbaum and his sister Lia in Poland and to S. L. Shneiderman in the United States are the best sources for reconstructing Sfard’s last years. We learn more about his feelings and activities from his wife’s correspondence than from his own—in the postscripts which he added to her letters, he criticizes himself for being a poor letter writer, and from his tone it is clear that he was not in a particularly cheerful mood during this time period. This is unsurprising as a reaction to his withdrawal from the active cultural and political life that he had enjoyed in Poland—Yiddish cultural life in Israel was relegated to the margins. A different rhythm, a busy daily life and his advancing age made it difficult to keep in close touch with friends (although the Sfards’ social circle expanded somewhat when several Yiddish writers immigrated to Israel from the USSR in the 1970s).

1169 D. Sfard, “In dem zelbn dor,” in: idem, *Shpatsirn in der nakht*, Tel Aviv 1979, p. 145.

1170 D. Sfard, “Far vos iz mir bashert?,” in: *ibid.*, p. 72.

1171 D. Sfard, “Tsuzamen,” in: *ibid.*, p. 160.

1172 Letter from Regina and Dovid Sfard dated March 3, 1980, AŽIH, Papers of Jakub Rotbaum, call no. 962, unpaginated

Regina and Dovid traveled a lot until the very end—in 1975, Regina wrote to Rotbaum from New York to inform him that in a few months, they would be returning to Israel via London, Paris, Düsseldorf and Zurich.¹¹⁷³ In the spring of 1981, they returned again to Paris, where Sfard felt quite unwell. Upon their return to Jerusalem, he fell seriously ill. In a letter written by Regina to Rotbaum, he managed to add a few words of his own, in shaky handwriting: “It would be disingenuous if I were to play the hero.”¹¹⁷⁴ He died in Jerusalem on September 9, 1981.

After his death, a few more of his poems were found, including this one:

I know that a dream is just a breath
 A wandering wind
 Smoke,
 That quickly disappears.
 But all my years
 Are found in it,
 All my young, bright times.
 And I am ready to trade my entire truth for it.¹¹⁷⁵

* * *

Sfard’s attitudes and activities must be assessed through the lens of his generation, through the lens of the Polish Jewish Communist milieu. The Polish Jewish Communists grew up in a traditional Jewish environment, had strong ties to Yiddish language and culture, and joined the Communist movement early on in their lives. They did not see Communism as a way to escape their own Jewishness, but rather as a movement that would enable them to attain and properly benefit from equal rights *as Jews*. The majority of the Polish Jewish Communists who survived the war spent it in the Soviet Union, whence they were repatriated to Poland. After the war, they introduced “Nusekh Poyln” (the Polish, socialist way of “solving the Jewish problem”) to the Polish Jewish community with the help and blessing of the authorities. “Nusekh Poyln” entailed the development of Yiddish social and cultural life in Poland, directed and stimulated by Jewish Communists, who brought an energy and self-confidence to this

1173 Letter from Regina and Dovid Sfard dated October 19, 1975, AŽIH, Papers of Jakub Rotbaum, call no. 962, unpaginated.

1174 Letter from Regina and Dovid Sfard dated August 5, 1981, AŽIH, Papers of Jakub Rotbaum, call no. 962, unpaginated.

1175 Published in: D. Sfard, *Mit zikh un mit andere: Oytobiografye un literarishe eseyen*, Jerusalem 1984, p. 538.

task that differentiated them from the Jews who had survived the war in Poland and endured the brutality of the German occupation. Perhaps it was their wartime reprieve that gave them the strength to withstand the postwar pogroms and attacks on Jews that persuaded many others to leave Poland soon after the war.

The Polish Jewish Communists began to feel doubt about how much they had accomplished beginning in 1956, when the political “thaw” in the country gave new license to anti-Semitic sentiments. However, even then, most of the leading TSKŻ activists did not yet decide to leave, although their doubts continued to grow over time. The Six-Day War and the events of March 1968 hammered the nail into the coffin. In 1970, Zenon Kliszko summarized a note from Hersh Smolar in which he asked for permission to leave the country: “In his note, Smolar writes that he is part of the Jewish community, that when he was in the Ghetto, he swore that if he survived, he would operate among the Jewish people. He has done so for over 25 years in Poland. He was interested not in the People’s Poland, but in operating among the Jewish people.”¹¹⁷⁶ On one level, this is obviously merely a recapitulation of the anti-Semitic narrative of Jewish double loyalty. However, it also reveals the tragic misunderstanding that persisted until the very end: Jewish Communists were willing to believe in and serve Poland for a lifetime, as long as they lived in a Poland that was willing to include Jews. But that they remain Poles in a Poland *without* Jews was ultimately too much to ask.

Against the backdrop of the Polish Jewish Communist milieu, the figure of Dovid Sfarid stands out as both typical and atypical: typical insofar as he was loyal to the ideals of his youth and committed to maintaining authentic socio-political and cultural ties to Yiddish culture; atypical insofar as he was highly educated, unusually smart, and, it seems, unusually gentle. Even Smolar, who in his memoirs was not kind to his former colleagues, described Sfarid with respect: “Always calm and laid-back, Dovid Sfarid always presented any argument with the help of a story or a witticism [...]”¹¹⁷⁷ Another TSKŻ activist, Jakub Wassersztrum, contrasted Sfarid, a “real writer and humanist,” with the prickly Smolar.¹¹⁷⁸ Shloyme Belis-Legis recalled, “He was a peacemaker, knew how to

1176 Notes from a conversation between Z. Kliszko and W. Kashtan, secretary general of the Communist Party of Canada, Warsaw, August 3, 1970, reprinted in: *Marzec '68: Między tragedią a podłością*, introduced, selected and edited by G. Sołtysiak and J. Stępień, Warsaw 1998, pp. 349–350.

1177 H. Smolar, *Oyf der letster pozitsye mit der letster hofenung*, Tel Aviv 1982, p. 412.

1178 J. Wassersztrum, “Oyfklungen un bamerkungen,” in: *Der tsadik in pelts....: Zamlung fun artiklen*, ed. M. Mirski, Tel Aviv 1985, p. 29.

ease hard feelings, smooth rough edges, bring about compromise. I cannot recall his having committed a flagrant wrong over all those years.”¹¹⁷⁹ He also cited Sfard’s answer to the question of how he squared the role of poet with the role of sociopolitical activist: “When I am acting as a diplomat, I am not a poet, and when I am acting as a poet, I am not a diplomat.”¹¹⁸⁰ Based on the accounts of his peers, Sfard was not a charismatic leader or really a leader at all—he was apparently too introverted and withdrawn from the world. His role was to mediate between opposing sides and seek a way out of conflict, not to confront it directly. All this makes his adamant stance in 1967–1968 all the more impressive.

How did it happen that a gentle intellectual became one of the most active members of the Jewish Communist milieu, and yet did not distance himself from the obligatory political trends in this milieu, even when they edged into objectionable territories? Perhaps he considered this a small price to pay for the maintenance of Yiddish culture in Poland—for state support of Jewish clubs, publishing houses, theaters, schools and newspapers. Perhaps he considered it his duty to do all he could to uphold Yiddish culture in Poland for as long as possible, and to prevent it from being liquidated as it had been in the USSR. Were there limits before 1956 that he would have balked at crossing, as he did in 1967? Or was it he, rather than political circumstances, who underwent a change? We have no way of knowing.

One way or another, although Sfard was always active in many arenas, he was almost always standing just out of the limelight. In memoirs by his contemporaries, he is rarely characterized in detail. He is visible in the picture, but he is always a half-step from the wings.

* * *

In Jewish tradition, the portal to paradise is obstructed by the Sambatyon River. The River is the archetypal uncrossable border: for six days, its current is too strong to risk crossing it; it only stills on the seventh day, the Sabbath, when travel is forbidden. Those who nevertheless manage to cross it, such as the Ten Tribes of Israel, are never heard from again.

Polish Jewish Communists were prepared to cross the Sambatyon, paying no attention to the dangers and the prohibitions that that entailed, in order to reach the paradise of class justice without anti-Semitism. Unfortunately, too many of the other travelers whom they met on the road viewed this dream not as a paradise, but as a paradox.

1179 S. Belis-Legis, “Tsum toyt fun Dovid Sfard,” *Folks-shtime*, October 17, 1981, p. 6.
1180 *Ibid.*

Regardless of the criteria used to judge Sfard's life and work and the life and work of the other members of the Polish Jewish Communist milieu, it must be acknowledged that despite their initially small numbers, the milieu's representatives managed, thanks to their enormous commitment and devotion, to maneuver the movement into what appeared for a certain time to be a winning position. And even though it turned out that the road they had chosen would end in defeat, their intellectual achievements (the publications of Yidish Bukh, Bernard Mark's historical research, Binem Heller's poetry, and Dovid Sfard's literary criticism, among other things), as well as their activism within the framework of the Polish Communist movement, comprised quite a prodigious chapter in the development of modern Yiddish culture; presumably one of the very last chapters in the history of Yiddishland.

Abbreviations

| | | |
|---------|---|--|
| AAN | Archiwum Akt Nowych | Central Archives of Modern Records |
| AIPN | Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej | Archives of the Institute of National Memory |
| APW | Archiwum Państwowe m.st. Warszawy | State Archives of the City of Warsaw |
| AŻIH | Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego | Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute |
| BSSR | | Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic |
| BŻIH | <i>Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego</i> | <i>Bulletin of the Jewish Historical Institute</i> |
| CBŻ | Centralne Biuro Żydowskie | Central Jewish Bureau |
| CKŻP | Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce | Central Committee of Jews in Poland |
| GARF | Gosudarstvennyy Arkhiv Rossiyskoy Federatsii | State Archives of the Russian Federation |
| Gezerd | Gezelshaft far Erdarbet | Society for Agriculture |
| GOSET | Gosudarstvennyy Evreiskiy Teater | Moscow State Yiddish Theater |
| GUKPPiW | Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk | Central Office for Oversight of the Press, Publications and Performances |
| IKUF | Yidisher Kultur-Farband | Yiddish Cultural Union |
| IPN | Instytut Pamięci Narodowej | Institute of National Memory |
| JAC | | Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee |
| KC | Komitet Centralny | Central Committee |
| KOŻP | Komitet Organizacyjny Żydów Polskich | Organizational Committee of Polish Jews |
| KPP | Komunistyczna Partia Polski | Communist Party of Poland |
| KPZB | Komunistyczna Partia Zachodniej Białorusi | Communist Party of Western Belarus |
| KPZU | Komunistyczna Partia Zachodniej Ukrainy | Communist Party of Western Ukraine |

| | | |
|------|--|---|
| MBP | Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego | Ministry of Public Safety |
| MSW | Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych | Ministry of the Interior |
| MSZ | Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych | Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| NKVD | Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennykh Del | People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs |
| OHD | Oral History Division | |
| ONR | Obóz Narodowo-Radikalny | National-Radical Camp |
| ORT | Obshchestvo Remeslennogo i Zemledelecheskogo Truda Sredi Evreev v Rossii | The Society for Handicraft and Agricultural Work among the Jews of Russia |
| PKWN | Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego | Polish Committee for National Liberation |
| PPR | Polska Partia Robotnicza | Polish Labor Party |
| PPS | Polska Partia Socjalistyczna | Polish Socialist Party |
| PRL | Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa | Polish People's Republic |
| PUR | Państwowy Urząd Repatriacyjny | State Office for Repatriation |
| PZPR | Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza | Polish United Workers' Party |
| RAPP | Rosyjskie Stowarzyszenie Pisarzy Proletariackich | Russian Proletarian Writers' Union |
| TOZ | Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia | Society for the Protection of Health |
| TSKŻ | Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce | Socio-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland |
| YIVO | Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institut | YIVO Institute for Jewish Research |
| ZLP | Związek Literatów Polskich | Union of Polish Writers |
| ZPP | Związek Patriotów Polskich | Union of Polish Patriots |
| ZRWM | Związek Religijny Wyznania Mojżeszowego | Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith |
| ŻAP | Żydowska Agencja Prasowa | Jewish Press Agency |
| ŻIH | Żydowski Instytut Historyczny | Jewish Historical Institute |
| ŻTK | Żydowskie Towarzystwo Kultury | Jewish Cultural Association |

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