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THE POGROM OF JEWS IN KIELCE ON JULY 4, 1946

On July 4, 1946, Kielce was the scene of violent anti-Jewish excesses as a result of which 42 people, including two Poles, lost their lives, and over 40 people were injured. Among those who died nine people suffered gun-shot wounds and two were stabbed with bayonets. Moreover eight of the injured suffered bullet wounds. Others suffered serious injuries as a result of beating.

The State of Research

Historical research on the Kielce pogrom, after a period of complete silence, was taken up in Poland in the 1980s in the circles connected with the then opposition and has been continued since. The publications that appeared outside Poland are mainly based on accounts by witnesses, mostly Jews, on press reports and information provided by foreign correspondents who arrived in Kielce immediately after the events. Their authors had no access to the documents and records of law-suits, which were available to Polish researchers. A pioneering historical work whose author recreated the development of the tragedy in detail is the book by Bożena Szaynok¹. One should also mention a two-volume publication of the sources dealing with the pogrom and its background, prepared by Stanisław Meducki and Zenon Wrona². It is worth emphasizing that although the source materials contained in the archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (not open to the

¹ B. Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach 4 lipca 1946 (The Pogrom of Jews in Kielce on July 4, 1946)*, Warszawa 1992.

² S. Meducki, Z. Wrona, *Antyżydowskie wydarzenia kieleckie 4 lipca 1946 r. Dokumenty i materiały (The Anti-Jewish Events in Kielce on July 4, 1946. Documents and Materials)*, Kielce 1992, 1994. The problem of the origin of the pogrom was taken up in the study *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach — znaki zapytania (The Pogrom of Jews in Kielce—Question Marks)* in: K. Kersten: *Polacy—Żydzi—komunizm. Anatomia półprawd 1939–1968 (Poles—Jews—Communism. The Anatomy of Half-truths 1939–1968)*, Warszawa 1992, pp. 89–142 and in M. Chęciński, *Poland. Communism, Nationalism, Antisemitism*, New York 1982.

public until the end of the 1980s) are now accessible to historians, the documentation of those events is still far from complete. Also the prosecutor who conducted the investigation into the responsibility for the Kielce crime in the name of the Chief Commission for the Investigation into the Crimes Against the Polish Nation (*Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu*) has not got access to all the materials. Nevertheless, the knowledge of Polish historians on the subject of the pogrom in Kielce is at present fairly thorough — although it still cannot be established beyond reasonable doubt what were the direct causes of this eruption of violence and bestiality and the mechanism of events. Many questions have still not been answered.

Opinions About the Pogrom

What happened at Kielce on the fourth day after the referendum, has from the first moment been the subject of intense controversy that could be attributed to — on the one hand, political — on the other — denominationally-national differences. The pogrom was generally presented as the result of deliberate provocation, however opinions were divided as to who could instigate it. The Polish political circles in exile³, the anti-communist underground, both that based on the old Home Army and the nationalist one, and also a section of public opinion regarded the pogrom as a provocation directed against Poland, aimed at presenting the Poles as blood-thirsty anti-Semites and at turning the sentiments of the world opinion against Poland.

On the other hand the authorities, the leadership of the Polish Workers' Party (*PPR*) and the Polish Socialist Party (*PPS*) and also the Jewish circles in Poland as well as some sections of public opinion at home, and some foreign correspondents attributed the design of arousing the pogrom to the "reactionary forces" and precisely speaking, to the armed underground. Both versions of the theory of deliberate provocation as a plot that was a causative factor of the pogrom belittle the significance of the anti-Semitic attitudes in Polish society that were its background. These attitudes were mainly exposed by the Jewish milieu: it was precisely this milieu which charged the Church and the Roman-Catholic clergy with the moral responsibility for the violence whose victims were the Jews saved from the

³ See the proclamation of the Government of the Republic of Poland and the telegramme directed by the Council of Political Parties to the foreign ministers of Great Britain, the United States and France speaking of the rigged referendum and "the Jewish pogrom at Kielce organized by the security service of the so-called Warsaw government" — Gen. W. Sikorski Institute and Museum in London, Presidium of the Cabinet, Cabinet Minutes, No. K 102.86 b.s. 6–9, session on July 13, 1946.

Holocaust. The hypothesis of the causative role of the special services (Soviet agents, Ministry of Public Security — *MBP*) is often identified with negating the role of anti-Semitism as the background of the pogrom, with a defensive attempt to put the blame on those forces that were alien and hostile to Poland, hence a resistance continues to any suggestions based on presumptive evidence, that could indicate the presence of some elements of provocation at the source and in the mechanism of the pogrom disturbances. Michał B o r w i c z⁴, who acknowledged the pogrom at Kielce as a work “of gross and deliberately planned provocation”, wrote years later in exile: “there are two possible hypotheses — fascist provocation and communist provocation. I answer: for such provocation to succeed, there must exist conditions that would favour it. In Kielce there were such conditions”⁵.

Faced with assertions of organized provocation voiced immediately after the pogrom by various parties, the Roman-Catholic hierarchy behaved with reserve and did not take an official stand on the question. A similar attitude was taken by the leadership of the Polish Peasant Party (*PSL*) and also by a part of public opinion — those who did not fully believe the theory of communist provocation and at the same time did not share the view that the pogrom was a crime committed by the political underground. Also the ambassadors of Great Britain and the USA restrained themselves from disclosing their views about the origin of the pogrom. According to officials from the British Embassy⁶ the pogrom seemed to be “a spontaneous explosion of dark local emotions”.

50 years later, despite the fact that source materials have been put into scientific circulation, we remain in the fog of hypotheses. There appeared a few basic variants of interpretation of these bloody events.

1. The pogrom was from start to finish a spontaneous process, a result of anti-Jewish phobias, an explosion of accumulated resentment and bestial aggression aroused by the mass hysteria and directed against Jews.

2. The incidents that sparked a chain of events leading to the pogrom were spontaneous by nature; they sprang from prejudice and anti-Semitism. In later stages they were stimulated by the behaviour of local authorities — above all the Voivodeship Office of Security (*Wojewódzki Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego*), the police (*Milicja Obywatelska — MO*), the army — and also, although to a smaller extent, the central authorities.

3. These anti-Jewish disturbances were inspired by a certain scenario, while their transformation into a massacre of such dimensions was deter-

⁴ *Organizowanie wściekłości (The Organization of Fury)*, Warszawa 1947.

⁵ Cit. after M. Hillel: *Le Massacre des Survivantes en Pologne 1945–1947*, Paris 1985.

⁶ Public Record Office in London, Foreign Office, No. 371, 56534. Note of August 9, 1946.

mined by the resentment of Jews, anti-Semitic phobias and prejudices, accumulated throughout the centuries and pervaded with new contents.

4. The pogrom was consciously provoked, and the way it developed was in a large measure due to the activity of selected groups. The crowd consisted mainly of passive on-lookers, several score people exhibited activeness, to say nothing of the police and the military, who played an essential role in the mechanism of events.

The thesis that this pogrom was a deliberate provocation entails a question: who could instigate it? In view of its groundlessness, the version that the organizer of the pogrom was the anti-communist underground, has been discarded, however two other versions still function: according to one of them, the culprits should be sought among the Soviet special services, according to the other — in the ruling circles in Poland. One should also mention the view, which outrages common sense and is considered absurd by the majority of Polish historians, which casts the blame for this incident on Zionist circles interested in the mass emigration of Polish Jews to Palestine⁷.

In the light of the hitherto research and the reconstruction of events based on it, one can ascertain that both in the initial stage and in the further development of events the crucial role was played by the security forces: the functionaries of the Security Office (*UB*), the police and the army. Everything that the police, Security Office and the army did led to a bloody tragedy. Such a conclusion can be drawn from the reconstruction of events, as it appears today, before the announcement of the findings of the Chief Commission for the Investigation into the Crimes Against the Polish Nation and before the materials collected by it have been made accessible to historians. One should, however, distinguish between deliberate provocation and an unintentional stimulation of a massacre as the result of the actions taken.

The Course of Events

The findings concerning the sequence and mechanism of events are based on three different types of sources: information provided by the functionaries of the Polish Workers' Party and of the Security Department in Kielce at the time of the tragedy, hearings of the investigation and — contemporary and later — accounts by the victims and witnesses of the pogrom. All these materials, especially the records of confessions, require insightful criticism and confrontation with other accounts, which, generally speaking, is not

⁷ See J. Orlicki, *Szkice z dziejów stosunków polsko-żydowskich 1918–1949 (Essays on the History of Polish-Jewish Relations 1918–1949)*, Szczecin 1983.

possible, as there is a lack of any materials of investigations concerning the officers and soldiers of the Polish Army and the Internal Security Corps (*Korpus Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego* — *KBW*). The records of the Military Information of the 2nd Division of Infantry were destroyed in 1989.

The outline of events reconstructed by historians presents itself as follows:

1. For some time rumours were spread in Kielce of children getting lost and suspicion fell on the Jews.

2. The first impulse that triggered the mechanism of the pogrom was the fact that a nine-year old boy, Henryk Błaszczyk, son of a shoemaker from Kielce, disappeared on July 1. He returned home on evening of July 3 and said that he had been inveigled into some house, where he was kept in a cellar from which he managed to escape. (In fact, as the investigation showed, the boy visited an acquainted family in Pielaki village, about 25 km. from Kielce). The people who listened to his tale from the very beginning suggested that the boy had been kidnapped by the Jews and persuaded his father to report this fact to the police, which he did at about 23.00 hrs. He was told to come in the morning. On the next day, July 4, about 8 a.m. Walenty Błaszczyk and his son went to the police station at 45 Sienkiewicza street, passing on their way the building at 7 Planty street, which housed the Jewish Committee, the religious congregation, the kibbutz of Ichud party, and which was the residence of the majority of over a hundred Jews from Kielce, mostly repatriated from the USSR. A neighbour who attended the Błaszczyks (later tried and acquitted) suggested to the boy that he had been kept precisely in this house. The child beset with questions also identified one of the passers-by as the very man who had accosted him.

3. Of basic importance to the development of events was the behaviour of the chief of the Police Station Sergeant Edmund Zagórski. He ordered the Platoon-Commander Stefan Kozłowski to summon the man identified by young Błaszczyk; the man turned out to be Kalman Singer, inhabitant of the house at 7 Planty street. Six policemen were sent to Planty street, together with the father and son and the said neighbour; on the way they made known to everybody encountered that the boy had been kidnapped by the Jews. People started to gather. Singer was arrested, despite intervention by the chairman of the Jewish Committee, doctor Seweryn Kahane, who personally visited the police station. Informed about the problem, the vice-commander of the voivodship police (*MO*) Major Kazimierz Gwiazdowicz ordered to examine the arrested; the latter was beaten at the station. Zagórski's next move entailed an escalation of anti-Jewish emotions and the crowd grew larger. He ordered the investigatory magistrate's assistant Stefan Sędek to

send another patrol to find out from what cellar the boy escaped and to escort the owner of the house and cellar to the station (doctor Kahane maintained that the house at 7 Planty street had no cellars). A patrol (about 14 policemen, plain-clothed and uniformed) accompanied by the Błaszcyks proceeded immediately to Planty street. On the way the functionaries again made known to all and sundry that they were about to surround the Jewish house where Polish children were held, that they were going to search for the murdered Polish children. By that time (about 9.30 a.m.), several score people had gathered in the square near the house. They generally behaved passively. The next patrol, sent by order of Major Gwiazdowicz, was told to disperse the growing crowd and escort to the station the people who spoke about the Polish children being murdered by the Jews. Arriving at the station in Sienkiewicza street, Gwiazdowicz personally took control of the police (*MO*) procedure.

4. At the same time the action was joined by the Chief of the Voivodeship Security Office, Major Władysław Sobczyński (actual name Spychaj), informed by the officers of the Ministry of Public Security then present at Kielce: Humer and Sztablewski, about the search and the encircling of the house occupied by the Jews. He ordered Gwiazdowicz to transfer the Błaszcyks and Mr. Singer to the Voivodeship Office of Public Security (*WUBP*) and to order the policemen to retreat from near the building. Sobczyński said that this was a provocation, a political matter for the jurisdiction of the Security Office. Also the Soviet adviser to the *WUBP* Shpilevoy, *NKVD* colonel, ordered the *MO* to discard the action. Earlier, Sobczyński, informed by the Office employees about what had happened, refused to send a special detachment to Planty street to defend the Jews. Humer and Sztablewski, with a few functionaries, proceeded to Planty street. Between 9.30 a.m. and 10 a.m. they were joined by a group of *WUBP* employees and seven policemen from the guard platoon under the command of security officer Captain Jan Mucha. Sentries were placed around the building to stop civilians from entering. Despite resistance from the patrol policemen, the Błaszcyks were taken to the *WUBP*.

In the meantime the crowd, which grew up to a hundred and more people, most of them women, became more and more aggressive and refused to disband. They reacted with hostility to the arguments of the functionaries of Security Office (*UB*) that this was a provocation. According to the report of two officers of the Ministry of Public Security, Jan Jurkowski and Henryk Gutowski, who were present at the scene of events, cries were heard: "Down with the Jewish servants, security, and communist government". According to their assessment the situation became critical and threatened civil disorder.

der. Also the materials collected by the episcopal curia show that the asseverations of the people in uniforms that no traces had been found in the building of the presence of Polish children were replied with the cries of those gathered: "Away with them, let us, civilians, in, we shall search, the police and army are Jewish defenders". In this situation Captain Mucha and the functionary of the District Security Office (*Powiatowy Urząd Bezpieczeństwa*) in Kielce Albert Grynbaum, who was present in the building, asked the chief of the *WUBP* to send in soldiers.

5. The first detachment of soldiers (to Planty street were sent altogether 40 soldiers of the Internal Security Corps (*KBW*), 30 of the 2nd Division of Infantry, 5 information officers, 30 soldiers from the military police and the command of the town) appeared between 10.00 a.m. and 10.30 a.m. Its appearance at first appeased the crowd. According to Grynbaum's relation "the military units mixed together and encircled the building of the Jewish Committee, leaving the turbulent crowd undissolved. A characteristic moment came when provocators threw stones at the windows. The crowd gathered in front of the building at 7 Planty street stepped back, fearing a reaction from the soldiers. Faced with the passive attitude of soldiers and policemen, the people came up to the building with the cry 'long live our army and police' and assuming an aggressive attitude started storming at the entrance. In the meantime a group of the military from the *MO*, *KBW*, and military police from the 2nd division entered the building and started looking for the murdered children"⁸. This was the beginning of murder and bestiality. Following the military, people from the crowd broke in. The soldiers and the policemen started shooting, some shots fell also from the side of the Jews, who defended themselves, which enraged the assailants. The military and the policemen not only joined the pogrom, but — as most of the Jewish accounts show — in fact played the role of the catalyst of the massacre. The soldiers and the policemen led people out of the building and handed them over to the crowd, they beat the victims themselves, fired at the unarmed, killed off the wounded. The analysis made directly after the pogrom by the episcopal curia states: "the soldiers joined the crowd, together charging into the Jewish house. The Jews defended themselves desperately. (...) During the fight the wounded Jews were finished off by the people with stones or wooden boards. There were cases where the Jews dragged out of the building were smashed with stones even by old people or children"⁹.

At about 10.30 a.m. Major Sobczyński and Colonel Shpilevoy arrived at Planty street, however they did not take any steps that could put an end

⁸ *MSW* (Ministry of Internal Affairs) archives, No. 750. Albert Grynbaum's account.

⁹ *MSW* archives, without call number.

to the massacre. The actions of order forces were not co-ordinated, there were animosities and distrust between the voivodeship commander of the *MO*, the chief of the *WUBP*, and the commander of the 2nd Division of Infantry. About 11.00 a.m. at the intervention of the voivodeship commander of the police Colonel Wiktor Kuźnicki, the commander of the regiment of the 2nd Division of Infantry Kupsza directed to the scene of events a detachment of soldiers under the command of Major Kazimierz Konieczny. Forbidden to use arms by General Marian Sychalski, viceminister of national defence, Major Konieczny ordered a warning shot to be fired. About 11.00 a.m. a Fire Brigade came to the rescue, but faced with the attitude of the crowd they did not use water to disperse it. However, the detachment of Major Konieczny managed to ensure protection of the building and soon there appeared the students of a police school, sent in by Major Gwiazdowicz, who removed the people from the vicinity of the building. This did not put a stop to the excesses, which spread to the streets of the town. The Jews, dragged out of their houses and encountered in the street were beaten, robbed, and lapidated. Soldiers and civilians joined in the massacre. However, the pogrom slowly died down.

6. The attack on the Jews present in the house at 7 Planty street was resumed from 12.30 p.m., with the arrival of about 600 workers from the Ludwinów Iron works, armed with sticks, crow-bars and stones. Shouts were raised: The Jews have murdered Polish children, the policemen are shooting at people. News that the workers were getting ready to leave the iron works reached the chief of the *WUBP*. The actions he took (sending *UB* functionaries to the ironworks, persuading the secretary of the Voivodeship Committee of the *PPR* and vice-voivode to speak to the crowd) could only inflame the situation. The streets were not lined with soldiers, which could have hindered the workers in their march towards the scene of events. The students of the *WUBP* school (47 persons) who came from Zagórska at about 13.00 hrs. stood idly in front of the office building in Focha street for an hour and a half. They received an order to make for Planty street at about 14.30 hrs, when the situation was mostly already under control. At the same time the new-comers broke through the cordon of soldiers and penetrated into the building. According to Grynbaum's quoted account: "With the arrival of the workers from the Ludwinów Ironworks, murdering and robbing started anew. As the result about 15 people were killed". An eye-witness, whose confession was recorded by the episcopal curia, stated: "The workers broke into the yard and another lynching took place, since they started to kill the Jews. The square, formerly cleared, was strewn with corpses again. Among the crowd of workers from the Ludwinów Ironworks

was the father [allegedly — K.K.] of the lost child, who desperately called: 'for the innocent blood of my son' and split a Jew's head with a big spanner". The bloody excesses lasted for over an hour.

7. An end was put to them with the appearance of an army detachment of 50 soldiers under the command of the chief of staff of the 2nd Division of Infantry, Lieutenant-Colonel Pollak. After firing a few warning shots he managed to remove from the yard and street those individuals whose aggression turned on the commanding officer (a shout was heard: "Soldiers, shoot him in the head, he is a Jew!"). Soldiers and policemen surrounded the building again. The wounded and the dead were gradually taken away. At about 15.30 hrs. army units from Góra Kalwaria arrived in Kielce.

8. Far from the main scene of events, on the same day, the family of Abram and Regina Fiszes, with their three-week old baby were murdered in Kielce. On July 4 more Jews were murdered on the Lublin-Wrocław train and on other trains, departing from Kielce or passing through it. According to the Central Committee of Polish Jews 30 persons were killed on the trains. There were attempts to arouse anti-Jewish disturbances in Częstochowa, Kalisz and in other places.

The course of events presented above in brief gives rise to the following basic conclusions:

Firstly — the decisions taken by the policemen from the station in Sienkiewicza street and the behaviour of the patrols sent to the house of the Jewish Committee led to the gathering of the crowd, excited the psychosis aroused by the rumour about the murdered Polish children, and enhanced the aggression of the people who were initially passive. Next, the fact that the soldiers entered the building and the way they and officers acted inside it encouraged the persons from the crowd, caused the breaking of the psychological barrier dividing oral aggression from physical violence, and started the bloody pogrom.

Secondly — the unbelievable indolence and inefficiency, lack of co-ordination, wrong decisions, ineffectiveness and incompetence of those in command of *MO*, *WUBP* and soldiers had, to a large measure, the effect of expanding the dimensions of the pogrom, the duration of violence and the number of victims.

Thirdly — in the Kielce community, police and army, there were many people who were extremely susceptible to anti-Jewish slogans and ready to believe the rumours that Polish children had been murdered by Jews, and were hostile to those saved from the Holocaust. It is impossible to establish the number of those who directly committed the acts of bestiality, however, it cannot be denied that behind their backs there was a crowd which was

hostile to the Jews and increasingly aggressive. A noteworthy fact, in this respect, was how easily the workers from the ironworks could be stirred up. After the pogrom, information mushroomed in Kielce and Częstochowa about the cases of inveigling children into Jewish homes, treated quite seriously by the local authorities. Fantastic rumours went around Kielce about the “criminal experiments” carried out by the Jews in the house in Planty street.

Fourthly — no confirmation can be found of the version contained in the above-mentioned analysis of the pogrom made by the ecclesiastical circles and currently invoked by some publicists, according to which there was “an exchange of shots”, a fight, “a psychosis of street fighting arose, more bloody than at the front and in the trenches. Shots were fired only by the police and soldiers, the Jews replied, having all kinds of arms at their disposal. There was a moment when fighting could spread all over the town, as feelings ran high”. The number of arms in the hands of the residents of 7 Planty street (a few revolvers), the relation of the number of victims (2 Poles, 42 Jews) as well as the accessible documents and the majority of accounts completely contradict this picture.

Fifthly — there is an open question as to the presence in the pogrom’s mechanism of the factor of deliberate provocation, a plot aimed at arousing bloody anti-Jewish excesses whose victims were to be the Jews saved from the Holocaust. The traces indicating the possible instigators — the Soviet special services — are too slight for anything more than a query to be posed.

Investigation and Trials

The investigation into the matter of the pogrom was conducted by a special commission of the Ministry of Public Security (*MBP*). In the first days scores of people were arrested, including policemen from both patrols, the chief of the station in Sienkiewicza street, the chief of the *WUBP*, the commander of the voivodeship *MO* and his deputy, Walenty Błaszczuk and other persons involved in the fabrication and spreading of the story that the boy was held by the Jews. In the show trial at the Supreme Military Court (at the out-session in Kielce), which started on July 9, in the dock appeared only eight persons, selected at random from the crowd and only four people (including one policeman) charged with the murder of the Fisz family. These eight people were accused of raising shouts and beating. One of the witnesses was not allowed by the prosecutor to touch on the subject of the behaviour of soldiers in his confession. Nine death sentences were passed. The execution took place on July 12.

The trial was a parody of justice; the accused were beaten during the examination, and actually deprived of the right of defence in the trial. The legal proceedings did not aim to discover the real culprits. The indictment sustained the earlier declared version that the pogrom was the climax of the underground offensive — an anti-democratic action “of the fascist forces active underground and making use of legal forms. (...) The particular acts of terror and anti-Semitic campaign that were the subject of separate investigations, turned out to be the work of the Freedom and Independence (*Wolność i Niezawisłość* — *WiN*), National Armed Forces (*Narodowe Siły Zbrojne* — *NSZ*) and other reactionary elements, who see the only way out in negating the present Polish reality”¹⁰. The directives for the Voivodeship Security Commissions of July 17 tell about a wide scale action taken by the underground, where “anti-Jewish pogroms occupy one of the principal positions, the reactionary forces applying a new tactics, aimed at involving the military, the Internal Security Corps (*KBW*) and the police in the pogrom. The anti-Jewish disturbances and strikes are, as the experience of the last few months shows, a result of a wide-scale, organized terrorist action”¹¹. These statements were not followed by any accusations or trials of concrete persons, although at this very period (July 26), one of the main figures of the armed underground created by Home Army veterans, in the Kielce region, Jerzy Franciszek Jaskólski, was arrested. There is no doubt that the investigation into the responsibility for causing a pogrom and participation in violence was carried out in a maximally superficial way, with the intention to exculpate the main accused. In subsequent trials on September 25 and 26 of seven policemen accused of beating, robbing and participation in the murder of Jews, the sentences were very light (from 6 months with a suspension up to two years of imprisonment). From November 18 until 22 a trial of 15 *MO* functionaries and civilians proceeded before the Regional Military Court in Kielce, among whom there was also the chief of the Police Station at 45 Sienkiewicza street and the director of the investigation department at the same station, who were accused of “not standing up to the occasion and by punishable forsaking of repressive measures that were at their disposal letting the crowd (...) break into the said house”¹². However, Zagórski and Sędek were exculpated, just like four other people; the remaining people were sentenced to from 2 to 15 years imprisonment (later these sentences were diminished by the Supreme Military Court). At the begin-

¹⁰ *Antyżydowskie wydarzenia*, p. 138.

¹¹ Central Military Archives, State Security Commission, without call number.

¹² Kielce District Archives, Regional Military Court, vol. III, K. 43; B. Szaynok, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

ning of December trials took place of seven *KBW* soldiers as well as officers and soldiers of the 2nd Division of Infantry. The verdicts were very different, one of the soldiers found guilty of stabbing wounded men with bayonets was given a life sentence. Earlier, on August 22, 1946, the Division Court of the 2nd Division of Infantry judged the case of soldiers and non-commissioned officers, one of whom was acquitted, four sentenced to from 3 to 9 years of imprisonment. They were accused of taking part in disarming the Jews, shooting in the house in Planty street, of giving no assistance to the person beaten by the crowd, and of not acquitting themselves of the duties of a commander.

The last to be judged were Major Władysław Sobczyński, Lieutenant-Colonel Wiktor Kuźnicki and Major Kazimierz Gwiazdowicz, who appeared before the Supreme Military Court in Warsaw on December 13, 1946. Sobczyński and Gwiazdowicz were found not guilty of “not counter-acting the criminal deeds committed by the crowd” of which they were accused in the indictment. Kuźnicki, who was accused by the prosecutor of “being actuated by personal motives, such as hostility towards the democratic system and anti-Semitism, of which he gave frequent proof (e.g. by asserting that the Kielce events were a Jewish provocation) in his activity at the post he held, was sentenced to a year of arrest. He was released in October 1947.

Before the military courts appeared altogether 49 persons, wherein 21 civilians, 14 functionaries of *MO*, 2 functionaries of *UB*, 12 soldiers and non-commissioned officers of *KBW* and of the 2nd Division of Infantry of the Polish Army. In three cases the law-suit was discontinued, 9 people were acquitted, among others the deputy commander of the voivodeship *MO* and chief of *WUBP*, the chief of the *MO* station in Sienkiewicza street and the director of investigations at the same Police Station. Only in the first trial were death sentences passed.

The Background of the Pogrom in Kielce

The tragedy that occurred in Kielce on July 4, 1946, must be viewed in a wider context, embracing two, mutually linked spheres of reality:

- 1) the situation in Poland, the condition of society, the state of its consciousness and
- 2) the situation of the Jews.

The majority of Polish society did not accept the power imposed on them, which was clearly expressed in the referendum of June 30, 1946, (no less than 3/4 of those taking part in this *sui generis* “plebiscite”, and in some regions over 80%, voted against the communists). The stifling of political

liberties, repressions of the legal and formally co-governing Polish Peasants' Party (*PSL*), mass arrests, ruthless war against any conspiracy — all this aroused a sense of undeserved harm in the betrayed nation. Active resistance — and an armed one — continued, unjustly termed as civil war, since in reality in the fight against the underground *NKVD* forces were largely involved, and units of *KBW* and the Polish Army (*Wojsko Polskie* — *WP*) were under the command of the officers from the Red Army. How large was the scope of operations against the underground is testified by the data from the first months of 1946 handed over by the Soviet adviser to the Ministry of Public Security; in 514 operations 7,985 “bandits” were killed, wounded and arrested. In 1945 the number of underground soldiers that were killed amounted almost to 3,000, in 1946 — 3,300. During these two years 45,000 people were arrested, military courts sentenced 11,000, and 700 death sentences were passed, most of them executed. The scope and character of repressions, intensified especially after the referendum, deprived the conspiracy of its hinterland. The loss of hope for a rapid change, the necessity for the country's reconstruction, the desire for peace after the years of occupation, and finally fear, favoured assuming the attitude of adjustment. However the resentment against the rulers, intensified by helplessness, had to find an outlet and was directed against a vicarious enemy — the Jews, who became the embodiment of foreign, sinister forces. Wide circles of society were convinced of the interpenetration of the Jews and authorities, of the ubiquitousness of the Jews in the state apparatus, Polish Workers' Party, the army and especially in the organs of repression. A large part of society perceived the Jews as an economic, cultural and spiritual threat, which gave rise to exaggerating and mythologizing the actual participation in ruling circles of people of Jewish descent and the actual support given to the communists by the Jews and to the Jews by the communists. The pre-war cliché of the Jewish Commune, strengthened by selective relations about Jewish behaviour during the Soviet occupation in the years 1939–1941, overlapped with the still vital phobias and hostile prejudices. Of no less importance were the fears that Jews returning to Poland would like to recover their property. This problem appeared among other places in Kielce.

As a consequence of this situation the Jews were treated with suspicion and hostility. One of the reports of the Government Delegation sent to London in 1945 says: “there is no more room for a Jew in Polish villages and country towns (...) And when one or two Jewish families return to a town that was once 90% Jewish, they find themselves on an alien, hostile ground”¹³. The Polish (non-communist) and Jewish sources record many

¹³ The Gen. W. Sikorski Institute and Museum, *MSW*, No. 9 III 2c, vol. 69.

facts testifying to a threat to the safety of the Jewish population, which in January 1946 numbered about 90,000, in July 1946 — a little over 200,000.

The estimates of the victims of murder are discordant — they oscillate from several hundred to two thousand in the years 1944–1947. According to data of the Central Committee of Polish Jews, until April 1946 the number of those killed reached 300 (including those murdered in the attempt to recover their property, as a result of wide-spread banditry that threatened not only Jews). The fact that many people possessed arms, war and post war savagery, the devaluation of human life, a lack of stabilization, the attitude to the authorities, favoured violence, stemming from hostility to the Jews. The participation of armed detachments of various affiliations (Freedom and Independence, *Wolność i Niezawisłość* — WiN, nationalistic formations of the National Armed Forces, *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne* — NSZ, National Military Union, *Narodowy Związek Wojskowy* — NZW) in mistreating and murdering the Jews, exposed — then and now by many people — is at present the subject of historical research. There can be no doubt that the attitude of soldiers of the anti-communist underground was strongly conditioned by the cliché of the Jewish Commune; anti-Semitic phobias, intensified by the tragic situation of those soldiers, gave rise to hostility which found its expression not only in the hostile words of leaflets and illegal news-sheets, but also in acts, always cruel, sometimes bloody. Sometimes murders were justified by collaboration with the UB, however Jews were many times attacked and killed merely because they were Jewish. The Kielce region was one of the more dangerous areas for Jews, although it did not specially stand out by the scope and character of actions against them, since during the war it was the scene of operations of the Świętokrzyska Brigade of the NSZ. It is true that not only Jews were victimized by members of armed detachments, who killed many thousand people: as a result of self-defence, lynchings, in attacks on Police Stations, in actions taken to rescue the prisoners, to gain money etc. Murders of Jews, however, stand out from others — the people who perished had been saved from the mass Holocaust of the Jewish nation perpetrated by the Germans and the motives of their executioners stemmed from the anti Semitic ideology of hatred and contempt.

Anti-Jewish excesses came in waves. In 1945 they reached a climax in March, April and August. In June 1945 there was an attempt to provoke a pogrom in Rzeszów, which strikingly resembles the beginning of the pogrom in Kielce. On August 11 and 12 pogroms broke out in Cracow; here, too, a rumour about murdered Polish children played its part, and the police contributed to the spread of disturbances. Among the 145 persons detained

there were 40 police functionaries. The order of the minister of public security of August 13, 1945, states that in Rzeszów and Cracow "The reactionaries succeeded in involving in this mean work even the leading cells of the Police". According to the information of the NKVD "the investigation corroborated that the pogrom had been prepared in advance"¹⁴, although no initiators or organizers were established. Whether a trial of 14 policemen, six soldiers of the Polish Army and 70 civilians, against whom investigation was conducted, took place in the end, remains a question. There is no evidence for it. The next wave of anti-Jewish violence started in February 1946. On February 5 a detachment of *WiN* encircled the Parczew town where 200 Jews resided. Three were killed, one injured and all of them robbed.

The threat to security that became the lot of the Jews in Poland in the early post-war years affected also, although to a lesser extent, the Jewish population in other countries. Anti-Semitism in France, in Hungary, in Czechoslovakia did not expire, just as it did not in Poland, together with the Holocaust of most of the Jews living in the given country. In September 1945 a pogrom broke out in Velke Topolcany in eastern Slovakia, as a result of which 49 people were injured. Similar incidents took place in several other localities. Another wave of pogroms in Slovakia came in August 1946. Jewish pogroms also broke out in Hungary; in the biggest, in Kunmadaras in 1946, three persons perished.

Reactions After the Pogrom

The pogrom in Kielce aroused in Poland expressions of condemnation, although its contents were different. The communists made use of the Kielce tragedy in their fight against their political opponents, by discrediting the legal and illegal opposition, the clergy and the armed underground, and created a great myth, combining anti-Semitism with the protest against the imposed order, with the "reactionary" forces. Of similar tenor were the statements made by many writers, scholars, publicists, and common declarations by the representatives of various circles of society. The milieu in opposition to the arising system — Polish Peasant Party (*PSL*), the hierarchy of the Roman-Catholic Church, the Catholic press — condemned the violence and murders "committed against honest citizens regardless of their condition and descent" (the interview with Stanisław Mikołajczyk)¹⁵. The declaration by the Primate of Poland, Cardinal August Hlond, similar in tone, made before American journalists in Warsaw, aroused negative reper-

¹⁴ Cf. "Karta", No. 15, p. 25.

¹⁵ "Gazeta Ludowa" of July 8, 1946.

cussions in the West. The Primate said: “The Roman–Catholic Church condemns any kind of murder always and everywhere. She condemns it also in Poland, regardless of who commits it, and whether it is committed against Poles or Jews in Kielce or in other corners of the Polish Republic. (...) The course of the fatal and deplorable events in Kielce shows that they cannot be attributed to racism. They have risen on quite a different, painful and tragic ground. These events are a terrible misfortune which fills me with sadness and grief”¹⁶. Cardinal Hlond emphasized that the responsibility for the worsening relations between Poles and Jews “in a large measure should be placed on those Jews who occupy leading posts in Polish state life and who strive to impose on this country systemic forms that a large majority of the nation do not accept. (...) In the fatal armed encounters on the political front some Jews perish, alas, but incomparably more Poles do as well”. With minor exceptions, among which can be ranked the articles in “Tygodnik Powszechny”, the public reaction of oppositional milieus to the pogrom was incommensurable with the gravity of the crimes that took place in Kielce on July 4, 1946. The fact that a part of Polish society and its élites as well as the Church failed to take firm actions against anti–Semitism, especially against the murders that continued, actions autonomous to the ruling camp, entailed very negative consequences.

(Translated by Agnieszka Kreczmar)

¹⁶ *Antyżydowskie wydarzenia*, p. 115.