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## A MICROHISTORY OF DECLINE. ATTITUDE OF JEWS IN AND AROUND DZIERŻONIÓW TOWARDS POLAND IN THE YEARS 1967–1968<sup>1</sup>

### MIKROHISTORIA ZNIKANIA. STOSUNEK ŻYDÓW MIESZKAJĄCYCH W DZIERŻONIOWIE I OKOLICACH DO POLSKI W LATACH 1967–1968

**ABSTRACT:** The article presents the fate of the Jewish population settled in Lower Silesia, Poland, during the anti-Semitic campaign of 1967–1968, focusing on two towns: Dzierżoniów and Bielawa. Through an analysis of archival sources, the text reconstructs the fate of individual members of this community, including its leaders, beginning in 1967 (during the Six-Day War) and continuing through the following months, till the events of March 1968. The paper takes a special interest in the attitudes of Jews towards Poland, as well as in the government anti-Semitic campaign and accusations of disloyalty to Poland. It also presents the experiences of hostility, as well as the consequences of stigmatization by anti-Semitism. The analysis exemplifies the impact of the anti-Semitic campaign on a small, provincial Jewish community, living far from Warsaw and the student protests in 1968 or the centre of communist authority.

**KEYWORDS:** anti-Semitic campaign, Six-Day War, March 1968, Jews in Poland, Lower Silesia

Microhistory of the Jewish community in the Dzierżoniów and surrounding area<sup>2</sup> in the years 1967–1968 is something more than just a look at one of many

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<sup>2</sup> My area of interest is, above all, neighbouring towns: Dzierżoniów and Bielawa, where Jewish organisations functioned and where Jewish life was concentrated. Sometimes I also discuss cases from other towns of this powiat: Pieszyce, Niemcza, Piława, etc.

Jewish population centres or a branch of the Socio-Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (Polish: Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce, TSKŻ). Recreating the image of Poland as seen by that population can only be regarded as a symbolic act. Many Jews settled on these lands just after the Second World War, and they remembered extremely eventful and institutionally developed life in the second half of the 1940s, especially in terms of culture and politics. Because of that, before I move to analysing the Jewish optics in that period in more detail, I would like to shortly present some information regarding earlier times and offer historical context.

The main issue I would like to discuss in this work is the situation of the Jews of Dzierżoniów and in the vicinity in the period between the Middle Eastern conflict in June 1967, called the Six-Day War or the June War, and the events known in Poland as March 1968 and the anti-Semitic campaign which had its epicentre at that time. Of particular interest to me is the attitude of the Jewish population towards Poland – the country they lived in, and also towards their Polish fellow-citizens. In my opinion, the issue of continuity of anti-Jewish moods and acts in those months also needs to be addressed. At this point, a question can be posed about the extent to which a feeling of threat and attempts to limit the Jewish community's life were present also before the aforementioned dramatic events and dates.

There are a number of Polish historians who published works on the subject of Jews in Dzierżoniów in different periods, among them Bożena Szaynok,<sup>3</sup> Kamil Kijek<sup>4</sup> and Anna Gruzlewska.<sup>5</sup> The latter researcher is the only one so far who has published papers on this community regarding the years 1967–1968.<sup>6</sup> Many publications do not deal with the subject directly, as is the case with works by Marcin Szydzisz,<sup>7</sup> Tamara

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<sup>3</sup> Bożena Szaynok, *Żydzi w Dzierżoniowie (1945–1950)*, [in:] *Dzierżoniów – wiek miniony*, eds. Tomasz Przerwa, Sebastian Ligarski, Wrocław 2007, pp. 26–33.

<sup>4</sup> Kamil Kijek, *Aliens in the Lands of the Piasts: The Polonization of Lower Silesia and Its Jewish Community in the Years 1945–1950*, [in:] *Jews and Germans in Eastern Europe*, ed. Tobias Grill, Berlin–Boston 2018, pp. 234–255.

<sup>5</sup> Anna Gruzlewska, *Dzierżoniowski oddział TSKŻ w latach 1957–1968: Pomiędzy odwilżą i wydarzeniami marcowymi*, "Słowo Żydowskie", September 2015, pp. 12–19; *eadem*, *Ostatnie lata szkoły żydowskiej w Dzierżoniowie we wspomnieniach uczniów i nauczycieli (1960–1964)*, "Rocznik Dzierżoniowski", 26 (2016), pp. 34–49; *eadem*, *Polska Jerozolima: fenomen żydowskiego osiedla w powiecie dzierżoniowskim 1945–1950*, Dzierżoniów 2019.

<sup>6</sup> *Eadem*, *Marzec 1968 i jego prelude w Dzierżoniowie i Bielawie w świetle dokumentów i relacji*, "Bibliotheca Bielaviana 2018", (2019), pp. 11–34.

<sup>7</sup> Marcin Szydzisz, *Společnosť žydovská na Dolním Šlasku w świetle działalności Towarzystwa Społeczno-Kulturalnego Żydów w Polsce w latach 1950–1989*, Warszawa–Wrocław 2019.

Włodarczyk<sup>8</sup> or Ewa Waszkiewicz.<sup>9</sup> The anti-Semitic campaign has already been studied many times in the publications by authors such as Dariusz Stola,<sup>10</sup> Piotr Osęka<sup>11</sup> and Jerzy Eisler,<sup>12</sup> as well as, more recently, also in the works of researchers like Anat Plocker<sup>13</sup> and Hans Christian Dahlmann.<sup>14</sup> In this paper, I refer to the results of these researchers' studies, while showing a slightly different, more bottom-up and local picture of the years 1967–1968 in Poland. The present article is based on materials collected in the State Archives in Wrocław and the branch in Kamieniec Ząbkowicki. Many documents come also from the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance.

### Jews in Dzierżoniów after the Second World War

After 1945, the Dzierżoniów region became an important centre of Jewish life, primarily because of the former prisoners of one of the branches of Gross-Rosen concentration camp. When the camp was liberated by the Red Army, its prisoners decided to settle close to the place where they had been forced to work,<sup>15</sup> thus creating foundations of Jewish settlement in Lower Silesia. First committees were set up, among others, in Dzierżoniów and Bielawa, where towns were situated just a few kilometres from one another. With time, and also as a result of the decision made by the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Polish: Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce, CKŻP) to increase the number of settlers, subsequent groups of Jews arrived in the area from various regions of Poland. A significant

<sup>8</sup> *Ku nowemu życiu. Żydzi na Dolnym Śląsku w latach 1945–1970*, ed. Tamara Włodarczyk, Wrocław 2017; Maciej Borkowski, Andrzej Kirmiel, Tamara Włodarczyk, *Śladami Żydów: Dolny Śląsk, Opolszczyzna, Ziemia Lubuska*, Warszawa 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Ewa Waszkiewicz, *Kongregacja Wyznania Mojżeszowego na Dolnym Śląsku na tle polityki wyznaniowej Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej 1945–1968*, Wrocław 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Dariusz Stola, *Kampania antyżydowska w Polsce 1967–1968*, Warszawa 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Piotr Osęka, *Syjonści, inspiratorzy, wichrzyciele: obraz wroga w propagandzie marca 1968*, Warszawa 1999; *idem*, *Marzec '68*, Kraków 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Jerzy Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, Warszawa 2006; *idem*, *Marzec 1968: geneza, przebieg, konsekwencje*, Warszawa 1991.

<sup>13</sup> Anat Plocker, *The expulsion of Jews from communist Poland: Memory wars and homeland anxieties*, Bloomington 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Hans Christian Dahlmann, *Antysemityzm w Polsce roku 1968*, Warszawa 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Bożena Szaynok, *Początki osadnictwa żydowskiego na Dolnym Śląsku po II wojnie światowej (maj 1945–styczeń 1946)*, "Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego", 4–2, (1994–1995), pp. 45–46; Marek Szajda, *Początki instytucjonalnego życia żydowskiego na Dolnym Śląsku od maja do sierpnia 1945 roku*, [in:] *Koniec wojny na Śląsku. Rok 1945. Studia i materiały*, eds. Ksawery Jasiak, Krzysztof Kawalec, Piotr Stanek, Wrocław–Opole–Warszawa 2018, pp. 169–177.

number of settlers came as early as the following year; they were part of the so-called repatriation from the USSR.<sup>16</sup> In the middle of 1946 in Lower Silesia, there were only two centres that had more than ten thousand Jews<sup>17</sup>: Wrocław and Dzierżoniów. It is no surprise, then, that the latter was nicknamed “the Polish Jerusalem”. At the beginning, till April 1946, it was in this Sudeten town where the most important Jewish organisations were located, including the Jewish Committee of the Lower Silesia Voivodeship (Polish: Wojewódzki Komitet Żydowski, WKŻ). Thanks to the productivisation programme (state support to employ Jews in various sectors of the economy), a number of cooperatives were established; people also found work in factories in the cotton industry and radio set production.<sup>18</sup> What is more, Dzierżoniów was at that time famous of agricultural productivisation.<sup>19</sup> For many Jews from other regions, this particular town was a synonym for safety, Committees’ successful work and a “new life” after the Holocaust.

The postwar history of Jews in and around Dzierżoniów is marked by processes and events that affected the situation of the Jewish population in general. Consequences of the 1946 Kielce pogrom were noticeable also in Lower Silesia, and were reflected in numbers. Thousands of people from various places and communities, including the Sudeten area, left Poland.<sup>20</sup> The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and the possibility of emigration to the Middle East also had its impact on the Jewish population.<sup>21</sup> This meant Jewish life in Dzierżoniów was in systematic decline, in proportion to the decline of the town’s Jewish population. When in 1950 CKŻP was merged with the Jewish Association for Culture and Art (Polish: Żydowskie Towarzystwo Kultury i Sztuki) and transformed into the Socio-Cultural Society of Jews in Poland, a branch of this most important institution of the Jewish life operated in the town, and a similar organisation was established in Bielawa. In subsequent years, especially after the so-called Gomulka Aliyah (mass emigration of Jews to Israel), more families left Dzierżoniów.<sup>22</sup> However, not all of them emigrated – some

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<sup>16</sup> Bożena Szaynok, *Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku 1945–1950*, Wrocław 2000.

<sup>17</sup> *Eadem*, *Żydzi w Dzierżoniowie*, p. 29.

<sup>18</sup> Piotr Kendziorek, *Program i praktyka produktywizacji Żydów polskich w działalności CKŻP*, Warszawa 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Marek Szajda, *Żydzi na roli? Studium produktywizacji ludności żydowskiej na przykładzie Dzierżoniowa w latach 1945–1946*, [in:] *Wieś na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych po 1945 r. Ciągłość czy zmiana?*, eds. Jolanta Kluba, Aleksandra Paprot-Wielopolska, Marek Szajda, Piotr Zubowski, Wrocław 2020, pp. 50–86.

<sup>20</sup> Dariusz Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia? Migracje z Polski 1949–1989*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 49–65.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> Conf. Ewa Węgrzyn, *Wyjeżdżamy! Wyjeżdżamy?! Alija gomulkowska 1956–1960*, Kraków–Budapeszt 2016.

Jews joined Jewish communities in bigger cities such as Wrocław. According to 1960 reports (that is reports produced after the 1956–1960 wave of migration), in July, there were 400 Jews living in Dzierżoniów, half of which were members of the TSKŻ.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, in the neighbouring Bielawa, every second of its 200 Jewish inhabitants was a member of the Society.<sup>24</sup> We should note that at that time, as part of the so-called second repatriation from the USSR, a few dozen Jewish families settled in the town. The Jewish population had also their religious structures – commonly known as the Congregation (Polish: Związek Religijny Wyznania Mojżeszowego w Polsce), which organised religious events, first of all prayers, but also run kosher kitchen and was a place for ritual slaughter. The Congregation consisted of about 300 people; most of its members were active only during holidays and major events.<sup>25</sup> In 1957, many Jewish aid organisations resumed their activities, with the authorities' consent, which helped develop initiatives undertaken by this group. Some institutions subsidized by the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) were also active in Dzierżoniów – among them the Central Jewish Commission for Social Aid (Polish: Centralna Żydowska Komisja Pomocy Społecznej, CŻKPS) and Organisation for Creative Development (Polish: Organizacja Rozwoju Twórczości, ORT). Both were located in the TSKŻ building and they both provided financial help or organised professional training. Financial support and new circumstances did not, however, stop the process of decline of local population, the main reason for which was emigration. As more and more people, including children, left the town, in 1964, a decision was made to close the Jewish school.<sup>26</sup>

### Jewish life before the March 1968

Before the events of the second half of the 1960s, which had a great impact on Jewish functioning and the way of thinking among this population, institutional forms of Jewish life were quite stable, also in other communities in smaller towns

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<sup>23</sup> Report of the inspection of the TSKŻ branch in Dzierżoniów carried out on 27–28 July 1960, 1585/7174, Institute of National Remembrance Archive in Warsaw (hereafter: IPN BU).

<sup>24</sup> Report of the inspection of the TSKŻ branch in Bielawa carried out on 29–30 July 1960, 1585/7179, IPN BU.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from the Citizens' Militia (Polish: Milicja Obywatelska, MO) Chief in Dzierżoniów to head of the Dept. III of SB KW MO in Wrocław, 9 December 1960, 053/148, vol. 1, Institute of National Remembrance Archive in Wrocław (hereafter: IPN Wr).

<sup>26</sup> Report of the inspection of the TSKŻ branch in Dzierżoniów carried out on 25–26 June 1964, 1585/7179, IPN BU. For more information on the last years of the organisation, see Gruzlewska, *Ostatnie lata szkoły*, pp. 34–49.

and villages. In March 1966 in Warsaw, the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress of the TSKŻ took place. It stimulated activity of the Society and attracted new members. During one of the sessions, a representative from Bielawa called for, among others, more help for Jews in smaller towns, for more financial support and for organising meetups with famous artists.<sup>27</sup> Actually, he repeated the requests that had already been submitted to the head office. As a result, the TSKŻ branches in Bielawa and Dzierżoniów made attempts to stimulate their members, which took a form of increased activity of Society commissions and organising cultural events. The most important consequence of the March Congress was, however, an initiative aimed at intensifying cooperation between neighbouring branches. As representatives of both organisations declared just a few months later, close contact and stronger cooperation produced positive effects.<sup>28</sup> In the discussed period, the Jews of Dzierżoniów were not free from single anti-Semitic excesses. As Anna Gruzlewska points out, in 1965, it was reported that food stored at the Jewish kitchen was stolen. A year later somebody broke windows in the building of the TSKŻ, which, understandably, caused great concern.<sup>29</sup>

At that time the structures of the TSKŻ were less numerous than at the beginning of the decade. In Bielawa, there were 67 members, and in Dzierżoniów – 150.<sup>30</sup> The diversity of Jewish life in these towns is well documented in a report presented in February 1967 in the Department of Internal Affairs of the Presidium of the Poviát National Council (Polish: Powiatowa Rada Narodowa, PRN). The document describes also how after the Congress in Warsaw, the Jewish community became more active. Examples of bustling Jewish life include numerous meetings, lectures, concerts, debates about culture, guest theatre performances, kids and youth clubs' projects – that is, a full spectrum of events intended for participants of all ages.<sup>31</sup> Other issues are discussed in this document as well, for instance: participation of a group of 15 women in a knitting course hosted by the local branch of ORT, work for CŻKPS or sending 20 children to a camp organised

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<sup>27</sup> Report on the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress of the TSKŻ Society in Poland held on 5–6 March 1966, 8/28, Socio-Cultural Society of Jews in Poland Archive (TSKŻ), Organisational Department (hereafter ATSKŻ, WO).

<sup>28</sup> Report of a meeting of secretaries and chairmen of local branches held on 2 July 1966, 8/28, ATSKŻ, WO.

<sup>29</sup> Gruzlewska, *Marzec 1968*, pp. 13–14.

<sup>30</sup> List of branches and clubs as of 30<sup>th</sup> July 1967, 1585/7172, IPN BU.

<sup>31</sup> Report on activities of the TSKŻ in Bielawa for the year 1966, 4 February 1967, Presidium of the Voivodeship National Council (Polish: Wojewódzka Rada Narodowa, hereafter WRN) in Wrocław, Internal Affairs Department, 1/21, State Archives in Wrocław (hereafter AP Wr).

every year by the TSKŻ. One cannot forget political engagement, mostly in the form of cooperation with local administration and Party structures. The apostrophe crowning the document can be regarded as a schematic and common wording: "The branch strives at an even better work in the future, so that our members and non-members could use to a greater extent the cultural achievements provided by our beloved Homeland, the Polish People's Republic".<sup>32</sup> This sentence does not only convey the idea of faithfulness to the ideology, and thus – to the authorities, as it would be expected. It is also an expression of a fact, which at the end of the year was acknowledged by almost all Jews, that only by consent of the highest Party authorities and with their permission was it possible to have so many and so diverse forms of Jewish life in Poland. This was about to change only four months later, in June.

### The Six-Day War

An armed conflict in the Middle East between Israel and its neighbouring Arab states was a momentous event also for the Jews living in the Dzierżoniów powiat. The main reason for this was that many of them maintained regular contacts with their families, friends and acquaintances who had made Aliyah (emigrated to Israel) before the war. Many Jews from Dzierżoniów and Bielawa not only exchanged letters with their close ones in *Eretz Yisrael*, but also visited them and, in some cases, stayed there longer. Understandably, they could not remain indifferent to the fate of the Israelis. As early as 5 June, the day the fighting – that is, the pre-emptive attack on the Arab forces – broke out, some members of the Jewish community gathered to talk about the future of Israel. One of such meetings took place in a stamp shop run by Hersz Rajman, who back in 1965 spent five months in Israel.<sup>33</sup> A group of several people discussed, among others, influence of the USSR on the aggressive policy of the Arab countries and the future of the Israeli state. Another meeting was held in the building of the Congregation. During that meeting Maurycy Mincer, who had been to Israel not much earlier, assured those gathered of the Israeli army's technical advantage.<sup>34</sup> While these discussants were convinced that the Israel

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<sup>32</sup> Report on activities of the TSKŻ in Bielawa for the year 1966, 4 February 1967, WRN, 1/21, AP Wr.

<sup>33</sup> Operation correspondence re Zionism, Information re destructive Zionist attitudes in the Dzierżoniów powiat, 13 November 1967, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

<sup>34</sup> Operation correspondence re Zionism, Report on the situation in Jewish circles in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict, 7 June 1967, 053/1481, vol. 3, IPN Wr.



Defence Forces would win, some others demonstrated anxiety or fear for the *Yishuv*. Some were even reported to “have cried like babies” on hearing the news about the breakout of the war.<sup>35</sup> Whatever particular reactions of the Jewish community in that period, there is no doubt people were not indifferent to the situation in the Middle East, as well as to the social situation in which they functioned. A vast majority of Jews from Bielawa and Dzierżoniów thought that information about the conflict delivered by the media was biased, that the news was distorted.<sup>36</sup> Reliable news came from somewhere else – people listened, for example, to radio stations such as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, as they gave very different news accounts of the conflict.<sup>37</sup> Poland – although not involved in military operations – was seen as an ally of the Arab countries supported in the international arena by the USSR.

The war ended quickly and with clear-cut victory of the Israeli forces, which was a surprise to Jews, although of course a highly desired one. Jewish communities, not only in Dzierżoniów, felt elated and happy. The atmosphere changed, celebrations and parties were organised in people’s houses to honour the victors, and in particular general Moshe Dayan, the commander-in-chief of Israel Defence Forces.<sup>38</sup> It was a sudden shift from anxiety to enthusiasm. It is worth noting that all this was happening in the privacy of people’s homes, not in public. Discussions and meetings held in the buildings of the Congregation and the TSKŻ can be regarded as closed meetings – their participants amounted to the same circle of regular listeners, mostly Jewish activists, who almost unanimously expressed their positive opinion about the end of the conflict and Israel’s victory, and claimed that if the war had developed in an opposite direction, the country would have been destroyed and “not a single Jew would have stayed alive”.<sup>39</sup>

Signing the truce between the sides of the conflict did not mean an end of discussions on war subjects. New themes arising from a changing international situation to a greater extent concerned Poland. In the days that followed, between 10 and 13 June, people gathered for meetings in Congregation’s rooms and debated about

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>38</sup> Operation correspondence re Zionism, Report on the situation in Jewish circles in the Dzierżoniów powiat in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict, 13 June 1967, 053/1481, vol. 3, IPN Wr; Information of WSW PRN in Dzierżoniów re the recent situation of Jewish population, 1 July 1967, WRN, 1/21, AP Wr.

<sup>39</sup> Operation correspondence re Zionism, Report on the situation in Jewish circles in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict, 7 June 1967, 053/1481, vol. 3, IPN Wr.



consequences of the USSR breaking off diplomatic relations with Israel. Whereas Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, who followed the Soviet Union policy, were called “Moscow’s puppets”, some believed that Poland would act differently, would not be “led on a leash” by its Eastern neighbour.<sup>40</sup> Other attitudes, adopted, among others, by aforementioned Rajman, included “prophetic” voices. According to them, breaking off diplomatic relations between Israel and the USSR would result in repressions against Jewish community.<sup>41</sup> This meant that, especially in the light of the government’s decision of 12 June, some Jews worried a lot or even “broke down”.<sup>42</sup>

While in the course of events the attitude of the Jewish population towards the Polish state changed, the way Jews saw the Polish people was entirely positive. This good image was built up mostly thanks to supporting opinions expressed by fellow citizens, who sympathized with Jews and the success of Israel.<sup>43</sup> As the Jewish population saw it, the defeat of the Arab states, which at the same time was the defeat of the USSR who supported them, pleased the Poles, especially after so many examples of propaganda information which distorted the reality. Supposedly, a rumour circulated among the Jews of Dzierżoniów that cardinal Wyszyński himself supported Israel.<sup>44</sup>

As days went by, people kept on discussing the matter, listening to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and getting reassured in their conviction that Israel was in the right. Interestingly, one of operational contacts in Dzierżoniów informed the Security Service (Polish: Służba Bezpieczeństwa, SB) that in those days the Jews – and, what is more, Jews coming from various political circles – were disappointed with socialism.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, first warning talks came; some Party members and some congregation and TSKŻ activists (among them Mincer) were warned about supporting Israel’s policy and making negative comments on the USSR. As a result of this kind of measures, discussions quietened and meetings ceased. Surely not without impact was also a speech given by First Secretary of the Polish

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<sup>40</sup> Operation correspondence re Zionism, Report on the situation in Jewish circles in the Dzierżoniów powiat in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict, 13 June 1967, 053/1481, vol. 3, IPN Wr.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*. About the decision of Poland’s severance of diplomatic relations with Israel see: Bożena Szaynok, *Z historią i Moskwą w tle. Polska a Izrael 1944–1968*, Warszawa–Wrocław 2007, pp. 394–444.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>45</sup> Operation correspondence re Zionism, Report on the situation in Jewish circles in the Dzierżoniów powiat in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict, 17 June 1967, 053/1481, vol. 3, IPN Wr.

United Workers' Party (Polish: Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR) Władysław Gomułka on 19 June at the 6<sup>th</sup> Trade Unions Congress. Jews construed it as a warning, but also as a sign of possible future repressions towards all those who were favourably inclined towards Israel.<sup>46</sup>

Mass meetings held in plants and factories, as well as resolutions condemning the Israeli "aggression" – as propaganda called it – were important, and sometimes even life-changing for some Jews, as the case of Gienadi Pilcz shows. This worker of "DIORA" – a radio set factory in Dzierżoniów<sup>47</sup> – underestimated the importance of a Party resolution circulated in his place of work and did not sign it, which led to severe consequences. Executive of the PZPR Factory Committee did not show much understanding. Pilcz offered explanations, showed readiness to sign the document the following day and referred to his 23 years' experience in the Party – but all this to no avail. As Pilcz put it himself during a meeting with Party representatives from "DIORA":

I, comrades, am not an enemy of the People's Republic, I fought for it. Please, do not expel me from the Party. I am ill and for the sake of my health please let me stay in the ranks of PZPR. I simply overlooked this fact that I should sign it. Once again, I am asking you, do not remove me from the Party. Punish me in some other way, but let me stay in the Party. Don't destroy my life.<sup>48</sup>

The speech, dramatic as it was, did not change the decision of the Party. Its representatives came to a conclusion that Pilcz's behaviour proved he was in favour of Israel's policy. The executive decided to expel him from the Party, and at the same time it was ruled that "[...] Comrade Pilcz would be dismissed from the post of curator and lay judge of the powiat court, since he was not put forward on behalf of a Party organisation".<sup>49</sup> This way, the Jewish "DIORA" worker became the first in Dzierżoniów "victim" of consequences of the Six-Day War. He surely had not foreseen that not signing the aforementioned document would bring such far-reaching consequences. This tells us a lot about the feeling of security in one's life – this feeling had never been at risk before. Being removed from the Party was not the heaviest punishment possible, yet it was fraught with serious consequences. Acting

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<sup>46</sup> Operation correspondence re Zionism, Report on the situation in Jewish circles in the Dzierżoniów powiat relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict, 24 June 1967, 053/1481, vol. 3, IPN Wr.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>48</sup> Report of the KZ PZPR executive meeting held on 29 June 1967 re G. Pilcz, 82/XIII/74, KP PZPR in Dzierżoniów, KZ PZPR at „DIORA” production plant in Dzierżoniów, AP Wr.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*.

according to the rule “whoever is not with us, is against us” was in line with the policy clearly expressed by Gomułka during the 6<sup>th</sup> Trade Unions Congress: “[We] have not created obstacles for Polish citizens of Jewish origin to relocate to Israel, if they wanted to. Our stand is that every Polish citizen should have only one homeland – the Polish People’s Republic”.<sup>50</sup>

The subject of Israel was present also in other committees and factories. However, what happened to Pilcz did not happen anywhere else, maybe because – unlike at “DIORA” – in other plants and factories, such resolution was not created and distributed. For example, in the “Silesiana” factory, the question of the “aggression” was only discussed.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the Town National Council (Polish: Miejska Rada Narodowa, MRN) passed a resolution which – on behalf of the citizens and the Council – condemned the Israeli attack on the Arab countries. The resolution was passed unanimously, which means that councillor Jakub Kon – who worked at “Silesiana” and was a PZPR member – did not voice objections.<sup>52</sup> Presumably, this was so because of a warning from the “higher Party authorities”. In total, after the Six-Day War, five Jewish members of PZPR were removed from its ranks in Dzierżoniów and Bielawa, including Pilcz, one person received a reprimand and two – a warning.<sup>53</sup>

It is hard to say whether Party decisions were what some Jewish activists had already mentioned when talking about repressive measures. In the weeks that followed, most Jews, however, remained cautious and discreet, staying away from any possible trouble. People were not only dissatisfied with the existing socio-political situation, but they were also disappointed with the stand taken by the Main Board of the TSKŻ in Warsaw, which in the days right after the end of the conflict did not make any statement. Also “Folks-Sztyne”, the press organ of the Society, remained silent, although normally its editors were quick to comment on current events.<sup>54</sup> All this influenced Jewish attitudes. Some people felt lost, not knowing

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<sup>50</sup> Władysław Gomułka, *Przemówienie na VI Kongresie Związków Zawodowych, Warszawa 19 czerwca 1967 r.*, Warszawa 1967, p. 24.

<sup>51</sup> Report of the meeting of KZ PZPR at the Lower Silesia Cotton Mill “Silesiana” in Dzierżoniów held on 23 June 1967, 82/XIII/18, KP PZPR in Dzierżoniów, KZ PZPR at the Lower Silesia Cotton Mill “Silesiana” in Dzierżoniów, AP Wr.

<sup>52</sup> Resolution, 29 June 1967, 84/572/64, Presidium of MRN. Report of the MRN session, State Archives in Wrocław, Branch in Kamieniec Ząbkowicki (hereafter AP KZ).

<sup>53</sup> Operation correspondence re Zionism, Letter from MO Chief in Dzierżoniów to head of the Dept. III of SB KW MO in Wrocław, 8 December 1967, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

<sup>54</sup> See more: Marek Szajda, *The Impact of the Six-Day War of 1967 on the Life of Jews in Poland: The Example of the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland*, “Judaica Petropolitana. Scholarly Journal”, 14 (2020), pp. 60–75.

what the official interpretation of events was and how to behave in that situation. On the other hand, there were individuals who agreed with the propaganda talking about “aggression” and regarded the silence on the part of the TSKŻ central authorities as an act of supporting Israel.<sup>55</sup> The TSKŻ published its official stand, which followed the Party policy, only in the middle of June. Most of the Jewish community received it with disappointment; for one thing, too much time had passed since June; for another, they were not satisfied with the document’s contents, condemning the Israeli “aggression”. One activist in Bielawa claimed, for example, that he voted in favour of the document, as – facing the fact that all participants present at the meeting were in favour – he could not break ranks.

Officials who in June 1967 analysed Jewish activity in and around Dzierżoniów were fully satisfied. For the authorities, the most important thing was there were no public demonstrations in support of Israel. As reports said, “[...] atmosphere in the powiat among the Jewish population is calm. Moreover, there are no records of any anti-Semitic disturbances among the Polish population”.<sup>56</sup> Any measure taken by the public, such as grass-roots initiative to collect money for Israel, was instantly rejected; in this particular case, head of the Congregation, Turbiner, decided there would be no collection.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, the single bigger event was the case of the “DIORA” resolution. Accounts of that period given by the Jewish people show a different picture than the one presented in official reports. At the beginning, there was enthusiasm, in days that followed – anxiety, first threat-posing situations, and then a significant change of circumstances. Majority of Jews disagreed with the policy of condemning Israel, with the information they received from the media regarding the conflict in the Middle East, and with breaking off diplomatic relations with the state of Israel. There were also some Jews, although in minority, who followed the Party rhetoric and criticized imperialism and the “aggressor”. One of Dzierżoniów officials gives us some interesting insight into this matter:

[...] after Comrade Gomułka’s speech, one can observe that the more politically sophisticated members of the Jewish society support the only right Poland’s policy. They saw for themselves that here we do not have anti-Semitism, that Jews are not

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<sup>55</sup> Operation correspondence re Zionism, Report on the situation in Jewish circles in the Dzierżoniów powiat in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict, 24 June 1967, 053/1481, vol. 3, IPN Wr.

<sup>56</sup> AP Wr, Presidium of WRN in Wrocław, International Affairs Department, 1/21, Memo on a visit to Dzierżoniów and Świdnica on 24 June 1967, 358.

<sup>57</sup> Operation correspondence re Zionism, Telephone note No. 26/67 from SB KPMO Dzierżoniów to Deputy KW SB KWMO in Wrocław, 13 June 1967, 053/1481, vol. 3, IPN Wr.

victims of any “smear campaigns” and they are not removed from their posts. (Those in management positions still hold them)”.<sup>58</sup>

In other words, if one remained utterly “faithful to the Party”, they could be sure they would keep the *status quo*, something that Pilcz, who got removed from the Party, did not know or was not aware of. Simultaneously, the SB became more active, following the „line of Jewish nationalism”.<sup>59</sup> Security Service officers were vigilant for people displaying „Zionist attitude” and gathered information about 120 Jews from Dzierżoniów region and the town itself, including “3 operational cases of verification, and the 4<sup>th</sup> person for an operational case of observation. Fifty people in total were selected and are currently under scrutiny”.<sup>60</sup>

### Between June and March

The time between events of June 1967 and March 1968 was a period of further changes in opinion about Poland among the Polish Jews. This was a gradual process, caused by different factors – both internal and external – that influenced the Jews of Dzierżoniów. Unlike in the case of the Middle East conflict, this was not a rapid change, but rather a slow process of shaping certain attitudes.

On the national scale, an event that had the greatest influence on the mood among the Jews was the dissolution of aid organisations: CŻKPS and ORT. In a broader sense this meant blocking JDC, since it was JDC which till then had given funds and guaranteed functioning of those organisations.<sup>61</sup> The process of closing of specific structures took a few months, from August till the end of December 1967. Also in Dzierżoniów, a special liquidation commission was set up. One of its tasks was, for example, selling the organisations’ property.<sup>62</sup> Cutting subsidy which for so many years had been given to Jews was – for obvious reasons – received with disapproval, especially since most of Jews in Dzierżoniów

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<sup>58</sup> Information of WSW PRN in Dzierżoniów re the recent situation of Jewish population, 1 July 1967, WRN, 1/21, AP Wr.

<sup>59</sup> Jarosław Syrnyk, „Po linii” rewizjonizmu, nacjonalizmu, syjonizmu: aparat bezpieczeństwa wobec ludności niepolskiej na Dolnym Śląsku (1945–1989), Wrocław 2013, p. 203.

<sup>60</sup> Operation correspondence re Zionism, Letter from MO Chief in Dzierżoniów to head of the Dept. III of SB KW MO in Wrocław, 8 December 1967, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

<sup>61</sup> Anna Sommer-Schneider, *Sze'erit hapleta. Ocaleni z Zagłady: działalność American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee w Polsce w latach 1945–1989*, Kraków 2014, pp. 307–311.

<sup>62</sup> Operation correspondence re Zionism, Information on situation in Jewish circles, 16 October 1967, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

were elderly people, some of whom received diverse forms of pension, but for whom additional financial support from the CŻKPS was extremely helpful. Various rumour circulated regarding the basis for dissolving the organisations. Some claimed that the Polish authorities withdrew their permission for foreign grants. Others said that it was the JDC's decision, as they no longer wanted to fund the institutions in Poland. And there were also those who put the blame on the USSR, believing the Soviet Union had demanded that from Poland.<sup>63</sup>

Whatever the rumours, the fact was that many Jews found themselves deprived of a possibility to get any support. This meant both small-scale help such as free meals given out in the Congregation canteen,<sup>64</sup> as well as more complex issues such as specific financial help in a form of benefits. When a Jew from nearby Ziębice turned directly to local social workers for help because of the new situation he found himself in, an official told him that they "will not be able to provide any new people with care".<sup>65</sup> The main reason for that was lack of funds. Another issue was the problem of former employees of CŻKPS and ORT, waiting for the TSKŻ to help them find new employment.

In the discussed period, the Society itself tried to function as usual, at least theoretically. In autumn, during a meeting with representatives of local structures of the Main Board of the TSKŻ, Rajber announced that regardless of financial means work should be carried out at the same level – the change was that paid work was to be replaced with community action. Both the branch in Dzierżoniów and the one in Bielawa attempted to schedule regular events, as well as political commemorations, such as the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution".<sup>66</sup> The reality was, however, that the activities were limited and precautionary, very often taking a form of social gatherings of mostly elderly Jews.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, here and there one could hear complaints about various decisions, usually unfavourable towards Jews, announced by the authorities. In Bielawa for instance, for no reason, the branch was told to give

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>64</sup> Information on the current situation in Jewish circles, 25 January 1968, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

<sup>65</sup> Socio-Cultural Society of Jews in Poland, 1960–1971, Details of a plenary meeting of the board of the TSKŻ branch in Bielawa held on 18 October 1967, prepared by head of the Social Affairs Office of USW PRN Karol Skrzężyna, 1585/7179, IPN BU.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>67</sup> Information on situation in Jewish circles, 16 October 1967, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

up their cellar in which 15 tons of coke was stored.<sup>68</sup> Moving such a load of fuel to another place posed a serious problem to TSKŻ members. Another reason for complaint was that the local Party and administrative officials were not interested in problems of the Jewish population. Activists felt that they not as much as did not get any responses, but they were not even given a chance to touch on issues important to them, for example during meetings of the Ethnic Commission (Polish: Komisja Narodowościowa) of the Poviát Committee of PZPR.<sup>69</sup> Local authorities were highly inquisitive, but focused their attention on other subjects. In October, the Department of Internal Affairs of the Presidium of PRN sent official letters to the Society branches in which it asked for lists of all Jewish families living in a given area, including detailed personal information: name, surname, address, date and place of birth, Party membership, profession and place of work, as well as TSKŻ membership and the exact date of joining the Society.<sup>70</sup> More than a month later, after consultation with the Main Board and other centres, it turned out that such invigilation had no legal basis. At the beginning of December, the Presidium of PRN reversed that decision and declared that the officials who were to blame for this situation would be punished for their “arbitrary” actions.<sup>71</sup> Before this happened, however, unsuspecting anything activists from Bielawa had sent their registers to officials.

Local administration played an important role also in the case of the town authorities taking over the building belonging to the TSKŻ and the synagogue belonging to the Dzierżoniów Congregation. This information circulated among Jews as a stirring rumour, but as it turned out – it was true. In its proposal, the Presidium of the MRN in Dzierżoniów asked the Voivodeship National Council (Polish: Wojewódzka Rada Narodowa, WRN) in Wrocław to change the current building of the Congregation to a smaller one.<sup>72</sup> The synagogue, after some alterations, would in the future become a museum of the Dzierżoniów region. And even though in the end the idea did not materialize at that time, just working on it was for the Jewish population a clear example of restricting their life. Facing financial difficulties and aware of plans to take over the building of the Congregation,

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<sup>68</sup> Details of a plenary meeting of the board of the TSKŻ branch in Bielawa held on 18 October 1967, prepared by head of the Social Affairs Office of USW PRN Karol Skrzężyna, 1585/7179, IPN BU.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>70</sup> Letter from WSW PRN in Dzierżoniów to TSKŻ branch in Dzierżoniów, 19 October 1967, 1585/7179, IPN BU.

<sup>71</sup> Letter from the Presidium of PRN, 4 December 1967, 1585/7179, IPN BU.

<sup>72</sup> Information re the Jewish Congregation in Dzierżoniów, 28 February 1968, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.



its leader, Benjamin Turbiner, believed that the following year the Congregation would cease to exist and be dissolved like so many other organisations supported by JDC.<sup>73</sup> Seeing this coming, he took measures to emigrate to the USA, and contacted the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) about that.<sup>74</sup> Surely, it was no accident that in the same time, at the end of January 1968, Turbiner's son, Pinkus, was detained. He was accused of financial chicanery and irregularities in the co-operative he worked for, and then arrested for a month.<sup>75</sup> It is hard to say how much this case affected the atmosphere in the Jewish community. One can say for certain, though, that it was discussed in the context of other adverse developments.

In general, the mood among the Jews in those months was rather depressing. People still gathered to discuss current events, for example at Pejsach Komar's shop or at various people's homes, yet some became more cautious about what they said than they had been before.<sup>76</sup> The conflict in the Middle East and the situation of Israel were still widely discussed. People also complained about the situation of Jews in Poland. They expressed dissatisfaction with it on various occasions. Some elderly Jews referred to history. During a meeting with head of the Social Welfare Department of the Office of Internal Affairs of PRN, the TSKŻ representatives expressed their disappointment, as they felt their contribution as Jews was underestimated and forgotten:

[...] when migrants from Central Poland pillaged and took away whatever they could, it was the Jews who set up plants and cooperatives and cleared the streets of rubble. Nowadays nobody remembers their services; nobody mentions them on any occasions, such as celebrations of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, etc.<sup>77</sup>

During that very meeting, "it was said that more and more often one could see that official matters with which Jews came to offices and bureaus were resolved not in their favour, that there was a lack of tolerance. For example, a privately-owned stamp shop was closed, the TKSŻ branch in Bielawa was dispossessed of its cellars, or there was a threat of taking away the TSKŻ building in Dzierżoniów, and so on".<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>74</sup> Memo, 10 February 1968, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

<sup>75</sup> Report, 2 February 1968, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

<sup>76</sup> Information on the current situation in Jewish circles, 25 January 1968, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

<sup>77</sup> Details of a plenary meeting of the board of the TSKŻ branch in Bielawa held on 18 October 1967, prepared by head of the Social Affairs Office of USW PRN Karol Skrzężyna, 1585/7179, IPN BU.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*.

Talking about repressions and Jews migrating from Poland to Israel in the indefinite future continued. There were voices which claimed already back then that anti-Semitism was spreading.<sup>79</sup> It is noteworthy that among a part of the community, anything that limited the Jewish way of life prompted deep reflection and made people regret that that had not left in the previous years, when others did, when leaving Poland was still possible.<sup>80</sup> Letters sent abroad and intercepted by censorship contained information about persecutions of Jews, limiting their civil liberties and removing them from various posts.<sup>81</sup>

Not all Jews, however, shared the same point of view. The prevailing mood could origin from different, more often than not, personal experiences and opinions. And so, some Party activists claimed that the USSR allegedly put pressure on Gomułka regarding Jews; moreover, this was accompanied by confidence in the Party and the system.<sup>82</sup> However, there were also people who believed the opposite. For example, Daniel Diamant, who worked in a “Ruch” newsagent’s stand, openly declared his anti-Soviet beliefs and fulminated against communism, First Secretary and the dominating social order.<sup>83</sup> Many Jews were also critical of the TSKŻ; they blamed it for tardiness in taking a stand on Israel and maintaining the *status quo*.<sup>84</sup>

The image of Poland, as seen through the eyes of Jews from Dzierżoniów in the period before the March 1968 events was pessimistic, full of remorse, doubt and anxiety. There were various reasons for this: closing down of some centres of Jewish life, activities of local administration and Party members, but also everyday events and experiences which provoked reflection. The Poland of that period was a country where the limited Jewish life was “shrinking”. It was a country where talking about the Middle East conflict and calling it anything else than the officially accepted “aggression” was a taboo. Even though for some Party activists not much changed, the overwhelming majority of Jews waited to see how the situation

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<sup>79</sup> Report on a meeting with “Janecki” and the situation in Dzierżoniów, 18 October 1967, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

<sup>80</sup> Information re destructive Zionist attitudes in the Dzierżoniów powiat, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

<sup>81</sup> Letter from MO Chief in Dzierżoniów to head of the Dept. III of SB KW MO in Wrocław, 8 December 1967, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

<sup>82</sup> Report on a meeting with “Janecki” and the situation in Dzierżoniów, 18 October 1967, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

<sup>83</sup> Information on the current situation in Jewish circles, 25 January 1968, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

<sup>84</sup> Details of a plenary meeting of the board of the TSKŻ branch in Bielawa held on 18 October 1967, prepared by head of the Social Affairs Office of USW PRN Karol Skrzyżyna, 1585/7179, IPN BU.

would develop, feeling that the end was near. And so it was – the end came with the crisis known as March 1968 and the anti-Semitic campaign of that period.

### March 1968 and its consequences

Student protests organised on 8 March were the climax of the social and political crisis which arose in 1968 in Poland. Already a few days later, the propaganda press published a text which clearly indicated who the enemy of the Polish People's Republic was, and explaining who was guilty of what had happened at the University of Warsaw. The anti-Semitic campaign had the consequence that some Jews had already predicted a few months earlier. An image of the "March enemy" was created, and that enemy was the Jewish population, called Zionists by propaganda.<sup>85</sup> Quite quickly – already in March and at the beginning of April – in various factories and plants, mass meetings were organised, and letters of support addressed to First Secretary Gomułka were sent. However, there were also purges. Jews and people of Jewish origin lost their jobs on the basis of various accusations. Michał Fajner, who worked at the "BIELTEK" Cotton Mill, was one of the first to get dismissed. He did not want to listen to the radio as it broadcast the First Voivodeship Secretary's speech on activities of the Zionists and the "aggression" of Israel, and so he turned the radio off. Another worker (of Greek descent) did not like it and they started scrambling. As the factory newsletter wrote, "Fajner's behaviour is deplorable, and his reason for this fight is clear: Zionism, manifestation of which was more than obvious".<sup>86</sup> Other Jews laid off at that time included Jakub Groberg, chairman of the Bristle-Brush Cooperative, and the aforementioned Pinkus Turbiner, son of the leader of the Congregation, who worked in a branch of the Wrocław Multi-Trade Cooperative (Polish: Spółdzielnia Wielobranżowa).

Those who could not be laid off, if only because they run small independent companies, were removed from the Party. Izrael Walden, a hairdresser from Dzierżoniów, was accused of "registering to leave for Israel". One of the charges levelled against him was also that his daughter had participated in student strikes in Wrocław. In an attempt to explain himself, Walden declared that he

<sup>85</sup> Bożena Szaynok, *Problematyka żydowska w wydarzeniach marcowych*, [in:] *Wokół Marca 1968 na Dolnym Śląsku: materiały pokonferencyjne*, eds. Wojciech Trębacz, Joanna Hytrek-Hryciuk, Wrocław 2008, pp. 19–20.

<sup>86</sup> 'Ujawnił syjonistyczną postawę', "Krosno. Pismo Włóknarzy Ziemi Dzierżoniowskiej", No. 5, May 1968, p. 2.

indeed had applied for a passport, but 12 years earlier; yet, the Party executive still removed him from the ranks of the Poviát Committee of PZPR. Trying to defend himself, Walden referred to his long-standing experience: "For 15 years, I have been a sympathizer of revolutionary movement, member of Class Trade Unions (Polish: *Klasowe Związki Zawodowe*) and of the Communist Party of Poland. I fought for the People's Republic. I have no criminal record whatsoever and I feel I am being greatly wronged".<sup>87</sup> Also during meetings of executives of factory committees, "Jewish comrades" were removed and various explanations were offered, both by Party officials and by the Jews. A "DIORA" employee, Dawid Lemański, was crossed off the members' list not only for showing unsuitable attitude towards the March crisis and the Middle East conflict, but also for "defaming Poland by claiming that during the occupation and after the liberation, anti-Semitism was extremely strong".<sup>88</sup> Speaking in his own defence, the accused was to say: "[...] I condemn every act against peace. I always have and always will support socialism. I have worked here for 21 years and here's where I want to stay".<sup>89</sup> Removal of certain Party members from prominent Party organs was maybe less important but equally meaningful. And so, as early as at the end of March, during a meeting of the Poviát Committee of PZPR, after analysing the current situation in the country, its participants moved on to discuss expelling certain "comrades". As one can read in the minutes, "[...] there is still a pressure from the Party members that there are too many members of Jewish origin in the Membership Commission (Polish: *Komisja ds. działaczy*)".<sup>90</sup> After a short discussion, it was decided that the following Jews would be removed from their posts: Jakubowicz, Beremfeld, Ogólnik and Flajs, and that they would be replaced by new – that is, non-Jewish – Party members.<sup>91</sup> In some cases, consequences of altercations occurring in factories on subjects related to Israel were far less serious. For instance, in the Second Polish Army Cotton Factory in Bielawa, a punishment for offending a Jewish worker because of his ethnicity was only

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<sup>87</sup> Report of the KP PZPR executive meeting held on 24 April 1968, 82/IV/46, KP PZPR in Dzierżoniów, Executive, AP Wr.

<sup>88</sup> Report of the KZ PZPR executive meeting held on 30 April 1968, 82/XIII/74, KP PZPR in Dzierżoniów, KZ PZPR at „DIORA” production plant in Dzierżoniów, AP Wr.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>90</sup> Report of the KP PZPR executive meeting held on 3 April 1968, 82/IV/46, KP PZPR in Dzierżoniów, Executive, AP Wr.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibidem*.

a transfer to a different department.<sup>92</sup> Surely, had it been the other way round, the punishment would have been far more severe. A „Jewish witch-hunt” was also on in offices, as an example from the Poviát Court in Dzierżoniów shows. Its chief judge was accused of being of Jewish descent, which by default resulted in his dismissal.<sup>93</sup> He defended himself by presenting a Catholic baptismal certificate. In the months that followed, Jewish activists were still being removed from the Party ranks for reasons such as not including in one’s *curriculum vitae* information about registering to leave for Israel<sup>94</sup> or deciding to make Aliyah.<sup>95</sup> As a response to described events and to the general atmosphere of hostility towards Jews, on 2 April, 1968, the local branch of the TSKŻ adopted a resolution, according to which Jewish activists expressed their support for the policy of PZPR and the First Secretary’s stand.<sup>96</sup>

According to Włodzimierz Suleja’s calculations, as a consequence of the March crisis, 4 Jews lost their jobs in Dzierżoniów, whereas in the whole powiat, 19 members were expelled from the Party.<sup>97</sup> The Security Service officers influenced such decisions, as they prepared and presented to Party committees materials concerning the alleged pro-Israeli activities. For SB, any member of the Jewish community was a “Zionist”. However, only the most significant ones were exposed, as was the case with Secretary of the TSKŻ in Bielawa. His anti-state activity consisted of subscribing to a Yiddish magazine posted to him from the USA, and corresponding with someone from abroad.<sup>98</sup> In total, out of 329 exposed “Zionists” in Lower Silesia, 33 were from Dzierżoniów. This was not the only way the Security Service influenced the anti-Semitic campaign in the region.<sup>99</sup> Its officers contributed to repressing the whole Jewish community also by manipulating officials. Therefore, hearsay about the possible takeover of the public buildings serving the

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<sup>92</sup> Report of the KZ PZPR meeting, 28 March 1968, 82/XIII/54, KZ PZPR at „BIELTEX” Cotton Mill in Bielawa, KP PZPR in Dzierżoniów, AP Wr.

<sup>93</sup> Letter from MO Chief in Dzierżoniów to head of the Dept. III of SB KW MO in Wrocław, 29 July 1968, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

<sup>94</sup> Report of the KP PZPR executive meeting held on 19 June 1968, 82/IV/46, KP PZPR in Dzierżoniów, Executive, AP Wr.

<sup>95</sup> Report of the KP executive meeting, 20 November 1968, 82/IV/46, KP PZPR in Dzierżoniów, Executive, AP Wr.

<sup>96</sup> Gruźlewska, *Marzec 1968*, p. 22.

<sup>97</sup> Włodzimierz Suleja, *Dolnośląski Marzec '68: anatomia protestu*, Warszawa 2006, pp. 248–250.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 250.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 257.

Jewish community became a fact. From this point on, the TSKŻ branches in Bielawa and Dzierżoniów had to fit into smaller rooms because their seats were taken over by local authorities.<sup>100</sup>

The anti-Semitic campaign was met with mixed reactions. Some Jews, as the already mentioned Michał Fajner, could not conceal their strong feelings about propaganda talk and various accusations. Similarly, Fajda Zuzowska in a butcher's shop or Towia Liberman in children's clinic reacted with intense emotions, saying out loud what they thought about the situation.<sup>101</sup> Their "provocative" behaviours resulted in inquiries, and in the latter case, the culprit had to also pay a fine. People's attitudes could be shaped not only by propaganda, but also by specific events and experiences. Jews started to sense open hostility towards them already a few days after the campaign started. On the night of 14–15 March, unknown persons broke a window in the building of the Congregation in Dzierżoniów.<sup>102</sup> Acts of vandalism and anti-Semitism were also observed in the months that followed. In March and April 1969, somebody attacked the Society building by throwing inside smoke bombs and breaking windows three times.<sup>103</sup> A few months later, in February 1970, the organisation's information board was stolen. The search did not yield any results.<sup>104</sup>

The majority of Jews could not understand why it was them who were blamed for student riots, since there were so few of them among protesters.<sup>105</sup> Some believed, as it has already been mentioned, that since they were the ones who rebuilt Poland after the war, they now had a right to live normal lives in this country. People complained also about the fact that all Jews were treated in the same way – nobody took into account how much they contributed to the development of the communist movement, no one paid attention to their activity within the Party. The whole Jewish community was simply perceived as „Zionists”. At the same

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<sup>100</sup> Information on operational and political situation in Jewish circles in the Dzierżoniów powiat, 28 October 1968, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr. This opportunity was also used to seize rooms that were previously used by CŻKPS and ORT.

<sup>101</sup> Information on the current situation on Jewish circles in the Dzierżoniów powiat, 28 March 1968, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

<sup>102</sup> Suleja, *Dolnośląski Marzec*, p. 135.

<sup>103</sup> Letter of the TSKŻ branch to the Presidium of PRN in Dzierżoniów, 2 May 1969, 1585/7179, IPN BU.

<sup>104</sup> Letter of the TSKŻ branch to the Powiat MO in Dzierżoniów, 2 February 1970, 1585/7179, IPN BU.

<sup>105</sup> Information on the current situation on Jewish circles in the Dzierżoniów powiat, 28 March 1968, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

time, it was a commonly shared opinion that migrating to Israel was a way of escaping the anti-Semitism raging in Poland.<sup>106</sup> Certainly, for some Jews, the problem was also that they did not understand the stand taken by the TSKŻ.

Within a few months, by October 1968, 39 families from the powiat had supposedly registered to leave the country.<sup>107</sup> Facing omnipresent propaganda, and – what was even worse – suffering constant insults and negative comments from their co-workers, some Jews talked openly about their decision to emigrate. Leader of the Congregation, Turbiner, was one of those who thought it was inevitable that all Jews would leave Poland.<sup>108</sup> What is interesting, also the Security Service officers predicted almost all the Jewish community would emigrate, except for the elderly and the sick. On the other hand, Towia Liberman defended himself from the persecutions by accusing Poles of murdering Jews. Pictures he presented as a proof were quickly taken away from him during a search carried out by the Security Service in his house.<sup>109</sup> In the months that followed, rumours also spread about the approaching pogroms, a new world war and massacres of those who would stay in Poland.<sup>110</sup> It is difficult to point to the source of those rumours and their popularity. A depressing picture of the atmosphere prevailing at the time was presented during one of the meetings of the Main Board of the TSKŻ in Warsaw. As a delegate from Bielawa put it: “«Smoke is coming from the chimney», that’s the public feeling”.<sup>111</sup>

Even though according to the TSKŻ’s reports for 1968 the decline in the number of members was insignificant – supposedly, only 5 Jews left the structures in Bielawa and 5 more in Dzierżoniów – yet the analysed documents paint a different picture of the months and years that followed.<sup>112</sup> As the statistical data presented in those documents suggest, till the end of 1969, as many as 99 families from Dzierżoniów – some 320 Jews – applied for permission to leave Poland.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Information on operational and political situation in Jewish circles in the Dzierżoniów powiat, 28 October 1968, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>110</sup> Information note, 15 July 1969, 053/1481, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

<sup>111</sup> Report of a meeting of secretaries held on 8 June 1968, 8/30, ATSKŻ, WO.

<sup>112</sup> Information on cultural and educational activities of the TSKŻ branches operating in the Wrocław voivodeship [1968], n. d., 1/21, WRN, AP Wr.

<sup>113</sup> Information on the current situation on Jewish circles in the Dzierżoniów powiat, 13 January 1970, 053/148, vol. 1, IPN Wr.



A part of this group, ca. 80 families, had already left in the preceding months, and the remaining ones were waiting to complete all formalities.

### Closing balance

At the turn of decades, just after the anti-Semitic campaign and towards the end of the process of post-March migration, the Jewish community in the Dzierżoniów powiat was very small compared with a decade or just a few years earlier. Its number was estimated at 50 people,<sup>114</sup> most of them seniors and pensioners, but also some Jews living in mixed families.<sup>115</sup> The number of members of the TSKŻ decreased several times. In 1971, it was 30 people, and in 1971 – 38.<sup>116</sup> Before 1968, the Society had at its disposal a whole building (11 rooms) at 11 Kraśnickiego Street. Now, only 2 rooms were left to them (ca. 100 m<sup>2</sup>).<sup>117</sup> After so many members left, new managing board was elected; its members included Izaak Ogólnik (former secretary of the branch in Bielawa), Jakub Flajszer, Mojżesz Jakubowicz, and Szymon Finkelman, all of them aged between 50 and 60.<sup>118</sup> The Society found performing its activities challenging. It held meetings, mainly to celebrate important anniversaries – usually of political events, but also the ones significant for Jewish history. Celebrations held to commemorate the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising were “quiet, [...] lacking artistic performances”.<sup>119</sup> During meetings of the Main Board of the TSKŻ held after March 1968 delegates commented on “losing contact with the members” of the organisation.<sup>120</sup> Certainly, some people did not want to come to the club that had been attacked many times. In Bielawa, the situation was even worse. As somebody noticed: „The atmosphere in Jewish circles is gloomy. People are afraid to come to the club”.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, the club was opened only once

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<sup>114</sup> Report of the inspection of the TSKŻ branch carried out on 20 May 1971, 1585/7179, IPN BU.

<sup>115</sup> Information on the current situation on Jewish circles in the Dzierżoniów powiat, 13 January 1970, 053/148, vol. 1, IPN Wr.

<sup>116</sup> List of TSKŻ branches and clubs as of 31 December 1975 (members as of 31 December 1974), 1585/7172, IPN BU.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>118</sup> Report of the inspection of the TSKŻ branch carried out on 20 May 1971, 1585/7179, IPN BU; TSKŻ branch in Dzierżoniów, November 1971, 1585/7179, IPN BU. Before March 1968, none of them had played a prominent role in the organisation.

<sup>119</sup> Details of a plenary meeting of the board of the TSKŻ, 4 April 1970, 8/31, ATSKŻ, WO.

<sup>120</sup> Report of a meeting of secretaries held on 10 January 1970, 8/31, ATSKŻ, WO.

<sup>121</sup> Report of a meeting of secretaries, 7 June 1969, 8/31, ATSKŻ, WO.

a week. At the time, the branch had reportedly 29 members<sup>122</sup>. Already in 1969, the Society members considered a possibility of shutting down the branch in Bielawa, which indeed took place at the beginning of the 1970s.<sup>123</sup> Probably somewhere around that time also the local Congregation was disestablished.<sup>124</sup>

In conclusion, I would say that the “closing balance” of Jewish community in Dzierżoniów in years 1967–1968 is negative. This claim is supported both by numbers, since a significant group of people left the country, and by structural data – institutions were being limited, not only in terms of finances, but also space for conducting their activities. Nevertheless, there were other factors that were even more important. Being laid off, excluded from the membership of the Party and other, various forms of mistreatment during the anti-Semitic campaign – all this aroused a feeling of living under constant threat and made people think of leaving the country. Even long before that, just after the Six-Day War, tension built up among Jews, which manifested itself first of all in the fact that people kept their comments to themselves, activities of various organisations were being restricted, there was a general feeling of injustice and widespread anti-Israeli defamation was being disseminated by the media.

As Jews saw it, in June 1967, Poland became, quite suddenly, a country in which international politics dominated, but was used for the authorities’ own internal needs. Many of those who identified themselves with the Jewish nation and had contacts in Israel found the necessity to take sides a painful experience, especially since Jews did not describe themselves in a consistent way. Rather, their definition of “self” implicated a hybrid identity: Polish-Jewish or Jewish-Polish. In turn, those who believed in communism and were devoted to the Party thought it was perfectly normal and even desirable to condemn the “aggression”. They did not expect any trouble or comments in relation to that, viewing the events of that time from the perspective of political affiliation and not ethnic origin. The Jewish population appreciated the firm support from the Poles regarding Israel. It showed that it was the Party, not Polish citizens, who provoked hostility towards the alleged “aggressor”, and that the public feeling was different. It is not certain whether the Jews knew that those who were happy about Israel’s victory were actually more interested in the defeat of the USSR’s allies than in the very victory of the Jewish

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>123</sup> The branch in Bielawa is not on the list of TSKŻ branches as of the middle 1970s.

<sup>124</sup> Waszkiewicz, *Kongregacja Wyznania Mojżeszowego*, p. 147.

state. In the months after June 1967, when the conflict in the Middle East was not discussed as much as before, Jews slowly started to suffer repressions. For many members of the TSKŻ or the Congregation, events such as appropriation of the cellar or rumours about seizing the synagogue were no longer just a warning, but reasons to feel anxious and threatened. Another cause for worry was the act of dissolving self-aid organisations, which for years had provided solid financial support. The crisis of March 1968 and the campaign of aggression towards Jewish population that ensued constituted an embodiment of the earlier fears. Anti-Semitic attacks, mostly on buildings, were one thing, yet another were the repressions in a form of layoffs and removal from the Party ranks. March 1968 activated some mechanisms of “seeking” and eliminating Jews, whom the propaganda machine called “Zionists” or the enemies of the Polish People’s Republic. To the Jewish population, including Party members of long standing, Poland in those weeks became an unfamiliar, hostile place, where Jews did not want to live. While in the summer the year before people discussed the wave of migration, in 1968, they not only talked about emigration, but also encouraged others to start seeking possibilities of leaving the country. Seeing the scale of verbal violence, some people could no longer listen to defamations and did not hide their emotions. Pointing out that the Poles participated in extermination of Jews during the Second World War meant taking up a topic widely covered by the media, but was also an act of self-defence against exaggerations about the scale of help offered by Poles to the Jews during the war. Last but not least, one of the factors that brought an end to the Jewish world and tells a lot about the Poland of that time was activity of the Security Service who exposed “Zionists”, which was equally meaningful is the seizing of the TSKŻ building in Dzierżoniów (hard not compare with the earlier act of appropriation of the cellar in Bielawa). Attitude towards the country can be seen most clearly if one looks at the numbers showing the scale of Jewish migration. Those who remained in the country were a small remnant of the community which had existed there just a year before. This makes the reasons for their staying in Poland extremely interesting. Was living somewhere else inconceivable? Did they prefer to stay with the closest family? Or maybe they could not leave due to their advanced age or ill health? Whatever the answer, after March 1968, the country they lived in was different, marked by the experiences of the years 1967–1968.

*Translated by Zuzanna Sikora*

## SUMMARY

The article presents the fate of the Jewish community in Lower Silesia in 1967–1968 on the example of Dzierżoniów and Bielawa – two towns in the southern part of the region. It is a microhistory of the slow decline of the community during a time of intensified anti-Semitic propaganda. The article focuses on the period which began with the Six-Day War and its repercussions in Poland, as well as on the impact of this conflict on Jews in selected towns. Events just after June 1967, which preceded March 1968 and the epicentre of the anti-Semitic campaign in Poland, are then presented. The campaign itself is presented through the lens of selected figures – Jewish residents of Dzierżoniów and Bielawa. The paper concludes with the consequences of hostility toward Jews in the form of mass emigration and the near disappearance of the community in the area.

## STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł przedstawia losy ludności żydowskiej, zamieszkałej w dwóch miastach Dolnego Śląska Dzierżoniowie i Bielawie, w okresie kampanii antysemickiej w l. 1967–1968, poczynając od wojny sześciodniowej, przez kolejne miesiące, aż do wydarzeń marca 1968 r. Na podstawie analizy źródeł archiwalnych zrekonstruowano losy poszczególnych członków tej społeczności, w tym jej przywódców. Zwrócono uwagę na podejście Żydów do Polski i kampanii antysemickiej, a także na oskarżenia ich o nielojalność wobec państwa polskiego. Przedstawiono również doświadczenia wrogości, jakiej doznawali obywatele pochodzenia żydowskiego ze strony polskich władz i polskiej ludności, oraz konsekwencje stygmatyzacji antysemityzmem. Przeprowadzona analiza ukazuje wpływ kampanii antysemickiej na małą, prowincjonalną społeczność żydowską, z dala od stołecznej Warszawy i od protestów studenckich w 1968 r.

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