
By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2015
To my Grandma and Zayde and Bubba and Grandpa
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Since the day I started my Ph.D., I have eagerly awaited the day when I could express my gratitude to everyone who helped me through this long journey. Whether it was reading a chapter, helping me find a place to live during one of my many archive trips, or simply being there when I needed some encouragement, so many people have played an integral role in my success, and I can honestly say that I would not have gotten this far without their support.

A dissertation that brings together research from over ten archives in four countries demands a great amount of financial support. I owe a tremendous amount of thanks to all of the institutes and organizations that helped fund my research. At the University of Florida, I received generous support from the History Department, the Graduate School, the Center for European Studies, and the Center for Jewish Studies. I am also grateful for the O. Ruth McQuown Scholarship and for having been named a finalist for the 2015 Association for Academic Women Lockhart Dissertation Fellowship and the Association for Academic Women Emerging Scholar competition. In addition to the awards from the University of Florida, I received significant grant and fellowship money from the American Academy for Jewish Research, The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Targum Shlishi, The Feinstein Center at Temple University, The Polish-American Fulbright Commission, The Aleksander and Alicja Hertz Memorial Fellowship at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, and The Rabbi Theodore S. Levy Tribute Fellowship at the American Jewish Archives. I also owe a huge amount of gratitude to all of the archivists who helped me find materials when I was told that there would be nothing related to my topic. In particular, I would like to give a special thanks to Dana Herman, Kevin Proffitt, and Gary Zola at the AJA for allowing me to look at the B’nai B’rith collection, which had arrived just weeks before my visit to the AJA. When I explained what I hoped to find in the collection, they made it possible for me to look through the uncatalogued material. Some of the best
material in the dissertation is from that collection, and I look forward to returning to the AJA again in the future to find the treasures that I may have missed.

I had the opportunity to present my work at a number of conferences and workshops over the years, and my dissertation incorporates many of the questions and ideas that were raised at the various conferences and workshops. In particular, I would like to thank the organizers and participants at the Graduate Student Workshop on the History and Culture of Polish Jews in Wielka Lipa, Poland, the Postwar as Revolution? Rethinking Power in Eastern Europe after World War II workshop in Berkeley, the Absorbing Encounters: Constructing American Jewry in the Post-Holocaust Decades Conference in College Park, Maryland, the Sixth Session of the International Forum of Young Scholars on East European Jewry in Odessa, Ukraine, the Jewish Politics and American Society Graduate Student Workshop in American Jewish History in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the GWU/UCSB/LSE Graduate Student Conference on the Cold War in Washington, D.C., the Woodrow Wilson Center East European Studies Junior Scholars’ Training Seminar in Turf Valley, Maryland, and the Max and Hilde Kochmann Summer School for PhD students in European Jewish History and Culture in Frankfurt, Germany. I am also grateful for having had the opportunity to share the Warsaw Ghetto Commemoration chapter with the UC Berkeley Kroužek Working Group on the Culture and History of East Central Europe.

Several people I met at the various conferences, workshops, and archives have become close friends over the years. While it would be impossible to thank everyone, there are a few people who deserve a special shout-out. Katharina and Dan Matro have been wonderful friends, commiserating during the brutal Warsawian winter of 2012, and welcoming me into their home when I needed a place to stay on a long research trip to Washington, D.C. Melissa Hibbard, Sarah Zarrow, and Jaclyn Granick have offered endless advice, encouragement, and comic relief
whenever I needed it. Joanna Sliwa has been one of the best readers, advice givers, and cheerleaders that I could ever have asked for. Whether preparing for one of our travel adventures, rooming together at a conference, or discussing Polish Jewish life today, I know that I can always count on Joanna to give me her honest opinion and to guarantee that regardless of where we are or what we are doing, we will always have a wonderful time. I met Przemysław Gasztold-Seń just as I was finishing the dissertation, and he pointed me to some sources that proved to be essential for the dissertation. I am grateful for his assistance as well. Helise Lieberman, Yale Reisner, Nitzan Reisner, Rebekka Herberger Rødner, and Tyson Herberger all helped me feel at home in Warsaw, while also introducing me to some of the most important figures in this book who allowed me to interview them. I am forever grateful to Konstanty Gebert, Monika Krajewska, Stanisław Krajewski, Michael Schudrich, Bella Szwarcman-Czarnota, and Ryszarda Zachariasz, each of whom shared their experiences with me.

My cohort at UF has also been instrumental in helping me get to this point. I benefitted immensely during our short-lived modern Europeanist reading/writing group, but more importantly, I value the friendships that we’ve built over the years. Lisa Booth, Erin Conlin, Rebecca Dillmeier, Olesya Dudenkova-Williams, Jodi Greig, Greg Mason, Johanna Mellis, Matt Mingus, and Wesley White have been great friends in Gainesville. Toby Shorey has also been a wonderful friend in Gainesville, as well as a critical reader. My dissertation is much better thanks to all of his feedback.

Elana Thurston-Milgrom has also been part of my UF cohort, but she and I began the Ph.D. journey together long before either of us started in Gainesville. Both Elana and Jacob Labendz have been great friends since the memorable fall semester in Prague in 2002. Jacob assured me that the trip to Poland would be unlike my previous trip and while I was reluctant to
believe him, he was 100% correct. It was that trip, during my junior year of college, that helped me decide that I did not want to go to law school and instead that my passion was in Central European Jewish history. More specifically, it was the frustration I felt when I realized that there was little out there for me to read about Jewish life during Communism that led me to this dissertation topic.

Beyond the confines of the academy, I have been blessed with a wonderfully understanding and patient group of friends who never held it against me when I told them that I had to stay home and work, rather than go out with them. Heather Rosenheck, Stacey Breier, Leah Asher, Rochelle Asher, Becca Feingold, Stephanie Levin, Lisa Kanarek, Rachel Hanson, Jodi Loar, Orly Klein, Gene Germanovich, and Elyse Willen, I owe all of you lots of hanging out, telephone catching up time, and even visits once this dissertation is submitted!

Next comes my virtual cohort. It is not an exaggeration to say that there is no way I would be getting a PhD without either of them. Sarah Cramsey and Shaina Hammerman have read countless paragraphs, chapters, articles, etc. Most importantly, they have been supportive friends through the best of times and the worst of times. We’ve shared our successes and our defeats, and I am a better person for having both of them in my life. I thank them both from the bottom of my heart and I know that wherever our academic journeys take us, we’ll be friends for life.

Without the guidance, patience, and encouragement from Mitch Hart, I may never have begun, let alone finished, this project. More than an advisor for my scholarship, Mitch has been a mentor, guiding me through the labyrinth of graduate school and academia, always with a tremendous amount of sage advice and good humor. He has been patient, yet demanding, and
although I doubted my own abilities at times, his encouragement and constant support gave me
the confidence to keep going. I could not have asked for a better advisor.

My co-advisor, Alice Freifeld, has constantly pushed me to think broadly and outside of
whichever box I tended to be thinking inside of at the time. She believed in me from the
beginning, and fought for me whenever I needed an advocate. Her support in my early years as a
graduate student aided a great deal in helping me establish my place and my voice as a scholar.

I have also benefitted tremendously from working with other scholars, and I would be
remiss if I did not include them in this section. My committee members, Norman Goda, Michael
Bernhard, and Karen Auerbach have offered invaluable feedback and support. From our first
meeting in Warsaw, Karen helped me navigate the confusing and intimidating Polish archival
system and more recently helped me secure my first publication. Although not on my committee,
Anna Muller, Ewa Wampuszyc, Christopher Caes, Simon Rabinovitch, Stewart Finkel, Peter
Bergmann, Dariusz Stola, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, and Jerry Legge have played major
roles in helping me get to this point as well. Sim Pearl and my Weber School teachers gave me
the tools that I needed to succeed in college and beyond, and it thrills me to no end that some of
them are now my colleagues.

And finally, my family. They have been the ones to bear the brunt of my stress and
forgiven me for many missed family events and holiday celebrations. My parents, Arlene and
Harry, have always encouraged me to follow my passion, even when that meant moving to
Warsaw for a year or spending an entire summer trapped in their basement preparing for quals. I
am thrilled that my first job is back in Atlanta so that I can be closer to them and the rest of my
family. My brothers, Paul and Brian, and sister-in-law, Jill, have also been supportive and
encouraging, and I’m looking forward to spending more time with them as well. My nieces and
nephew, Kacy, Bo, and Juliette (who arrived just days before I submitted the dissertation), have been wonderful sources of laughter and joy.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my four grandparents. My Grandma and Zayde introduced me to Central/Eastern Europe, since they wanted me to learn about the area of the world where they grew up. Had they not sent me to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic the summer before my senior year of high school, without a doubt, I would be practicing law right now. My Bubba and Grandpa were the American-born grandparents and admittedly, I thought their family histories were boring, at least until I got to graduate school and I was able to learn just how fascinating their family experiences were as well (a native Yiddish speaker growing up in Grand Forks, ND has to have an exciting story). As a student of the modern Jewish experience – or rather experiences – I have loved getting to know about the places where they and their parents came from and understanding how their experiences fit into the larger modern Jewish experience. I love and miss them all.
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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADL</td>
<td>Anti-Defamation League</td>
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<tr>
<td>AJC</td>
<td>American Jewish Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIAS</td>
<td>Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (sometimes spelled Hias)</td>
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<tr>
<td>JDC</td>
<td>American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (also known as the Joint)</td>
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<td>JFU</td>
<td>Jewish Flying University</td>
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<tr>
<td>KIK</td>
<td>Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej (Club of Catholic Intellectuals)</td>
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<tr>
<td>KOR</td>
<td>Komitet Obrony Robotników (Workers’ Defense Committee)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MFN</td>
<td>Most-Favored-Nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSW</td>
<td>Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych (Ministry of the Interior)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MSZ</td>
<td>Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)</td>
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<td>NCSJ</td>
<td>National Conference on Soviet Jewry</td>
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<td>PAP</td>
<td>Polska Agencja Prasowa (Polish Press Agency)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLO</td>
<td>Palestinian Liberation Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PZPR</td>
<td>Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (Polish United Workers’ Party)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSE</td>
<td>Société de Secours er d’Entr’Aide</td>
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<tr>
<td>TKN</td>
<td>Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych (Society for Academic Studies)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TSKŻ</td>
<td>Towarzystwo Społeczno Kulturalne Żydow (Social-Cultural Association of Polish Jews)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAHC</td>
<td>Union of American Hebrew Congregations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WFPJ</td>
<td>World Federation of Polish Jews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WJC</td>
<td>World Jewish Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZBoWiD</td>
<td>Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację (The Society for Fighters for Freedom and Democracy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZRWM</td>
<td>Związek Religijny Wyznania Mojżeszowego w Polsce (Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith, or the “Congregation”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ŽOB</td>
<td>Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa (Jewish Combat Organization)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ŽUL</td>
<td>Żydowski Uniwersytet Latający (Jewish Flying University)</td>
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In March 1968, the Polish government unleashed an antisemitic campaign designed to remove Jews from prominent positions in Polish society. The campaign resulted in a massive wave of emigration from Poland. Since then, the narrative has focused on the absence of Jewishness in the post-1968 period.

This dissertation challenges that narrative by demonstrating that Polish Jewishness remained symbolically influential even as Jews packed their bags and left the country. While some Polish government leaders believed that Poland would be better off without any Jewish presence, others believed that the Jews and Jewish material culture could serve a pragmatic purpose. Some Polish leaders believed they could harness perceived Jewish power in the West. They believed Jews in America would speak out on behalf of the Polish government and help them obtain much-desired financial aid and legitimacy. These Polish authorities invited leaders from prominent Western, especially American, Jewish organizations to meet with them in Poland. In the context of the Cold War, the two sides negotiated with each other in hopes that they would achieve their goals: for the Poles the securing of foreign funds and for the Jews the
guarantee that the Jews remaining in Poland would have their spiritual and physical needs taken care of, and that Jewish material culture would be preserved.

This is, above all, a story about the interrelated nature of the modern Jewish experience. Polish Jewry – and Jewish material culture – were highly dependent upon outside Jewish communities. The ability to help their fellow Jews in Poland helped foreign Jews fulfill the Talmudic ideal of *Kol Aravim Ze Ba Ze*, “all of Israel is responsible for one another.” Whether it was ensuring that they had access to kosher food, helping the next generation learn what it meant to be Jewish in the 1970s and 80s, or speaking out in Congress during periods of antisemitism, world Jewry was determined to help preserve Polish Jewishness. While the remaining Jews in Poland were few in number, the post-1968 period demonstrates that they held a strong presence in the minds of governments, organizations, and individuals in Poland and abroad.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In November 1968 Akiva Kohane, a representative of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC or Joint), wrote an extremely pessimistic report about Polish Jewry:

Most of the Jewish institutions existing in Poland – cultural, educational, and economic – have been liquidated or are in the process of liquidation. The Jewish cooperatives are losing their character. The Yiddish theater continues only a shadow existence, and even this theater will soon be closed. The Yiddish daily ‘Di Volksztyme’ appears once a week only; the Yiddish literary monthly ‘Yiddishe Schriften’ has ceased to appear; the Jewish book publishing firm ‘Yiddishe Buch’ has been closed; the Yiddish schools do not exist anymore; the Jewish youth clubs have been disbanded; the Jewish educational, recreational, and cultural programs starting with the summer camps through the Yiddish seminars, choirs, and dramatic circles do not exist anymore; the Jewish Historical Institute has been deprived of its rich archives. The ceaseless violent anti-Semitic propaganda has had its results and the small remnants of the once-large Jewish community are leaving Poland. The aim of the anti-Semites to make Poland ‘Judenrein’ may soon be a reality.¹

The picture Kohane paints of Jewish Poland is grim, and even today, many focus on the darkness and emptiness of this period, following the outbreak of the Polish government’s antisemitic, anti-Zionist campaign that led to the final major wave of Jewish emigration from Poland. With so much of the population of Jews or Poles of Jewish origin leaving Poland after the campaign broke out, the long-term continuation of Jewish life seemed doubtful.

And yet, Jewishness in Poland today is thriving. Jewish children attend Jewish day schools, kindergartens, summer camps, and youth groups. Warsaw and Krakow have rival Jewish soccer teams named after the pre-war teams of each city. There is a Jewish monthly magazine that one can buy at the large chain book store in every major Polish city. One can

¹ A. Kohane to Osri (at the South African Jewish Appeal), November 8, 1968, AR65/74-323, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archive (hereafter cited as JDCA). The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC or Joint) is a Jewish humanitarian assistance organization with offices in New York and Jerusalem.
choose from a variety of weekly Shabbat services in Warsaw and attend synagogue in other cities as well. The Jewish Community Center in Krakow hosts a club for Holocaust survivors, and the Jewish Community Center in Warsaw offers delicious breakfasts for its guests. The Jewish Historical Institute has a bustling café, and together with the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews, they have made Warsaw into an intellectual hub for Jewish-themed conferences, film premieres, and concerts. Today, July 28, the day that I am writing this introduction, one of Israel’s major newspapers, Haaretz published yet another article on this Polish-Jewish “revival.” Kohane would be baffled if he were to visit Poland today. Of course, with the hindsight provided by the post-Communist revival, his 1968 assessment seems bleakly inaccurate. And yet, Kohane’s narrative and the memories of the period allow for historians to dismiss the period as one devoid of significant Jewishness.

How can we understand these two vastly different assessments of Jewish life in Poland over a time period of less than forty years? Of course, much of the difference should be attributed to the major political, social, and economic changes ushered in with the democratic transition in 1989. In the confines of a narrative dominated by the Cold War, Solidarity, and Revolution we can easily glimpse the vast change over time. But where can we find continuity? If we look beyond Jewish life, religious community and demographics in search of "Jewishness" we would find a narrative that is less divided and more nuanced. My research looks beyond

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2 Marisa Fox-Bevilacqua, “In Poland, Jewish identity isn’t because of the Holocaust - but despite it,” Haaretz, July 28, 2015, http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-features/premium-1.668253. I put revival in quotes because one could argue that the Polish Jewish community is no longer undergoing a revival, and that instead it has entered a post-revival period.

3 I use the term Jewishness, rather than Judaism, to indicate that Polish Jewishness extended beyond the religious realm.
notions of religion or religious practices to include essentially anything that has to do with anything Jewish. This could include: mobilizing in one country on behalf of Jews in another during a time of crisis, fighting to preserve a synagogue or Jewish cemetery, non-Jews exploring Jewish culture and history, perceptions of Jewish power and influence, attending religious services, hearing a lecture on a great Jewish poet who wrote in the language of his or her choice, or commemorating the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

My dissertation explores various manifestations of Polish Jewishness across the “long 1970s.” Usually, Polish Jewish historiography includes a gap between 1968 and 1989, but I argue that a deeper understanding of the fifteen year period between 1968 and 1983 helps explain the “renaissance” that begins in the late 1980s and 1990s, and which continues until today. What we see emerging twenty years after the anti-Zionist campaign of 1968 is not a revival ex nihilo: there is a latent Jewishness in Poland even after the 1968 campaign that inspires and reinforces the revivalists of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Compared to what has emerged since 1989, the period directly after 1968 might appear to be insignificant; in fact many of those alive in Poland during the 1970s question the extent of their own impact. Despite their reservations, I submit that re-positioning the lens on this particular period offers a clearer image of that latent Jewishness that provided a foundation upon which a new, post-1968 Jewishness could be built.

In order to understand why 1968 was a watershed moment for Polish Jewry, one must understand the anti-Zionist campaign. The Polish government’s anti-Zionist campaign was a campaign rooted more in antisemitism than anti-Zionism, given that many of those targeted by the government were not Zionists. Although it officially began in March 1968, there were clear

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4 For detailed analyses of the March events and the anti-Zionist campaign, see Josef Banas, _The Scapegoats: The Exodus of the Remnants of Polish Jewry_ (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979); Michael Checinski, _Poland_,
“anti-Zionist” tendencies earlier than that. The Six Day War in the Middle East was, as Jerzy Eisler as written, “the detonator of the ‘explosive material’ which had been accumulating in Poland for years.” Poland officially backed the Arab States in 1967 and the authorities used the war to question the loyalty of Polish Jewry. In late January 1968, students at Warsaw University gathered to protest the government’s banning of Adam Mickiewicz’s play Dziady, or Forefathers’ Eve, which the government viewed as being anti-Soviet. Several students were arrested for instigating the protest, among them some with Jewish origins. Shortly after, accusations of a Zionist conspiracy appeared at the University and in messages to individuals.

When another round of protests broke out at Warsaw University on March 8, the police attacked the students, unleashing an even greater round of rallies, protests, and riots throughout Poland that spread beyond student circles. By the end of the month, over 2,500 people had been arrested.

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6 Ibid., 44.

and “many more people, mostly young, were beaten, removed from universities, blacklisted by the secret police, and made the object of various other forms of harassment.” Among those arrested, blacklisted, and harassed were a number of Poles with Jewish roots. Within a few days of the student protests at Warsaw University, accusations of a Zionist conspiracy appeared in the media.

There was another element driving the campaign, and that was an internal power struggle amongst certain groups and individuals within the communist party. As Polish discontent with the economy and the path of socialism increased in the mid- to late 1960s, new challenges emerged to challenge First Secretary of the Party, Władysław Gomułka. One of the strongest challenges came from a group of nationalist hard-liners, known as the “Partisans” that emerged under the leadership of General Mieczysław Moczar. Moczar was the head of the war veterans association, Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację (ZBoWiD), as well as, since 1964, the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych, or MSW). The MSW oversaw the security services, meaning that Moczar could wield enormous amounts of power. The Partisans warned of the German, Zionist, and American imperialist threats. Because the Partisans were in prominent positions within the security service, they consolidated their power and influence, particularly when it came to perceived threats against them. Jaff Schatz writes that a close surveillance of officials of Jewish origin began in 1961-62. They also began to keep a card index of Polish Jews who were deemed potential enemies of the state. By 1964, the index was complete and a plan was put into place to “cleanse the top administration, the army, the opinion-making media, and all positions requiring unquestioned afirmacja narodowa

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8 Ibid., 17.
(national allegiance) of Jews by 1970.” The information gathered by the MSW provided the “proof” behind the accusations that the March events were instigated by Zionists. The MSW Internal Bulletin from March 9 included a statement that the “most active involvement in the incident came from members of the Babel Club,” a youth club associated with a Jewish organization.10

The MSW had gradually built up the notion of a Zionist conspiracy, and the March events gave them the opportunity to fully unleash the campaign.11 Dariusz Stola argues that there may not have been a specific order from the Party leadership to use the “Zionist” threat in the propaganda, but it seems likely that some members of the Politburo decided to use the Zionists as the official scapegoat in the press, on television, and at public meetings throughout the country.12 At the same time, many Poles were being removed from their jobs, ranging from high ranking party officials to elementary school teachers. A number of those who suddenly found themselves jobless were of Jewish origin.13

On March 19, Gomułka gave a speech in front of 3,000 party activists. Towards the end of his speech he mentioned that some of the student instigators were of Jewish background. Nevertheless, he warned that there had been some misunderstandings regarding the “slogan of struggle with Zionism [that] emerged.”14 Stola writes that Zionism on its own was not


11 Ibid., 24.

12 Ibid., 28-9.

13 Ibid., 30.

14 Ibid., 31.
problematic, but, Gomulka conceded, there were some problems with how certain Poles of Jewish origin identified themselves. He proceeded to break them into three categories. The first included Poles of Jewish origin who identified more with Israel than with Poland. He believed that those Poles would likely leave Poland, and that Poland was more than happy to facilitate their emigration by providing “passports to those who consider Israel their Fatherland.” The second group included cosmopolitan Jews, who “feel neither Poles nor Jews…should nevertheless avoid fields of employment in which national affirmation is an essential thing.” Finally, he spoke of the ‘citizens of Jewish origin…for whom Poland is the only homeland.” These were clearly not categories for self-identification, however, as he proceeded to say that the party “will oppose with complete firmness every manifestation of antisemitism…the sole criterion for evaluating a citizen of our nation is his attitude towards socialism and towards the interests of our state and its people.”

Stola writes that “the content and the structure of the speech bear witness to the fact that it was supposed to cool down, to a certain extent, the anti-Zionist atmosphere and remove the topic from the audience’s centre of interest.” But the speech failed to calm down certain segments of the population. The press, radio, and television continued the attacks on Zionists, while the MSW continued to feed off popular sentiment, and alleged Zionists continued to come under attack as a way of controlling popular unrest. Stola writes that “Portraying the dissident students and intellectuals as aliens – Jews, bloodstained Stalinists or their sons, arrogant members of the establishment, and so forth – certainly contributed to alienating them from the masses.” The campaign had been unleashed and it would be years before it could be reined in.

15 Ibid., 30-31.
16 Ibid., 35.
Rather than fight the Partisans and Moczar, Gomułka successfully “outmaneuvered” Moczar on his terms, maintaining his position as First Secretary.

Stola succinctly summed up the campaign in the *Polin* volume on 1968:

The hate campaign that began in March 1968 included aggressive and omnipresent antisemitic propaganda – barely covered with a fig leaf of anti-Zionism; mass mobilization against ‘the enemies of socialist Poland,’ among whom the Zionists stood prominently; expulsions of Jews from the party, government posts, and other positions; the destruction or drastic restriction of Jewish institutions and organizations; and discrimination against and harassment of individuals for being Jewish. Last but not least, the wave of Jewish emigration that followed the campaign (encouraged, induced, sometimes simply forced by the authorities) reduced the Jewish population in Poland by half and brought organized Jewish life to the edge of extinction.†

Scholars have debated the number of Jews who left Poland after the March events.‡ The Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews gives the figure 13,000, while scholars like Michael Checinski have suggested that the figure is closer to 15-20,000.†§ According to one document that Jerzy Eisler has cited, more than 15,000 emigrated between 1968 and 1972.**

Regardless of the exact figures, such a substantial exodus from Poland, when the Jewish population in Poland was estimated to be around 30,000 before the March events, had a profound impact on the Jewish population. The period is often depicted as ushering in the “last chapter” of

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† Ibid., 16. Stola notes that he puts the term “anti-Zionist” in italics because it “belongs neither to Polish nor to English but to another language: the Orwellian newspeak of the Communist Party.”

‡ The 1968 wave of emigration was the third such wave of Jewish emigration from Poland in the post-war period. The first occurred in the immediate post-war period when there were outbursts of violence in various places. Violence, combined with the general trauma of the war, the imposition of communism, and the appeal of building a Jewish state in Palestine encourage many Jews to leave. A little over 70,000-80,000 Jews remained in Poland by January 1952 (Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume III, 1914-2008* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 607). The second major wave was after the Thaw in 1956 when more than 51,000 Jews left (Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, 684). Between 30,000-35,000 Jews remained by the early 1960s (Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, 684).


Polish Jewish history, or, as Stola explained, the campaign “brought organized Jewish life to the edge of extinction.”  

My dissertation picks up at the moment when the campaign is unleashed to challenge the dominant narrative that Jewishness in Poland after 1968 was insignificant. In the immediate aftermath of the March events, Jewish life in Poland may, indeed, have looked like it was on the verge of extinction, but as my dissertation reveals, the story, like all of history, is far more complicated than that.

The reexamination of the “absence” narrative is perhaps my largest historiographical intervention. When I first spoke with an archivist about my project, he asked me how I could write a dissertation on nothing, since nothing Jewish existed in Poland in the 1970s. Just looking at book titles drives home the point that March 1968 signaled an end. Josef Banas’ *The Scapegoats: The Exodus of the Remnants of Polish Jewry* sums up perfectly how many academics and observers viewed the period.  

And for Charles Hoffman, Poland’s remaining Jews were “a depleted, exhausted, and cowering remnant of a remnant.” He doubted the ability of the young Jews “coming out of the woodwork to explore their Jewishness “to galvanize as a group determined to maintain Jewish life.” Many just assumed that Poland was reaching its final chapter of Polish Jewish history.

There is a clear periodization in post-war scholarship that has 1968 as the end point in much of the literature. For example, Ewa Waszkiewicz wrote about the religious congregation and its relationship with the state in her *Kongregacja Wyznania Mojżeszowego na*


22 Banas, *Scapegoats*.


24 Ibid., 267.
Yet, the Jewish communities still exist in these places after 1968, and they continue to have relations with the local and national authorities. Alina Cała and Helena Datner’s book of documents about Jewish life in Poland covers the period from 1944-1968. 1968 is, indeed, an end point for many individuals, and even for some institutions, such as the Yiddish schools in Poland. But it is not a period of total rupture. It is not the period of total absence as the historiography and popular understanding of the period has suggested.

Only a few scholars, mostly in Poland, have written about Jewish life in the 1970s. Janusz Mieczkowski has written about Jewish life in Szczecin. Kazimierz Urban, Andrzej Rykała, August Grabski, and Albert Stankowski have offered some helpful overviews of Jewish life, including figures of synagogues and membership throughout the period. Very little has been written in English, however, save for short sections on the Jewish Flying University in a number of books. Some exceptions include Michael C. Steinlauf who writes about Holocaust

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memory in Poland, which, undoubtedly, impacted Jews living in Poland. Sociologist Iwona Irwin-Zarecka also writes about memory, namely the memory of the Jew in Poland in the 1980s. Journalist Ruth Ellen Gruber has spent substantial time in Central and Eastern Europe in recent decades and she has written about her observations in a number of books as well. More recently, Karen Auerbach included a chapter and epilogue on the post-1968 period in her book, *The House at Ujazdowskie 16: Jewish Families in Warsaw After the Holocaust*. My work elaborates on a number of events and institutions that they mention.

Anna Sommer Schneider, an expert on the Joint’s work in Poland since 1945, writes in her book and in the catalogue to a recent exhibit held at the Galicia Jewish Museum, *Rescue, Relief, Renewal* that the Joint’s work was interrupted in Poland after 1968. She briefly discusses that it “always managed to find pathways to reach those in need,” but she acknowledges that her book focuses on three major time periods: 1944/45-49, 1957-1967, and 1981-1989, since those were the periods when the Joint was actually authorized to work in the country. My work expands upon hers, placing it into the larger context of American Jewish involvement in Poland.

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33 Anna Sommer Schneider, *Sze’erit hapleta Ocaleni z Zagłady: Działalność American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee w Polsce w latach 1945-1989* (Krakow: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2013); Anna Sommer Schneider, *Ratunek, pomoc, I odbudwa: 100 lat Jointu w Polsce/Rescue, Relief, and Renewal: 100 Years of “the Joint” in Poland* (Krakow: Galicia Jewish Museum, 2014), 15.
during the period, while discussing some of the ways the Joint managed to work even when unauthorized. In fact, the Polish government welcomed the Joint’s assistance as long as it did not appear as though these were Joint funds. The perception that the Joint was no longer working was so strong that even scholars of the period were under the impression that the Joint and even the SSE no longer operated.  

Photographers also tried to capture absence or the impending absence in popular works of art. Małgorzata Niezabitowska and Tomasz Tomaszewski’s Remnants: The Last Jews of Poland proclaimed that the heroes of the book were “they, the last Polish Jews.” Niezabitowska and Tomaszewski captured their stories and lives with love and respect, believing that they had to capture Jewish life before it ended. Their work was considered to be so important at the time that their work is featured in the post-war gallery of the Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Other photographers also tried to capture what they perceived as absence. In the introduction to Jeffrey Gusky’s 2003 book, Judith Miller writes:

There are almost no people in Jeff Gusky’s images of southeastern Poland. More than three million of the country’s 3.5 million Jews were killed in the Holocaust. Fewer than twenty thousand Jews remain in Poland, perhaps as few as ten thousand. Poland today is virtually ‘Judenrein.’

While it is true that Jews no longer live in many of the places Gusky photographed, to call Poland “virtually Judenrein” today is incorrect. There are thriving and growing Jewish

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34 Grabski and Stankowski write, “The ban imposed by the state authorities on the activities of the Joint and La Société de Secours et d’Entre Aide in Poland cut the union off from its principal sources of funding. ZRWM’s continued functioning became highly uncertain” (“Jewish Religious Life,” 268-269).


communities in Warsaw and Krakow, with smaller Jewish communities scattered throughout. Limud Polska, the annual weekend of learning that takes place outside of Warsaw, just as it takes place in so many places throughout the world, has over 1,000 people teaching, learning, singing, dancing, and praying together.\textsuperscript{37} When viewed through the lens of the Holocaust and what was lost, yes, Poland might appear to be “virtually ‘Judenrein.’” But Poland’s Jewish community – or more accurately communities – still exist.

The lack of a large body of scholarship on Jewish life in the postwar, and especially Jewish life during communism, is compounded by the fact that Polish scholarship is rarely translated into English. This is not unique to Polish-Jewish history scholarship, but is true of Polish scholarship as a whole. Even the major works on the anti-Zionist campaign have yet to be translated, thus limiting the readership. Polish Jewish studies has exploded in popularity in recent years in Poland, with major departments and programs in Krakow, Warsaw, and Wroclaw, just to name a few. Fascinating scholarship is coming out of these departments and programs, but very rarely is it accessible to anyone outside of the field.

While reassessing the absence narrative is, perhaps, my largest contribution, my work also contributes to several other bodies of literature as well. Much has been written about the Soviet Jewry movement, yet less attention has been paid to American Jewish activity west of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{38} My dissertation attempts to incorporate the Polish experience into the broader

\textsuperscript{37} Limud is an international movement of learning that began in the U.K and has spread across the world.

Cold War historiography, as well as to the American Jewish subfield of that literature, by revealing how much of post-1968 Polish Jewishness depends on perceptions of Western Jewish power. There is a clear element of “religious diplomacy” at work here, suggesting that this period of history belongs to a much larger global Jewish history than to any particular continent-based subsection.

At the very moment that some members of the Party were orchestrating the campaign, there were others who realized that Poland’s Jewish past – or present – could not be eradicated without a serious blow to Poland’s image abroad. Perceptions of Jewish power in the West were strong in Poland, and American Jews in particular responded forcefully to the anti-Zionist campaign, further driving home the point that the government could only go so far with their most recent “Jewish question.”

Henry Feingold writes in the preface to his book on Jewish power in America:

The fear that Jews have a special access to power is as old as Jewish history. It was contained in the warnings given to the Egyptian pharaoh (Exodus 12). It was what Haman whispered into the ear of the Persian King Ahasuerus (Esther 8:7) in the biblical story of Purim. The late nineteenth-century fantasy that Jews control the world’s money markets and the Nazi obsession with Judeobolshevism were linked to a fear of Jewish power...The latest accusation that focuses on neoconservative control of a nation’s Middle East policy is foreboding because the notion of a Jewish conspiracy has found place in the mind of credentialed thinkers and policy makers. It can no longer be simply dismissed as the ravings of lunatic fringe anti-Semites.39

Feingold asserts that all humans have power, and American Jews as a group are no different. He writes, “There is such a thing as Jewish power in America. It is freely exercised by each Jewish citizen and also communally.”40 Feingold argues that Jews “use the political process well and as

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40 Ibid., xiii.
a result have maximized their political influence.”

Yet, he makes a clear distinction between projecting influence on policy and controlling it. American Jews were more successful at influencing policy when their interests meshed with national interests.

While that conclusion seems obvious, it might help explain why the Polish government was so convinced that American Jews exerted a tremendous amount of influence that could help them achieve legitimacy and financial aid from the Western governments. The Western governments, at least for most of the period I cover in the dissertation, also wished to build bridges with Poland. If the Polish government could get American Jews “on board,” perhaps the Jews would be willing to help with the bridge building.

Writing on the period after 1956, Piotr S. Wandycz writes that the U.S. embarked upon a period of “peaceful engagement” with Poland. He notes that:

The long-range objective was a neutral belt of East European states enjoying a status comparable to that of Finland that is, staying clear of Western alliances, displaying no hostility toward the Soviet Union, and possessing a genuine freedom of choice in domestic affairs. But American means of promoting such a program were obviously limited.

This proved ideal insofar as it established a neutral buffer between “East” and “West.” John F. Kennedy spoke in his State of the Union address in January 1961 about “our abiding friendship for, and interest in the people of Poland.”

Lyndon B. Johnson’s administration also supported Poland. Secretary of State Dean Rusk said in 1964 that “We apologize to none for our efforts to help the brave people of Poland to preserve their national identity and their own aspirations.”

41 Ibid., 4.
42 Ibid., 6.
44 Ibid., 374.
That same year Poland received $60.9 million in credits from the U.S., although Congress, which had a more cautious view of the U.S.’s friendship with Poland imposed new limits and regulations on Polish trade with the U.S.\(^{46}\) By the late 1960s, Poland’s support of the Viet-Cong strained relations with the U.S., but Johnson remained committed to his bridge-building policies, despite Congress’ disapproval and threats to remove Poland’s Most-Favored-Nation (MFN) status.\(^{47}\)

Both the Polish and American governments wished to create “bridges,” and one of the potential hurdles in the bridge-building process, from the perspective of the Polish authorities, was the question of Jewish issues. If American Jewry perceived the Poles as not protecting the local Jewish population or taking care of Jewish material heritage and culture in Poland, they could potentially prevent Poland from achieving good relations with the Americans. For example, at times the Polish authorities believed that American Jews were undertaking an anti-Polish propaganda campaign in the West, perhaps most widely recognized through the spread of Polish jokes, and the authorities felt pressured to stop the campaign. One way to do that was to make concessions on Jewish matters.

The anti-Zionist campaign presented a major challenge to the bridge-building process. American Jews reacted strongly to the anti-Zionist campaign, protesting through every available avenue. Members of the American government reacted to their constituents, condemning the Polish government on the floor of Congress, at the White House, and in Warsaw. The Polish authorities, still working to improve relations with the West, had to find a way to demonstrate that the campaign was about internal political issues, rather than an antisemitic wave overtaking

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 379-380.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 382-383.
the country. With one eye focused on the domestic issues and the other focused on matters of foreign policy, the Polish authorities tried to achieve a difficult balance. In December 1970, Poland signed a treaty with West Germany confirming the Oder-Neisse border, which was a major diplomatic achievement. Yet, Gomułka’s days in office were limited. In late December protests broke out when food prices were raised. Gomułka was forced to resign and Edward Gierek became the next First Secretary of the Party.

Gierek was committed to improving Poland’s economy and modernizing the country through technology imports. He focused on building trade relations with the U.S. in order to attract more American capital and technology. Richard Nixon’s visit to Warsaw in 1972, Gierek’s visit to the U.S. in 1974, and Gerald Ford’s visit to Warsaw in 1975 solidified a new phase of “close American-Polish economic involvement.” The U.S. extended more credits to Poland, and in 1973-1974, up to $300 million was available for about forty projects. According to Wandycz, “trade and cooperation were the key words. It was projected that American-Polish turnover would reach the figure of $1 billion by 1976 and $2 billion in 1980.” While this benefited Poland in some ways, it also led to a skyrocketing of debts. In 1978, the debt figure was estimated to be between $12-14 billion dollars.

Debt was not the only issue plaguing Gierek’s regime. There was widespread discontent with the economic situation and the increased controls over society. When the government announced a rise in food prices in June 1976, workers rushed to the streets in protest. Polish society came together, workers, intellectuals, and the church, to create the Workers’ Defense

48 Ibid., 395.
49 Ibid., 403.
Committee (Komitet Obrony Robotników, or KOR), which helped struggling working families. The seeds were being sown for what would eventually become a large opposition movement under the name Solidarity.

And the Americans were, generally speaking, ready to proclaim their solidarity with the Poles. In 1976 Jimmy Carter won the American election and his Polish-born national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, believed that with some help from the U.S., Poland could become relatively independent. During a visit to Poland in late 1977, he promised additional economic aid.

In Wandycz’s assessment, as offered in 1980:

American economic involvement in Poland, understood as providing a stimulus to modernization, that in turn might promote liberalization, has not proved a panacea. Détente, naively assumed to lead automatically to greater domestic freedoms, did not have a simple effect – both regression and progress have been observed in the past few years. Yet, unless the United States is prepared to continue assisting the Polish economy and trying to influence the political climate in Warsaw, the alternative may be chaos and a dramatic reassertion of Soviet might. The aid has to be based on realistic assumptions, taking into account the inefficiency of Polish economy, and applied in a selective fashion. It should be publicized more extensively and connected, although in a subtle way, to American concern for human rights. The issues is then largely political and ideological and transcends economics.

Wandycz writes that the Polish-American community, referred to as “Polonia:”

Constitute an important although thus far not a decisive factor in American-Polish relations. Both Washington and Warsaw have on numerous occasions singled out this ethnic group as a special asset, but its potential is not yet fully utilized, given the relatively narrow base of power of Polish Americans and the low degree of political sophistication of the masses with regard to Polish needs and problems.

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50 Ibid., 409.
51 Ibid., 410.
52 Ibid., 412.
Wandycz emphasized that there was, undoubtedly, a lot more potential for Polonia to act as a bridge between the two countries.\textsuperscript{53} Interestingly enough, American Jews, many of whom had roots in Poland and could arguably be considered to be part of Polonia, acted as a bridge in the 1970s.

To speak of “American Jews” or “American Jewry” – and for that matter “Polish Jews” or “Polish Jewry” – simplifies the picture, of course. In fact, the latter is far more complicated than the former.\textsuperscript{54} Yet, there were a number of organizations and individuals working on behalf of American Jews on Polish Jewish issues in “the long-1970s.” Feingold notes that “the actual exercise of political power by Jews is best observed within their communal organizations.”\textsuperscript{55} This is especially true when there is a strong communal consensus on the issue, as there was in 1968 when news of the anti-Zionist campaign spread throughout the U.S. \textsuperscript{56} Feingold points out that:

When these optimum conditions for confluence exist, then the Jewish influence appears much greater than it is to Judeophobes who overestimate Jewish power and underestimate the power of the majority. Far from being a Jewish conspiracy, the reality is that a coalition of forces, usually liberal, has come together to amplify support for a specific policy.\textsuperscript{57}

More specifically, he states:

A public relations campaign, which is often at the core of what passes for Jewish political power, brings certain drawbacks with it. It requires high visibility, which

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 412.

\textsuperscript{54} In addition to “Polish Jews,” many Jews living in post-war Poland referred to themselves or were referred to as “Poles of Jewish origin” or “Poles with Jewish roots.” Still others denied their roots entirely and were referred to by leaders of the Jewish community as “marranos.” This was a pejorative term used to refer to Jews living in the Iberian Peninsula who converted or were forced to convert in the 15th century, but who may have continued to follow some Jewish practices.

\textsuperscript{55} Feingold, \textit{Jewish Power}, 12.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 14.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 14.
acts like a Post Office ‘wanted’ poster on the anti-Semitic imagination, which sees Jewish influence everywhere.\textsuperscript{58}

J.J. Goldberg writes, “From the Vatican to the Kremlin, from the White House to Capitol Hill, the world’s movers and shakers view American Jewry as a force to be reckoned with.”\textsuperscript{59} At least from the Polish perspective in the 1970s, American Jewry was a force to be reckoned with, and the Polish authorities tried to find the best ways to benefit from their perceived power. Goldberg argues that American Jews are blind to their power because of the “enduring myth of Diaspora Jewish powerlessness, and the corollary myth of craven, ineffectual Jewish leadership.”\textsuperscript{60} Yet, it seems as though the Jewish leaders working in Poland, beginning with their response to the 1968 campaign and continuing through the Warsaw Ghetto commemoration were feeling anything but powerless. Sure, there were limits to what they could accomplish, but more than once the leaders expressed a historical imperative to keep fighting for what they believed was right. Goldberg also writes that “In some ways…the power politics of modern American Jewry represents the rebirth of a Jewish tradition that has lain dormant for three hundred years, since the collapse of the medieval Polish empire.”\textsuperscript{61} It seems only appropriate, then, if Goldberg’s assessment is true, that Poland once again became a center for Jewish power politics in the “long 1970s.”

My dissertation begins in 1968, with moments from 1967 occasionally drawn in, and ends in 1983 after the fortieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising commemoration and just a few months before the martial law era ended. Chapter 2 begins with a major PR campaign

\begin{footnotes}
\item[58] Ibid., 46.
\item[60] Ibid., 10.
\item[61] Ibid., 11.
\end{footnotes}
in response to the anti-Zionist campaign. In that chapter, I focus on the response to the anti-Zionist campaign, both in Poland and amongst American Jews. While Polish Jews were largely limited in how they could respond, as they were essentially under attack by the Polish government, American Jews could respond. And respond they did. They protested with all of the means at their disposal, attempting to gain access to the highest echelons of power in the U.S. government: the White House. They wrote letters of protest to their political representatives, and tried to gain support from their non-Jewish neighbors, and, as one prominent Jew attempted, even from the Pope. Feingold writes that:

Diplomatic correspondence and letters of concern regarding the treatment of Jews were a well established part of America’s diplomatic practice since the Mortara kidnapping case in 1858…whether they spoke of, the genocide of the Armenians or famine in Eastern Europe after World War I, American Jewry, together with such groups as the Quakers, earned a reputation of being morally involved minorities, which gave its public relations a recognizable liberal coloration.  

The Polish anti-Zionist campaign was yet another example of how Jewish leaders used PR to alert the country and those in power as to what was happening to their co-religionists.

Chapter 3 overlaps chronologically with Chapter 2, but it focuses on how Polish Jewish institutions attempted to continue their work in the period from 1968-1972. In Chapter 3 we are introduced to a number of organizations whose work we follow in this tumultuous period of uncertainty. The first is the Social-Cultural Association of Polish Jews (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydow, or TSKŻ). Founded in 1950, the organization was the larger of the two Jewish organizations in Poland. Focused on secular Jewish and Yiddish culture, the group’s activities were centered around local clubs in cities throughout Poland. One of the many ethnic

62 Feingold, Jewish Power, 54-55.
cultural organizations in Poland, the TSKŻ was under the Party’s control, and after 1967, this was even truer than it had been before since their major funding source, the Joint, was no longer permitted to work in the country after December 31, 1967 because of its connections to Israel.

The Joint, as it was called in Poland, was instrumental in rebuilding Jewish life in the postwar period. Established in 1914 after Henry Morgenthau, the U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, cabled Jacob Schiff, a prominent Jewish businessman, and Louis Marshall, asking for assistance for Palestine’s Jews shortly after World War I began. A few weeks after the cable arrived, forty American Jewish organizations sent representatives to a meeting during which the Joint was born.63 None of the leaders viewed this as a long term organization, as they hoped that the situation would improve quickly for the Jews in Palestine. Instead, the Joint became, arguably, the most important Jewish aid organization for Jews around the world. During World War II, for example, $1 million dollars was parachuted into occupied Poland where it helped support Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto.64 Their work was essential in the post-war period as well.65 Grzegorz Berendt writes that the Joint’s assistance to the Jewish community in Poland from 1946-1949 was about 20 million US dollars.66 This was part of the Joint’s “Jewish Marshall Plan,” which spent $280 million assisting Europe’s Jews between 1945 and 1950.67 The Joint did not work

64 Ibid., 12.
officially in Poland from 1949-1957, although in 1953 the Joint created a surrogate organization, the Société de Secours et d’Entre Aide (SSE), which ensured that Jews in need in Poland and elsewhere where the Joint was not permitted (at that time in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and other Soviet satellites) were not abandoned. After the Thaw, the Joint was permitted to return to Poland, and together with the SSE, they continued to be a lifeline for Polish Jewry, providing aid for individuals in need, as well as for the Jewish organizations and institutions in Poland. Between 1958 and 1965, the Joint sent in about 5 million dollars. In 1967, the Joint would once again be forced to end its work in Poland as the Polish authorities worked to crack down on any “Zionist” influences in the country. The SSE, which had mostly been funding the kosher canteens, picked up much of the Joint’s relief work while also ensuring that the “Congregation,” the final organization that we learn about in Chapter 3, had the necessary funds and materials to function.

In 1949 the Religious Union of the Mosaic Faith (Związek Religijny Wyznania Mojżeszowego w Polsce, the ZRWM, or as it was often referred to by foreign organizations, the “Congregation”) was created under the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Urząd do Spraw Wyznań). That same year there were sixty-two Jewish congregations, sixty-eight synagogues (with more smaller houses of prayer), seventeen mikva’ot, forty-two Talmud Torah schools, thirteen rabbis, four mohelim, and thirty shochetim. As more and more Jews emigrated, religious life was in decline, but that decline should not be understood as a decline in Jewish life, for there was still Jewish life in Poland. Many Jews, particularly those in Warsaw, became increasingly secular or

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hid their Jewish roots.\textsuperscript{70} By 1953 there were 8,100 members in twenty-three congregations, with the largest Jewish religious communities based in Łódź, Wałbrzych, Szczecin, Wrocław, and Legnica. Warsaw only had about 150 members. The TSKŻ’s membership was significantly larger (11,640 members in 1954).\textsuperscript{71} A decade later, there were twenty congregations and one in Warsaw that was connected to the main Congregation office, with twenty-seven synagogues, and about 6,000 members largely concentrated in the Katowice, Wrocław, Krakow, Łódź and Szczecin voivodeships). By 1974, six years after the anti-Zionist campaign began, the Congregation had 1,319 members, sixteen congregations, twenty-four synagogues and houses of prayer (the TSKŻ had 1,435 members around the same time).\textsuperscript{72} August Grabski and Albert Stankowski write that religious life in the 1970s and 1980s was “weak,” but they, unlike many scholars, acknowledge that it continued to exist.\textsuperscript{73}

These three organizations continued their work, I argue, because the government was unwilling to tarnish its reputation abroad in the name of the anti-Zionist campaign. The Joint officials in Geneva understood that the government would not allow this to occur, and they found ways to continue working. While their work did not really support the TSKŻ, their support kept the Congregation afloat.

Chapter 4 focuses on the Polish government’s early attempts to court American Jewish organizations and individuals, beginning with B’nai B’rith’s visit in 1973 and continuing through

\textsuperscript{70} Grabski and Stankowski, “Jewish Religious Life,” 260.


\textsuperscript{73} Grabski and Stankowski, “Jewish Religious Life,” 269.
1975. The Polish authorities were still convinced that Jewish power in the West, and particularly in the U.S. was something they had to take into account when determining their policy towards the local Jewish community, as well as Jewish material culture.

The most vocal about the outbreak of the anti-Zionist campaign in 1968, B’nai B’rith represented a diverse membership throughout the world, though it was an American based organization. Founded in 1843 in New York, B’nai B’rith was created as a defense organization to protect Jews from “the deplorable condition of Jews in this, our newly adopted country.” The organization soon turned to wider domestic issues, and by the late 19th century was speaking out on behalf of European Jewry. In 1973 the Polish authorities invited two representatives to Poland in an effort to improve Polish Jewish dialogue, and ultimately relations. This was the first major post-1968 attempt to “court the Jews,” and it would be the first of many throughout the decade.

Isaac Lewin was another major figure with whom the Polish authorities tried to establish relations in the early 1970s. A leading figure of Agudath Yisrael, a Hasidic organization in the U.S., and professor of history at Yeshiva University in New York, Lewin was active in political life in Poland before World War II, and he remained involved in Polish Jewish affairs even after he emigrated. Lewin served as a modern day shtadlan, or intermediary, in the 1970s, acting as an important emissary between the Congregation, the Polish authorities (especially the Ministry of Religious Affairs), the Joint and SSE, and finally the U.S. government when it came to religious matters in Poland.

The American Jewish Committee (AJC), founded in 1906 with the purpose of advocating for Jews in the U.S. and abroad, was the third major player in the early-mid 1970s in Polish

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Jewish affairs. In August 1974, Abraham Karlikow, an AJC employee traveled to Poland to begin laying the foundation for what would continue to be a productive and beneficial relationship between the Polish authorities and the AJC, focused on promoting Polish Jewish dialogue, both in Poland and the U.S. While the Polish authorities were eager to build relations with B’nai B’rith, Isaac Lewin, and the AJC, they were still somewhat cautious. With the exception of a few times that Lewin intervened on specific matters, there were few clear concessions.

Chapter 5, which begins in 1976, reveals a major shift in the Polish authorities’ attitude on Jewish matters. In 1976, two more prominent Jewish organizations began to establish relations with the Polish authorities, and the authorities begin to demonstrate not only a verbal commitment to taking Jewish opinion into account, but also a real commitment to taking action. The first major figure introduced in Chapter 5 is Alexander Schindler, who represented the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the umbrella organization for Reform Jewry. Schindler brought with him a list of demands regarding Jewish issues in Poland, which was drawn up by another organization, the World Federation of Polish Jews. The list of demands, which ranged from redoing the pavilion dedicated to the Jewish experience at Auschwitz to pension payments for Jews who were forced to leave Poland, signaled a major shift both in how Western Jews approached the government, as well as how the government approached world Jewish leaders. While relationship building was still important, the focus in Chapter 5 is on how Jewish leaders went in with concrete expectations for the Polish authorities, who in turn began to negotiate just how far they would be willing to go to fulfill the demands put forth. Schindler was not the only one issuing demands.
The World Jewish Congress (WJC) also played a major role in Polish affairs after 1976 when contact between the Polish Jewish leaders and the WJC leaders was reestablished. An umbrella organization representing Jewish communities worldwide, the WJC has been hailed as the "diplomatic arm of the Jewish people."75 In 1976 the WJC was under the leadership of Nahum Goldmann, who was one of the most prominent Jewish leaders in the 20th century. In an anonymous interview with Goldberg, one Jewish agency head said that Goldmann was “the master illusionist. All the organizations he created – the World Jewish Congress, the Conference of Presidents – were designed to reinforce the myth of a powerful, mysterious body called world Jewry.”76 Whether accurate or not, this was precisely the impression that the Polish authorities had of Goldmann. They were determined to have a good relationship with him, the WJC, and Armand Kaplan, the WJC representative who was the most active in Polish Jewish affairs.

The World Jewish Congress played two major roles in this period. The first was to bring the Polish Jewish leaders into their circle. Although Poland would have observer status, not full membership in the organization, the World Jewish Congress meetings provided opportunities for the Polish Jewish leaders to interact with their colleagues from both the East and the West. The other major role they played was as a chief negotiator on the World Federation of Polish Jews list of demands. Kaplan spent a great deal of time in both Warsaw and Paris, meeting with Polish authorities to find ways to make concrete progress on the list.

Chapter 5 ends with two major agreements signed in 1981. The first was between the Polish government and the UAHC regarding access for Jewish scholars to archival materials in Poland (which was one of the demands on the list). The second agreement was with the Joint,

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76 Goldberg, Jewish Power, 16-17.
which allowed them to resume their work in Poland in January 1982, just weeks after martial law was declared in Poland. Chapter 5 centers on the argument that the Polish authorities were determined to make some progress on Jewish matters, particularly as Poland’s economic and political situation worsened, and that they viewed Western Jewish connections as being potentially fruitful.

Chapter 6 explores a remarkable example of the Polish authorities attempting to “woo” Western Jewry. In honor of the fortieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the Polish authorities invited world Jewish representatives to Warsaw to participate in what was expected to be a grand commemoration. The ultimate goal was to use Western Jewry to turn the alleged anti-Polish sentiment around, and hopefully make substantial gains in regaining the legitimacy lost in the wake of martial law. The authorities finished renovating the Nożyk Synagogue after years of promises to do so in anticipation of the 5,000 anticipated visitors’ arrival in Warsaw. Yet, the commemoration took place under martial law, and serious schisms between the Polish authorities and the outlawed, but still strong opposition meant that the commemoration became a battle over who owned the legacy of the Warsaw Ghetto Fighters.

When Marek Edelman, a commander during the Uprising wrote an open letter informing the world that he would not attend and that he did not believe anyone else should either, American Jewish leaders were split on how to respond. Many organizations chose to go, believing that they had an obligation to ensure a Jewish presence. Other organizations, such as the AJC, which had built a substantial relationship with the authorities prior to December 1981, declined the invitation and refused to support Wojciech Jaruzelski’s military government in any way. Those Jewish leaders who attended witnessed the tumult of the period in Poland, first when a counter-commemoration of the Ghetto Uprising was quashed by the authorities, and perhaps
more abruptly when the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) laid a wreath at the Ghetto Heroes Monument, despite assurances from the Polish government that this would not happen. World Jewry, once again, was split on how to react. The PLO’s presence suggested that Poland was not quite as committed to Jewish matters as they had appeared to be. They were still far too subservient to Moscow. There was hardly a consensus between the Jewish leaders over whether attending was the right thing to do, nor was there a consensus from the Polish government over how successful the commemoration was. While they did not receive any financial support from Western governments as a result, the propaganda from the period indicated that it had been a worthwhile event because Jews returned home and spoke about the government’s commitment to Jewish matters.

Chapter 7 shifts the focus from the political and power levels to the role of influence, and specifically American Jewish influences, in helping to create a new Polish Jewishness for the next generation of Polish Jews. A group of young Poles, many of whom discovered their Jewish roots during the anti-Zionist campaign, began meeting as a “Jewish Flying University” in the fall of 1979 in hopes of learning about Judaism and Jewishness. Without local mentors to whom they could turn for guidance, the group looked to America. Their American peers were in the process of creating an American-Jewish counterculture that rejected their parents’ Judaism in favor of alternative trends like the havurah (fellowship) movement. The “Generation of ’68” found kindred spirits in their young American counterparts. Furthermore, American-produced texts such as The Jewish Catalog proved to be essential guides during this period of exploration. Thus, the American-Jewish counterculture served as an adaptable model for these young Poles, highlighting the interrelated, transnational nature of the modern Jewish experience.
My epilogue discusses the notion of absence. The idea that Jewish life barely continued to exist after the 1968-1972 emigration wave has dominated the historiography of the period. In particular, I discuss how the new Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews, which opened in October 2014 to much fanfare, presents the post-1968 period in the museum. There, the absence narrative dominates, and the 1970s gallery is almost totally devoid of any signs of Jewish life in Poland. I explore why the narrative continues to dominate today, and how it complements the more sensationalist “post-1989 revival” narrative that has become so popular today.

Read together, the main seven chapters identify and dissect the connections between American Jews, Polish Jews, American politicians, and Polish politicians. After 1968, Jewishness continued to influence Polish politics even as Polish Jews left en-masse. Whether symbolic (the idea of the Jew) or “real” (Jews, both from Poland and elsewhere), Polish Jewishness in the post-1968 period became increasingly identifiable with Western or American Jews. The Polish authorities supported displays of Jewishness, be it in the form of material culture, Jewish practice, or organizations, because they feared the potential repercussions abroad if they failed to support them. Organizations like the Joint became a lifeline, providing money and material assistance, while other organizations, like B’nai B’rith, acted as potential advocates with – at least perceived - access to American power-channels. Beyond the diplomatic level, American models of Jewishness helped to create a new possibility of Polish Jewishness for the next generation of Polish Jews, many of whom sincerely believed that they were the last Jews of Poland. Prospects for a Jewish future were dim after 1968. For that reason, the focus on the past and on the material remnants became just as important as the focus on the present and on the material and spiritual needs of the Jews still living in Poland. Concern about the past and present dovetailed to animate American Jewish involvement in Poland during the late Cold War years.
The connections between Polish Jewishness and other diaspora communities, then, are central to understanding the Polish Jewish experience after 1968. These connections are just as central to understanding the American Jewish experience in the late Cold War period as well. Much of the previous literature concerning diaspora Jewry’s experiences during the Cold War has focused on the Soviet Jewish experience. American Jewry mobilized on behalf of the Refuseniks, and Jackson-Vanik is heralded as a major victory for the Jewish community during the period. This dissertation expands the boundaries of the Cold War Jewish experience to include Poland. Unlike the Soviet Union, where American Jews were focused on helping Jews leave the Communist Bloc, Polish Jews wished to stay in Poland. This was not a rescue mission. American Jewish activity in Poland had to look beyond the past, difficult history, while also realizing that there was an uncertain future for Polish Jewishness. At that particular moment, Polish Jewishness depended on diaspora Jewry for material, spiritual, and political support.

Above all, this dissertation focuses on the interrelated nature of the modern Jewish experience. Jewish communities do not stand in isolation, but in relation to their non-Jewish governments and to other Jewish communities both real and imagined. The Talmudic responsibility for Jews to help one another “Kol Yisrael Aravim Ze Ba Ze” dominates in times of crisis, and from the perspective of world Jewry after 1968, Polish Jewishness was in a state of crisis. World Jewish leaders intervened on the community’s behalf in 1968 and during subsequent outbreaks of antisemitism. When Jewish material culture seemed to be at risk of further deterioration or destruction, worldwide Jewish organizations pooled their resources and lobbied their governments. The most prominent and secure of these communities, American Jewry, maintained that Poland Jewishness should be a priority during the late Cold War era, just as it had been for decades. Individuals as well as organizational leadership remained committed
to ensuring that Jews living in Poland had access to religious materials, kosher food, and that the community, heavily populated by Holocaust survivors, could live out their lives in dignity. The Polish government used the foreign Jews’ interest and commitment to Jewishness in Poland to their advantage. They believed that demonstrating a willingness to preserve Jewish life and material culture might convince the perceived powerful and wealthy Jewish community to speak out on behalf of the Polish government to the U.S. government. Poland, which was experiencing a period of heavy foreign debts, a rapidly weakening economy, and a burgeoning opposition to the regime looked to American Jews as a potential source of political and financial support.

Thus, at the same time that the Polish government was carrying out a purge of “Zionist” Jews from government and civil service positions, they were expressing a commitment to the Jewish organizations and institutions in Poland.

This dissertation reveals not only that diasporic Jews remained active – and in fact critical – in the Polish Jewish experience after 1968, but also that there was a Polish Jewish experience at all after 1968. A tragic narrative of Jewish absence in Poland dominated first after the Holocaust and again, more conclusively, after the anti-Zionist campaign. This work challenges that narrative and draws attention to post-1968 Jewish activity within Poland and on its behalf. Scholars have long focuses on how little remained after the wave of emigration. And indeed, compared to what came before, Polish Jewishness was largely unrecognizable. But it was different, not non-existent. When we focus on the absence, we focus on what had been, rather than what was still there. This distorts the picture, and historians have the important task of trying to repair those distortions. This dissertation offers new perspectives on Polish Jewishness after 1968 and on American Jewish connections to Poland after 1968. One simply cannot study one without also studying the other. The experiences are intricately intertwined, and the Jewish
Flying University, which is the subject of Chapter 7, drives home just how global the modern Jewish experience is. Amidst the failures and successes of détente, Jewishness brought together Polish and American government leaders, Polish and Jewish institutional leaders, and Poles, Polish Jews, and American Jews. Jewishness became a card, however low, in the Cold War decks that the various sides were playing with. As one prominent Polish-Jewish leader described the period, “small numbers, big presence.”77 One can hardly characterize the decades following 1968 as a period of absence. Re-positioning the lens through which we view the post-1968 experience, we can see a drastically different story.

CHAPTER 2
REACTING TO THE CAMPAIGN

For the Polish-Jewish community, 1968 was a moment of intense shock that continues to resonate even today. While much of the region experienced a spike in anti-Zionist, antisemitic sentiment as a result of the Soviet Union’s pro-Arab stance during the Six Day War in 1967, in Poland, these sentiments continued to boil until March 1968 when a state-sponsored antisemitic, anti-Zionist campaign was launched.

This campaign had a profound impact on Poland as a whole and the Jewish community in particular. In the introduction to the Polin volume about 1968, Leszek Głuchowski and Antony Polonsky quote Halina Zawadzka’s memory of the time:

Everything started collapsing then. I lost hope that a Jew would ever be able to live in Poland without the stigma of his or her origin. The feeling of pre-war humiliation returned…Embittered and disillusioned, I decided to emigrate from Poland…The past was being repeated.¹

The targeting of Jews (and those who did not consider themselves to be Jewish, yet had or were rumored to have Jewish roots) and the signs of the past being repeated only a little over twenty years after the end of World War II were, undoubtedly, traumatic for a Holocaust survivor who had already experienced anti-Jewish persecution.

Younger Poles also experienced a substantial shock from the campaign. Some of these young Poles were unaware of their Jewish roots, as many Jews who remained in Poland after the war decided to abandon their Jewishness, avoiding discussions about their family background

¹ Leszek Głuchowski and Antony Polonsky, “Introduction,” 3. That there is an entire volume of Polin, the most prominent journal in Polish-Jewish studies, commemorating the fortieth anniversary of 1968 indicates just how significant the anti-Zionist campaign was for Polish-Jewish history.
even with their own children. Those who knew of their Jewish roots believed that they were living in a socialist society where everyone was equal. For everyone impacted, 1968 revealed that their Jewishness somehow undermined their Polishness. Joanna Wiszniewicz captured the shock that individuals experienced in this period in her appropriately titled book, *Życie przecięte: opowieści pokolenia marca* (*Life Cut in Half: Stories from the March Generation*). For many, particularly the young, the shock led to the ultimate conclusion that it was time to leave Poland. While no exact figure is known, scholars have estimated that the number of Polish Jews/Poles with Jewish roots who gave up their Polish citizenship and rebuilt their lives in Scandinavia, the United States and Israel in the late 1960s/early 1970s ranges somewhere between 13-20,000.

Given the major demographic impact of the campaign, scholars have largely viewed Polish Jewishness in the post-1968 period as one of emptiness or absence. Głuchowski and Polonsky write that 1968, “effectively ended Jewish life in the country for over a decade.” Yet, this is not the entire story. The leaders of Jewish organizations who remained in Poland were determined to maintain some semblance of Jewish life, even if they believed that they would be the last Jews in Poland. For many, there was a deep sense of loss and loneliness as friends and

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4 See Albert Stankowski’s chapter “Nowe spojrzenie na statystyki dotyczące emigracji Żydów z Polski po 1944 roku,” in *Studia z historii Żydów w Polsce po 1945 roku*, eds. Grzegorz Berendt; August Grabski; Albert Stankowski (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2000), 139-145; Stola, *Kampania antysemicka*, 213-218; “Marzec 1968 w Polsce,” http://www.sztetl.org.pl/pl/term/1050.marzec-1968-w-polsce/ (accessed June 17, 2015). The Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews uses the number 13,000, though their affiliate website, sztetl.org.pl gives the number 20,000. The emigrants tended to be younger, as they were the ones best in the position to learn new languages and begin their lives anew abroad.

family members left for Western Europe from the Warszawa Gdańska train station. The campaign had a devastating impact on Jewish organizations and institutions as well, as many of the community leaders left Poland in this period.

In Chapter 2 I focus on the ways in which Jewish leaders, and in particular those of the Towarzystwa-Społeczno Kulturalnego Żydów w Polsce (Social-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland, known as the TSKŻ), responded to the outbreak of antisemitism in the wake of the 1967 Six Day War, as well as their reactions to the outbreak of the March events. In addition to the secular Jewish organization, there was also an organization that oversaw religious life and matters in Poland. This organization, known as the Związek Religijny Wyznania Mojżeszowego (Union of Congregations of the Mosaic Faith, ZRWM, or in many Jewish organizations documents, the “Congregation”), was, like other religious organizations in Poland at the time, more independent from the state. As such, they were not pushed by the government to react publically to the campaign, and thus the leaders largely remained under the radar in this period.

They, too, continued to find ways to continue operating even after March 1968.

I also illustrate how the rise in antisemitism, particularly in Eastern Europe, during the summer of 1967 and the outbreak of the anti-Zionist campaign in March 1968 mobilized American Jews to respond. American Jewish involvement in the Soviet bloc beyond the borders of Soviet Union has largely been absent from the historical record. As significant as 1968 is in Polish-Jewish collective memory, its aftermath has been largely forgotten in diasporic-Jewish collective memory. Yet, the international – and particularly the American-Jewish community –

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6 The station has a plaque commemorating the wave of emigration that left from the station and each year in March there is a commemoration of the events at the station.

7 Kohane to Haber, September 12, 1967, NY1965/74 REEL 27, Folder #AR65/74 – 0321, JDCA.

8 Given how prominent the Catholic Church was in Poland, religious organizations were permitted to function, though they received no aid from the government and thus maintained at least some semblance of independence.
was aware of what was occurring in Poland and they were actively responding through a multitude of American – and American-based international - Jewish organizations. From issuing public statements and organizing protests, to calling for the revocation of Poland’s Most-Favored-Nation (MFN) status and allowances for Polish Jews wishing to immigrate to the United States, American Jews from across the religious and political spectrum did not sit idly by while the Polish government pursued its antisemitic campaign. Instead, they used their perceived power to drawn attention to what was occurring. The campaign thrust Polish Jewry into the larger arena of Jewish issues during the Cold War, and should be included in the literature of the period. While the Polish-Jewish response was limited, for the most part, to acquiescence to the Party line or a forced emigration, American Jews could protest and they did what they could to exert pressure on both the Polish and American governments in order to end the campaign.

The Polish government paid careful attention to the American-Jewish response to the anti-Zionist campaign, and in fact, the Polish government’s approach to the Polish Jewish community after 1968 was largely dictated by the government leaders’ perceptions that foreign - and particularly American - Jews wielded enormous amounts of power in the West. Thus, while following Moscow’s line regarding Israel and the Middle East, the Polish government was never able to fully break itself from a more Western-looking approach, particularly when it came to seeking legitimacy with Western governments. Poland valued its image abroad, which government leaders viewed as being linked to their economic prospects. The Polish government was careful to not go too far with its policies towards the local Jews. In an ironic twist, then, the perceived powers of American Jews pushed Poland to adopt a more liberal policy towards its Jewish population at the very moment when it was engaged in a brutal anti-Zionist campaign. In fact, after the campaign and the ensuing exodus of so much of the Polish Jewish community,
perceptions of Jewish power in the West helped move American Jewry to the center of the Polish Jewish story.

**Polish Jewish Response**

The official Polish anti-Zionist campaign did not begin until March 1968 when the government blamed the outbreak of student protests on Zionist provocateurs. But anti-Zionism reached a fevered pitch as early as mid-June 1967 as the situation in the Middle East heated up. The Soviet Bloc, with the exception of Romania, backed the various Arab states in the region, and the war pushed them to break diplomatic relations with Israel. Yet Polish Jews, along with many of their fellow non-Jewish Poles, supported the Israelis. Many had friends and relatives living in Israel. But supporting Israel was also a way of rejecting the Soviet line vis-à-vis the Middle East. To do so publically meant that they were going against the government’s official stance, and as a result, they found themselves in a difficult position that continued to worsen as the attack on the so-called Zionists intensified. Describing this tension, Akiva Kohane, a Joint employee, wrote to fellow Joint staffer, Charles Jordan, on June 1:

> The Jews in Poland are extremely worried. Their heart is in the proper place and their attitude does not differ from that of the Jews in New York or Nairobi – with extremely few exceptions. But even those few exceptions are silent. They are afraid to say anything against the official line, so they don’t say anything at all.\(^9\)

The fear in Poland was palpable. While world Jewry watched with pride and relief as the Israelis emerged victorious, the Jews in Poland were forced to remain silent.

As the representatives of the secular Jewish community were closely aligned with the Party, the TSKŻ’s public reaction to the campaign was very important for the Polish government. Unlike the Congregation, which was permitted to remain isolated from politics, the TSKŻ was expected to follow the Party line regarding the Middle East crisis. Thus, it is hardly

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\(^9\) Kohane to Jordan, June 1, 1967, NY1965/74 REEL 27, Folder #AR65/74 – 0321, JDCA.
surprising that during the Six Day War, the Ministry of Internal Affairs called a meeting with the TSKŻ leadership to determine their position on Israel. In her dissertation on the anti-Zionist campaign, Anat Plocker writes that at this meeting Zygfryd Sznek, the Jewish under-secretary of state, requested that the TSKŻ speak out against Israel’s “‘imperialist politics’ to try to convince Jewish circles to adopt the official Polish stance.”

The TSKŻ leadership at the meeting tried to show that while they were loyal to Poland, they would not agree with the government’s stance on the Middle East and their denunciation of Israel. It is unclear whether this was because the organization’s leadership firmly believed that the Party’s stance was wrong, or whether they simply refused to be pawns in the Party’s plan to convince Polish Jewry to back their policy. Plocker writes, “The TSKŻ chiefs belonged to the communist establishment in Poland and considered the situation a disagreement over foreign policy and not an internal Polish matter.”

If this was only a matter of foreign policy, the TSKŻ might have been able to get away with not issuing a statement. After all, few Polish individuals likely felt any type of direct impact as a result of Polish foreign policy.

Yet, this was not merely a matter of foreign policy. Plocker argues that it did not really matter what the TSKŻ officials said at this meeting. She writes:

The Ministry of Internal Affairs did not need confessions: the guilt of Polish Jews had been established a priori…Guilt had ceased to operate at the individual level; it belonged to the entirety of Polish Judaism. Unlike Poles, Jews subscribed to Zionism just by being Jews. Any who had registered as Jews belonged to a different nation and would be obliged to leave Poland. While Moscow halted all emigration to Israel in June 1967, the Poles were eager to be rid of ‘their Jews.’ They did not see any hope for this band of outsiders becoming part of the Polish socialist nation.

10 Plocker, “Zionists to Dayan,” 65.

11 Ibid., 66.

12 Ibid., 67. Poland’s deviation from the Moscow line is interesting, for it shows that the general sentiment was coming from the top down, but there was some leeway at the local level. For the Moscow leadership, this meant
The TSKŻ leadership would quickly learn, then, that they would have to take a public stance and that they would be held accountable for the pro-Israel sentiments – real or imagined - throughout the Polish Jewish community.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs produced reports listing both individuals, as well as Jewish organizations, who supported Israel. Such reports could only have been used to terrorize these people and groups, as support for Israel from such a small segment of the population could hardly have constituted any significant threat to Poland. On June 14 they issued a report condemning the TSKŻ’s leadership for failing to suppress pro-Israel and Zionist feelings, as though the organization could have achieved this. After all, how could they control their members’ emotions? The authorities must have anticipated such a response, for the report claimed that in order to rectify the situation, the Party would have to call on the TSKŻ to publically denounce these sentiments. Further, the Jewish newspaper, the Folks Sztyme, would be forced to publically denounce Israel’s actions. Moving forward, they would only be permitted to publish articles in line with the government’s official position. The final intense blow that the report dealt to the TSKŻ was the “recommendation” that foreign aid from Jewish organizations abroad, most notably the Joint, cease.¹³

Less than a week later, on June 19, Gomułka gave his infamous fifth column speech at the Trade Union Congress:

In connection with the applause Israel’s aggression has elicited in the Zionist milieu of Jewish citizens of Poland, I wish to declare the following: we never made it difficult for Polish citizens of Jewish nationality to move to Israel, whenever they wanted. But we maintain that all Polish citizens should have only one homeland – People’s Poland. The government treats every citizen of People’s Poland equally, keeping the Jews in the Soviet Union. For Poland, this allowed some elements within the Party to scapegoat the Jews. By allowing them to leave Poland, there could be a “cleansing” of the leadership.

¹³ Ibid., 75-76.
regardless of their nationality. Every citizen of our country who takes advantage of equal rights bears similar responsibilities toward People’s Poland. We do not want a fifth column in our country. So long as there is a threat to world peace and therefore to the security of our country and the peaceful work of all Polish citizens, it will be impossible for us to remain indifferent to those who support the aggressor, the destroyer of peace. Let those who feel that these words are directed at them draw the appropriate conclusions.14

The official version of the speech that was printed later did not include the part about the “fifth column.” Plocker argues this may have been in response to Poland’s decision to let the Jews leave, a policy which stood in great contrast to the Soviets who refused to let their Jews leave.15 Yet, it is also possible that even from the beginning, Gomułka was wary of going too far, and he thus backtracked when it came to having a written record. Regardless, he was unable to take back what he said. The damage had been done. Gomułka’s speech revealed the insecurities within Poland: the question of who was Polish and where loyalties lay. While Jews worldwide expressed support for Israel at this moment, the Polish government used such support to question the Polish Jews’ loyalties, thereby enabling them to attack their own citizens. Furthermore, the Cold War rhetoric indicates that the authorities were really using this geopolitical event as a cover for their own internal issues.

On June 21, the TSKŻ leaders again met with representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs at which time they were told, once again, that they were expected to condemn the pro-Israel behavior of TSKŻ members and Jewish youth, publically criticize Israel’s aggression, claim support for Poland’s position in the Folks Sztyme, and monitor future Jewish behavior and statements. This time, they did not outright refuse, but rather they sought to buy more time. The TSKŻ leaders responded that they would have to meet with the organization’s presidium before

14 Ibid., 77.
15 Ibid., 77-78.
issuing any kind of condemnation because they did not agree with some of “Comrade Gomułka’s statements.”\textsuperscript{16} The “some” is key, for it shows that they were still unwilling to blindly follow the Party’s position.

Despite their seemingly brave front, the TSKŻ leadership was in a difficult position. The Party was insisting that they issue such statements, and they were clearly beginning to break down as the situation failed to improve. They feared the rise in anti-Semitism throughout the country. Nor did they want to cut off aid or their connections with foreign Jews. On the executive level, they were unprepared to condemn Israel, although the Warsaw branch of the TSKŻ, which met June 24, was prepared to speak out against Israel’s actions in the newly occupied territories, as well as to criticize Israel’s connection with West Germany. Thus, it is difficult to speak of any collective Polish-Jewish response. Indeed, Plocker writes that many TSKŻ representatives, much like many Poles with Jewish roots as a whole, were in the middle – neither Zionists, nor anti-Zionists. The TSKŻ leadership had to find a way to respond to the demands placed on them by the government without abandoning either their personal or collective views. The best they could manage was a statement which condemned Israel’s imperialist, aggressive actions, while criticizing the expulsion of Arabs from the newly gained territories. To control what they printed, the authorities demanded that future articles printed in the \textit{Folks Sztyme} were to be sent to the censors in Polish, rather than in Yiddish.\textsuperscript{17} Under the alleged Zionist threat, the TSKŻ had officially lost the relative independence that it had

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 79.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 81-82.
previously had, and within a few weeks, the leaders appeared to have given in to the Party’s demands.\footnote{As an organization in Communist Poland, the TSKŻ was never fully independent, but the situation in the Middle East gave the government an excuse to place them under an even stronger microscope.}

On July 15\textsuperscript{th}, the TSKŻ presidium issued a statement on the front page of the \textit{Folks Sztyme}:

\begin{quote}
We most strongly condemn the aggression on behalf of governing circles in Israel. The aggressive policy on the part of militarists of the Moshe-Dayan-line and the ultra-reactionaries led by Menachem Began which are alien and hostile to the real interests of the people of Israel, render quite impossible the finding of peaceful solutions to all existent controversies…

We declare our solidarity with the party’s position and with the government of our homeland – People’s Poland – which demands as an unconditional provision for the reinstatement of peace and neighborly relations that the Israeli army shall retreat from occupied territories in Arab countries and return to its frontiers previous to the 5\textsuperscript{th} June 1967.

We, Polish Jews, who have been tried hard during the last generation by the terrible fate of those chased from their homes and their cities, particularly strongly condemn the policy adopted in regard to the population of occupied Arab districts. We energetically demand to solve the problem of Arab refugees in the interests of peace in the Middle East.\footnote{Translation of the July 15, 1967 \textit{Folks Sztyme} article, NY1965/74 REEL 27, Folder #AR65/74 – 0321, JDCA.}
\end{quote}

This declaration officially placed the TSKŻ into the hands of the Party, stripping them of any hopes for neutrality. The wording indicates that they were condemning the Israeli government, which they viewed to be acting in conflict with the needs of the citizens. This may have allowed them to do so with a slightly less personal conflict, for they were attacking leaders, not individual Israelis or Jews in general. More interesting, however, is how they linked their own experience of forced removal during the Holocaust and its aftermath to that of the Arabs who had been forced to leave their homes. Perhaps couching it in terms of the humanitarian impact enabled them to empathize with the Arabs’ plight, thereby allowing them to justify their position.
Despite the issue of having to denounce the Israeli government, the TSKŻ leadership planned to go on with their work as usual. One of the major items on their agenda was the plan for the 25th anniversary commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which was to be held the following April. This was their main area of concern in board meetings around this time. The Jewish Historical Institute had received funds to create a new exhibit, but as of January 1968, it still had not been created. This alarmed the TSKŻ leadership, and they were determined to ensure that the exhibit be prepared in time for the commemoration. Plans were also underway to host a joint TSKŻ-Jewish Historical Institute symposium, the program for which was in the works. The National Museum at Auschwitz was also to participate in the milestone commemoration with the opening of the long-awaited Jewish exhibition block that would tell the story of the Jewish experience in the camp. Thus, there was no indication that things were truly changing for the TSKŻ. The Six Day War had a noticeable impact on the TSKŻ’s public correspondence, but they appeared to be continuing their activities. This remained their priority even after their major funding source, the Joint, was forced to end its work – at least officially – in Poland in December 1967. The government began to fund the organization, which meant that beginning in 1968, the TSKŻ was even more under the Party’s control than they previously had been. Nevertheless, the leaders were determined to continue their work. On the eve of the March events, it was clear that the TSKŻ leadership had no idea that the situation in Poland was about to worsen. During their March 5 meeting, they reasserted their commitment to the youth.

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21 Protocols, March 5, 1968, Protocols 1968, TSKŻA.
Furthermore, they planned the next Executive Board plenum, to be held the day before the Warsaw Ghetto symposium.\textsuperscript{22}

By the following week’s meeting, however, the Polish – and particularly the Polish Jewish – world was turned upside down. As students took to the streets to protest the government’s closing of Adam Mickiewicz’s play, \textit{Dziady (Forefathers’ Eve)}, the government used the opportunity to publically condemn the Zionist influences they believed to be behind these protests. Despite their denunciation of Israel and Zionism just months before, the TSKŻ was implicated in the student protests, and once again came under the Party’s microscope. Only this time, it was not simply the Party leadership that was demanding explanations. Polish society as a whole was reading about the organization in the newspapers. This created a far more critical situation than before. Item two on their March 12\textsuperscript{th} meeting agenda was “the Society’s direct and indirect accusations in connection with the student incidents in Warsaw.”\textsuperscript{23} According to the minutes, Leopold Domb, the TSKŻ president, had requested a meeting with the Administrative Department of the Central Committee, but it had yet to be scheduled. Given the accusations, Domb asserted that it was appropriate for the leadership to meet with representatives from the Party’s Central Committee and the Ministry of the Interior. Furthermore, he said that it was essential that the TSKŻ issue a statement protesting Israel’s aggression.\textsuperscript{24}

Domb’s reaction indicates just how difficult it was for him, or perhaps anyone, to understand the situation. He stressed that the TSKŻ’s recent activities should speak for themselves in proving that the organization was completely loyal to the Party. To support this

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{23} Protocols, March 12, 1968, Protocols 1968, TSKŻA.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
claim, he listed some of the TSKŻ’s efforts to emphasize their critical position on Israel. For example, the executive board met with local branch leaders to point out the consequences of Israel’s aggression. In addition, he drew attention to the organization’s attempts to educate the youth. The previous August they held a seminar for the youth club leaders which gave the Marxist perspective on the recent events, and they organized meetings for TSKŻ youth club, the “Babel Club.” The Folks Sztyme also published articles clarifying the organization’s response. Thus, he claimed, the TSKŻ was doing all it could “in the fight against nationalist influences in the Jewish community.” He was simply unable to understand how the organization could still be under attack, making worse the already bad situation that TSKŻ was in. It was unclear to him that the national issue was simply a cover for the impending crisis that Polish Jewry was just beginning to experience. The impending anti-Zionist campaign was not a question of Polish Jewry’s loyalty to Poland, but an excuse to remove prominent Jews from prominent positions within the Party apparatus.

Domb also blasted Polish newspapers, such as Slowo Powszechne and Kurier Polski, for publishing articles associating the TSKŻ with the “hooligans” protesting at Warsaw University. Referring to an article, “To the Warsaw University Students,” published in Slowo Powszechne on March 11, Domb charged that the censorship office was allowing slogans that were reminiscent of the pogrom-inciting language, argument, and methods that the interwar nationalist, antisemitic “Falanga” party used. He suggested that the TSKŻ leadership request permission to respond to these articles. That they had to ask for permission to respond at all indicates their subservience to the Party. The decision to ask for permission to respond was just one of the many resolutions the board passed. Other resolutions included another request for a meeting with the Central

25 Ibid.
Committee and the Ministry of the Interior, the need for a TSKŻ plenum, and the need to issue statements regarding the Babel Club’s alleged involvement. It was clear that the TSKŻ leadership firmly believed that with some explanation, they would be able to convince the Central Committee and the Ministry of the Interior that the accusations levied against the TSKŻ were unfounded. They were totally misreading the situation, however. The antisemitic language may have indicated just how serious the situation was becoming, but even if this was so, what might they have done? The organization was, by this time, at the mercy of the Party, which had no interest in halting antisemitic tirades.

The Babel Club board also wished to clear its name, and they, too, issued a resolution against the accusations. How, they asked, could the Babel Club be blamed for inciting student unrest at Warsaw University when none of the accused leaders were members of the club? While two of the participants had attended club meetings in the past, the leadership argued that this connection hardly justified implicating the entire club in the masterminding of the student protests. Mentioning Jewish names and the Babel Club, the statement continued, strongly suggested that this was a calculated attempt to incite antisemitism. The club’s leadership explained that they were a typical Polish youth club involved in Jewish culture. They stated adamantly, “We are not Zionists and many times we have given this statement. It is the authors of the article in “Słowo Powszechne” who are trying to make us Zionists.” They unsuccessfully tried to respond with logic in order to fight the label that had been forced upon them.

By the TSKŻ’s March 19th and 20th Presidium meeting, the leadership was beginning to notice the campaign’s impact on the club’s activities. For example, in both Wrocław and Łódź

26 Ibid.

27 Babel Club Statement, undated, Protocols 1968, TSKŻA.
attendence was lower than it had previously been, although the clubs and Wrocław youth club were still open. Domb resigned a few days after the meeting. Although he had previously attempted to resign due to health reasons even before the campaign, his resignation at the Presidium meeting demonstrated the extent to which the recent events had issued a devastating blow to the Jewish community in Poland. According to the minutes, Domb restated his decision to resign, this time adding that he simply saw no possibilities for the TSKŻ to continue its normal activities as a result of the “unfounded accusations” against the organization. This, he claimed, would be the last time he chaired a meeting, as the situation was coming into focus for him: this was not a temporary situation, but one with potentially long-lasting repercussions.

Before he vacated the position, however, he reported to the board regarding his recent meeting with two representatives of the Central Committee. The representatives suggested that the TSKŻ issue new statements addressing the rise in tensions between Israel and Jordan. Although his resignation suggested otherwise, Domb reported back that the Central Committee officials had urged the TSKŻ not to panic. Domb was assured that the government did not intend to undermine or disgrace the TSKŻ’s leadership, nor were there any plans to liquidate the organization. Furthermore, he said that they could respond to the accusations against the Babel Club, but that the Party saw no problem with the article printed in Słowo Powszechne, since the article referred to Zionists, not Jews. This differentiation justified the Polish Communist Party’s position towards the TSKŻ. There was, according to the Party leadership, a clear distinction between Zionism and Judaism. The first would not and could not be tolerated in Poland. The second was a crucial part of Polish society that the Communist Party understood must continue.

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28 TSKŻ Presidium minutes #10, March 19 and 20, 1968, Protocols 1968, TSKŻA.

29 Minutes, March 22, 1968, Protocols 1968, TSKŻA.
to be supported as proof that they were not antisemitic, since antisemitism violated socialist ideology. This was the crucial distinction that would shape the government’s Jewish policy moving forward.

At the meeting the board decided to issue a statement against Israel’s aggression against Jordan. With the guarantee that the organization would remain in operation without any substantial Party intervention, the TSKŻ leadership did as they were told and issued their condemnation.30 This subservience to the Party characterized the TSKŻ’s policy throughout this period. The Ministry of the Interior and the Central Committee constantly reiterated its commitment to the TSKŻ, and the TSKŻ leadership, in return, issued statements in line with the Party’s position on the Middle East. Whenever individual TSKŻ members strayed – or were believed to have strayed, as the government needed no proof to make accusations - from this position, they were removed from their position within the organization. When three board members were removed from the Party lists, they were also removed from their positions on the TSKŻ board. Despite articles claiming otherwise, the Folks Sztyme editorial board also came under scrutiny for its allegedly pro-Israel bias. The Central Committee demanded that the TSKŻ deal with this intolerable stance by removing those editors deemed ideologically problematic.31

The TSKŻ leadership had to deal with the pressures from above, as well as the reality from below. Although the Ministry of the Interior and the Central Committee guaranteed their commitment to the organization, in the end, such guarantees were irrelevant if people refused to associate with the organization. Reports from the local club branches throughout the country noted a decline in club and meeting attendance. Many members expressed a genuine fear of

30 Ibid.
31 Protocols, May 9, 1968, Protocols 1968, TSKŻA.
being associated with the TSKŻ, as associating with anything Jewish at the time was viewed as dangerous. As club members heard of members, one by one, being removed from Party lists, they ceased to attend. Thus, despite the government’s reassurances, the TSKŻ leadership understood that it would have to work extremely hard to counter the damage that the March events had done to Jewish life throughout the country. Meeting minutes reveal that the executive board believed it needed to act as a strong, central body of leaders, cooperating with one another to assist the local leaders with the difficulties they were encountering.32 There was no sense that the impact would be long-term or impossible to overcome, however.

While the board debated whether to completely reorganize the TSKŻ to better fit the new reality, Domb, who remained on the board, but not as the president, said that they must do whatever it took to prevent the dissolution of the organization. From his perspective, dissolving the TSKŻ would be detrimental for Poland and the Party, as well as for the Polish Jewish community. While maintaining the TSKŻ would benefit the state, he believed that the Party owed the TSKŻ something as well. He claimed that unless the Party stepped in to halt the “unjust attack” on the TSKŻ and other Jewish institutions, it would risk the “total elimination of the organized Jewish community.”33 That he viewed this as a risk indicates that he understood the Party’s interest in maintaining Jewish life in Poland. Whether genuine or not, that interest helped ensure that Jewish life would continue in the country, even as so many Jews continued to leave. The TSKŻ, Domb believed, would be responsible for doing whatever it could to uphold its end of the bargain. Moving forward, he insisted, the TSKŻ leadership would have to draw up a clear plan of action and call a plenum together in order to elect a new board. The board had a

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
responsibility to ensure that the Party understood the consequences of the current campaign for the Jewish population in Poland. Their fate, as well as the fate of the TSKŻ, were at stake, and Domb firmly believed that the government had a vested interest in maintaining the TSKŻ and Jewishness in Poland. Thus, even amidst the attacks, Domb expressed some hope that the situation would not become too dire.

Cutting Ties with the West

While the TSKŻ would be tolerated as long as it maintained the Party line concerning Israel, the fact that much of their funding came from the West was highly problematic, and the government knew that it had to cut off these ties. The decision to remove the Joint, along with a vocational organization known as ORT, from the country, effective December 31, 1967, dealt a devastating blow to all who had benefitted from these funds. The Joint had been working on and off in Poland since it was founded in 1914. ORT, founded in 1880 in Russia, focused on vocational training in Poland whenever it was permitted to work there. Both organizations had strong ties to Israel. Each also provided Polish Jews with essential resources that were often unavailable in Communist Poland, such as medicine, and both played crucial roles in sustaining Jewish life in the post-Holocaust period. The government’s decision to end their work in Poland, then, had tremendously negative implications, not only for Jewish communal life, but also for individuals whose livelihood depended upon the funds and resources provided by either or both of these organizations. But ending their work in Poland also ensured that the government could consolidate its power over the TSKŻ.

34 Ibid.
Roughly two months after the Six Day War, the Joint’s Executive Vice-Chairman, Charles Jordan, received a letter from J. Rutkiewicz, the Polish Under-Secretary of State in the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. Rutkiewicz wrote:

We have summed up the results of the JOINT’S activity in Poland and consider that it has helped in the vocational re-training of a part of the Jewish population in our country, which has facilitated their further independent work within the framework of our constantly developing economy. Because of this situation I wish to inform you that we consider the period of the JOINT’s activity in Poland which has lasted until now as sufficient, because the goals which have guided them have been reached, and therefore beginning December 31, 1967 we are terminating our further cooperation. At the same time, I am informing you that I have issued instructions that all matters of the organizational-financial nature be finally terminated till the end of the year 1967.

Upon reading the letter, Kohane insisted that Rutkiewicz, who was one of the “nicest men I have ever met,” would never have written such a letter about the Joint. Instead, he guessed, higher circles in the Party had written it and instructed Rutkiewicz to sign it. Poland was following Moscow’s lead regarding its response to the Six Day War, thereby leading Kohane to conclude that the situation was reminiscent of their forced removal from Poland in December 1949, which had also been the result of pressure from Moscow. Once again under pressure from Moscow, the Poles were seizing the opportunity to eliminate the Joint – and its economic and alleged ideological influence - from Poland. While the Party’s eagerness to head off an ideological threat was understandable, its willingness to give up the economic benefits was harder to understand, particularly since it was going to cost the government a substantial amount to support the organization’s activities.

36 The letter was dated August 10, merely days before Jordan was mysteriously found dead in Prague.

37 Translated letter from Rutkiewicz to Jordan, August 10, 1967, NY1965/74 REEL 27, Folder #AR65/74 – 0321, JDCA.

38 Letter from Kohane to Haber, August 29, 1967. According to Yehuda Bauer, this was a decision made in light of the increased Cold War tensions, as the JDC was kicked out of Hungary and Romania at the same time, despite the fact that the JDC’s assistance to these countries was invaluable (Bauer, Out of the Ashes, 168).
The letter appeared to be a fatal blow to Polish Jewry. Yet, Kohane observed that the letter failed to mention the Joint’s assistance to the religious Congregation, which occurred at a different exchange rate and was not part of the official agreement between the Polish government and the Joint. While the Party, and by association, the TSKŻ could not have a connection to this outwardly Zionist organization, the Congregation’s relative independence could potentially allow the Joint to continue working through the Société de Secours er d’Entr ’Aide (SSE), which was a Geneva-based Joint-sponsored organization that was created the last time the Joint had been removed from Poland. Although the TSKŻ would receive government funds as a social/cultural organization, the religious community would not be eligible for government funds. Thus, without Joint funds and no possibilities of obtaining government aid because of its status as a religious organization, it would mean an inevitable end to Jewish religious life. Kohane did not believe that the government could afford to so, since the government was concerned about its image abroad. For this reason, Kohane believed that they might be able to continue working in the country. He wrote:

I am of the opinion that we should continue also in the future to send money to the Congregation. Nobody could make an accusation that we stopped supporting the Relief Committee while we continued to support the Congregation. The fact is that we wanted to support both groups, but the government stopped us from supporting one of them.

Should we stop supporting the Congregation, the structure of Jewish religious life, all the synagogues and cemeteries, would not be able to continue functioning. Scores of people who are being assisted by the Congregation would no longer receive welfare.

It is my opinion that we should continue this assistance. Obviously enough, the government could and may stop such assistance to the Congregation, but before doing this they would have to face the dilemma: (a) Not to accept any money from us and then face the closure of the synagogues and cemeteries, and the collapse of Jewish life in Poland, with all the publicity which it would have world[wide]; (b) pick up the bill and finance those activities; or (c) continue to permit the present arrangement. 

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39 Kohane to Haber, August 29, 1967, NY1965/74 REEL 27, Folder #AR65/74 – 0321, JDCA.
Not allowing the Joint to continue its work in this realm would, he wrote, “be either costly for them or a very bitter pill from the point of view of public relations.”

Furthermore, from Kohane’s perspective, there was an advantage to this new situation, for continuing to support only the religious community, he claimed, the Joint would essentially be sustaining the Jewish organization that did not condemn Israel during the recent war, and thus it would not be compromising its own stance. Kohane was clearly displeased with the TSKŻ leadership. He claimed that withdrawing support from only the Central Relief Committee could “be the death sentence to the Kulturverband [TSKŻ] and its various branch organizations.” Thus, he concluded, if the Religious Community was the only one to survive, it would gain prominence within the country. Although previous Joint reports had not been overwhelmingly favorable regarding the TSKŻ, this is the first candid expression that the Joint was not an eager partner when it came to the TSKŻ, and that the Joint leadership disapproved of their recent statements. Though the Joint’s official stance was to remain apolitical, Kohane’s statements reveal that this was easier said than done.

Kohane’s notes also indicate that the Polish government’s decision took the Joint’s leadership completely by surprise. This was particularly true for the leadership in New York who heard about the situation in Poland indirectly through the Geneva office. Officials at the Geneva office did not alert New York right away, and Haber was “utterly astonished” that they did not want to “alarm” him. Clearly, the Geneva office was also totally misreading the situation, for it seems as though being kicked out of Poland and forced to end their work would be a sufficient reason to alarm him. Haber advised Kohane that they should consult the U.S. Department of

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.
State, which Haber hoped might have some explanation for what led to this decision. Furthermore, he wondered whether the State Department might suggest that the Joint leaders visit the Polish Ambassador in Washington, D.C. Haber believed, or at least wanted to hope, that this situation could be resolved with some negotiation at the highest diplomatic levels.\textsuperscript{42}

There would be no negotiation, however. The Polish government had no interest in allowing the Joint to continue its operations, and they refused to even allow Joint officials back into Poland to close up their accounts. Yet, at the same time, requests for additional funds continued to flow into the Joint office, since, officially, the Joint was permitted to remain in the country until the end of December. Haber believed that the Joint should refuse until they receive permission to go to Poland to close their accounts. He said that they would continue to fund the Religious Community, but he was adamant about not sending any additional funds to the TSKŻ unless the Joint leadership was permitted to go to Poland one last time.\textsuperscript{43} Kohane confirmed with Haber that the decision had been made and that no future funds would be sent into Poland, although he approved some exceptions, such as a cash transfer of $500 for medicine.\textsuperscript{44} The Joint was committed to the Jewish community, though it refused to be the Party’s pawn.

Yet, the New York and Geneva offices were not in total agreement when it came to how best to react to their new reality. While Haber wished to use additional money transfers for the remainder of 1967 as a way of bargaining with the government to allow the Joint to liquidate its own business in Poland, Kohane took a more diplomatic approach, believing that it was far more important to keep the dialogue going. Issuing an ultimatum, he believed, would not help the

\textsuperscript{42} Haber to Kohane, 1967, NY1965/74 REEL 27, Folder #AR65/74 – 0321, JDCA.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{44} Kohane to Haber, September 12, 1967, NY1965/74 REEL 27, Folder #AR65/74 – 0321, JDCA.
situation. Rather, he believed that the ultimatum should only be issued if (or when) Rutkiewicz did not agree with or respond at all to the Joint’s letter.\textsuperscript{45}

While there was much uncertainty in this period, one thing was clear. The March events deeply impacted the Polish Jewish community. Kohane reported that:

The Kulturverband has accepted the instruction of the authorities to discontinue the work without any protest or attempt of intervention. In view of the present mood in the country and the daily campaign against ‘imperialism, Zionism,’ etc. it is partly to be understood… I have the impression that the Welfare Committee doesn’t exist any more, and the liquidation committee has taken over its activities.\textsuperscript{46}

Another report indicated that they were to decrease their activities considerably, and that there would be no summer camps, youth clubs, or similar “separatist” activities in the future. Kohane’s assessment of the situation, without having any true confirmation, was that if this were true, the TSKŻ’s future was “very dim.”\textsuperscript{47}

**American Jews Respond**

By the time the March campaign was in full-swing, few Jews in Poland could speak out against their government’s stance. The TSKŻ was wedged between a rock and a hard place: denounce Israel or cease to exist. Having chosen the former, they ensured that Jewish life continued in Poland even after much of the remaining Jewish population left. The Congregation was exempt from issuing a statement due to its status as a religious confession, and they were also permitted to continue functioning. For most individuals, there was no option, however. As the situation deteriorated and Jews lost their jobs or were kicked out of school, many had no choice but to leave. The campaign, then, ushered in an era of forced emigration.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
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\textsuperscript{46} Ibid. The Welfare Committee consisted of representatives from the various Polish Jewish organizations.
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\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
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The American Jewish leadership did not leave the Polish Jews to deal with the situation on their own. American Jewry, which by the late 1960s felt far more secure than it had during prior periods of intense discrimination and antisemitism in Europe, used a variety of public statements, appeals, and political tactics directed towards both Polish and American government officials to end the campaign. Their efforts fall into two broad categories. The first was a “soft” push for America’s leaders to respond and publicly condemn the campaign. The second was a “hard,” more forceful push that called for American politicians to act by using Poland’s MFN status as a bargaining tool. This phase also included a push for exceptions to American immigration policy when it became clear that most Jews wished to emigrate. Given that many of them were former or current Communist Party members, their situation was complicated vis-à-vis American immigration laws.

Within a few days of the campaign’s outbreak, leaders of the major secular American Jewish organizations all spoke out against the Polish government’s antisemitic attack on Polish Jews. Their rhetoric varied. Some, to highlight the gravity of the situation, compared the current antisemitic campaign to prior instances of state-sponsored antisemitism. Others, like the leaders of the American Federation of Polish Jews, the Council of Warsaw Jews, and the Emma Lazarus Federation of Jewish Women’s Clubs, highlighted the contradictions between the Polish government’s socialist ideology and the outbreak of antisemitism. Still others, such as Morris

48 Most-Favored-Nation (MFN) status gave a country favorable trading rights and tax rates based on an agreement with the United States. Poland and Yugoslavia were the only two Communist bloc countries to receive MFN status in the early 1960s. MFN status would later become a major bargaining tool for the Soviet Jewry movement with the 1974 passing of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which denied MFN to countries that denied emigration or violated other human rights. For more on Jackson-Vanik, see Goldberg, Jewish Power.

49 While each of these organizations has its own mission and goals, their work overlaps in terms of working to protect Jewish interests in America and abroad, fighting antisemitism and advancing social justice and humanitarianism.
Perlzweig, a WJC representative, argued that a more tempered approach was necessary, given the complicated and tense geopolitics of the Cold War.

Viewing the campaign through the lens of 19th and 20th century history, Jewish leaders compared the campaign to the Stalinist purges, Nazi regime, or Czarist repression of freedom and democracy. When Dr. Joachim Prinz, the chairman of the American Jewish Congress’s Commission on International Affairs, demanded that the Polish Government, "repudiate the incitement to primitive racial and religious hatred and halt their scurrilous and racist appeals to latent anti-Semitism," it was clear that he understood the historical roots of the attack, as well as the potential for the government’s position to spread to the masses and create an even more precarious situation for the Jews in Poland. 50 Rabbi Philip Rudin, president of the Synagogue Council of America, declared that:

No amount of slanderous anti-Zionist rhetoric can hide from the world the moral degradation of a regime that would invoke racial animosity, in a manner reminiscent of Nazi tactics, against a community of 20,000 Jews who represent the pathetic remnant of three million Polish Jews butchered by the Nazis. 51

Rudin’s highly charged rhetoric was meant to elicit a reaction, Jewish and otherwise, against the Polish government. It is hardly surprising that he compared the Polish government’s antisemitism to that of the Nazis, but his and Prinz’s emphasis on racism is interesting. Their use of racial terminology reveals much about what was occurring in America at the time. The anti-Zionist campaign took place in the midst of the American Civil Rights movement. Thus, we can see how American Jewish organizations were turning not only to Jewish history, but also to current events, in order to inform their stance. Furthermore, American Jews were not using


Zionist rhetoric to fight the anti-Zionist campaign. This demonstrates that the American-Jewish leadership immediately understood this as an antisemitic, not anti-Zionist, campaign. The sentiment surrounding the Six Day War provided a convenient excuse for those wishing to cleanse the Polish leadership of its Jewish influences, and thus the American Jews were fighting more than just anti-Zionist feelings.

Local American Jewish communities reacted as well. In Los Angeles, the Jewish Federation-Council of Greater Los Angeles Community Relations Committee issued a resolution condemning the policy of the Polish regime, "in using Jews as scapegoats in a desperate effort to maintain political control."52 While one can, of course, question the extent to which a local resolution might have had any significant effect, a Jewish Federation sponsored resolution had a high likelihood of gaining press coverage in local Jewish newspapers, being repeated in rabbinical sermons, and mobilizing Jewish youth groups, to name just a few of the possible outcomes of such action. Furthermore, in Los Angeles the campaign became part of the community’s official 25th anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto commemoration. This was the case throughout the United States, as the Federation based National Community Relations Advisory Council strongly encouraged Jewish communities throughout the country to combine their observance of the 25th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising with protests and demonstrations against the anti-Semitic policies of the Polish regime.

In Washington, D.C., for example, the opening of a YIVO Institute for Jewish Research exhibit commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising at the B’nai B’rith Klutznick Exhibit Hall provided an important venue to speak out against the campaign. New

York Congressman, Emanuel Celler, used the opportunity to state publicly that it was, “sadly ironic that Warsaw, the very city which saw so heroic a manifestation of man’s indomitable spirit, is now once again the scene of anti-Semitic outrages.” Comparing the ghetto fighters’ heroism to liberal segments of Polish society under attack, he stated “‘the decent and liberal elements in Poland’ will gain the freedoms they seek and ‘thus vindicate the cause for which the martyrs of the Warsaw ghetto gave their lives.’”53 Celler recognized that the campaign, though targeted against the Jews, was really about domestic issues in Poland, whereby the government in power was attacking the liberal elements of society.

Left-leaning organizations like the American Federation of Polish Jews, the Council of Warsaw Jews, and the Emma Lazarus Federation of Jewish Women’s Clubs, also demonstrated an understanding of Polish conditions in their response to the campaign. In a November 1968 statement, several months after the initial outbreak, these leaders asserted that:

Our record as friends of People’s Poland is well-known…with joy and pride we invariably stressed this enlightened attitude of People’s Poland and held it up as a model for solving the problems of minorities generally and of the Jewish question in particular – as a model for fostering Jewish progressive culture under socialism.54

After establishing their admiration, however, they condemned the current situation:

We shudder at the sight of a revived anti-Semitic atmosphere which is remindful of the anti-Semitism in Poland between the two World Wars…We are shocked at this development and we express our condemnation and protest against it as anti-fascists, and as friends of socialism and as Jews who are concerned with the security and the fate of our people in every country.

We regard this development as a bitter tragedy for the Jewish people generally and for Jewish progressives particularly; and it is a tragedy for People’s Poland itself. This development is in flagrant contradiction to the principles of socialism, of


54 “Statement on the Jews of Poland,” November 16, 1968, Emma Lazarus Federation of Jewish Women’s Clubs Collection, Box 15, folder 9, AJA
internationally recognized human rights and of the humanism of many great figures in Polish history such as Tadeusz Kosciuszko, Adam Mickiewicz and others; of leaders in the historic struggles for the national liberation of Poland, participated in by Polish Jews as loyal patriots of their country. The current development is a desecration of the humanism of the founders of socialist People’s Poland, Boleslaw Bierut and others who helped build the Jewish community and Jewish national culture. The anti-Jewish chauvinism that has affected organs of the Polish press and government institutions is a betrayal of everything the aforementioned and other great figures in Polish history cherished, a betrayal of the anti-fascist fighters of the Gwardia Ludowa and other progressive elements who, together with the Ghetto heroes of Warsaw, held aloft the slogan – FOR OUR FREEDOM AND YOURS.55

While there was a strong tradition of Jewish socialism in the U.S., by the late 1960s, such a position undoubtedly placed them on the fringes of American Jewish communal life.56 Yet, their connections to Poland and familiarity with Polish culture and history enabled them to approach their condemnation in a more nuanced way. Rather than focusing simply on how this campaign was a tragic event reminiscent of the Holocaust or other period of foreign imposed anti-Jewish policy, the leaders of these organizations argued that the latest outbreak of anti-Semitism in Poland had led the country astray from its historical traditions and values. Thus, their statement differed from the “us vs. them” approach that other Jewish organizations took.

The WJC’s Maurice Perlzweig also shied away from the strong “us vs. them” approach. After meeting with the Polish ambassador to the United States, he wrote to the WJC Paris office, saying, “The habit of Jewish organizations to conduct diplomacy at the top of their voices is not helpful.” Explaining this in more detail later in the letter, he wrote:

The President of the mysterious American Committee for Soviet Jewry has publicly demanded the abrogation of the most favored nation status accorded by the US to

55 Ibid. “For Our Freedom and Yours” (Za naszą i waszą wolność) is a famous Polish slogan, hailed by those fighting for Polish independence since the mid-19th century.

Poland in economic matters. This can only have the result of infuriating the State Department, which has important interests in Poland.\(^57\)

Responding to the statement that his own organization had issued, Perlzweig said, “I fully realize that some statement should have been made, and I agree with the tenor of the statement, though I am as usual against the abundant use of adjectives in it.”\(^58\) His observation that the loud, and at times threatening, Jewish response to Poland’s antisemitic campaign could have highly negative consequences demonstrates a nuanced understanding of the Cold War politics of the time. While the knee-jerk reaction to protest loudly against the Polish government was a common tactic, Perlzweig believed it was important to take into account long-term repercussions for the relationship between Jewish leaders, the American government, and the Polish government.

In addition to issuing statements, some Jewish organizations turned to organized protests and boycotts in order to voice their opposition to Poland’s campaign.\(^59\) The North American Jewish Youth Council and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations immediately organized a protest, attended by hundreds of college students and others, during which they demanded an end to the anti-Semitic campaign.\(^60\) The Student

\(^57\) “Letter to Armand Kaplan in Paris,” March 29, 1968, World Jewish Congress Collection, Box B9, folder 19, AJA.

\(^58\) Ibid.

\(^59\) In Great Britain there was an organized boycott amongst Jewish housewives, in which they were encouraged to buy Israeli products instead of Polish tinned foods. Jewish storekeepers were asked not to sell Polish products. Jews were also asked to encourage their non-Jewish friends to boycott Polish bacon. According to one Jewish M.P., Sir Barnett Janner, while they were not officially boycotting, “any Jew who bought such goods could not have an easy conscience.” (“Deputies Debate Poland, Jordan, and Kosher Meat Prices,” April 26, 1968, Abraham Duker Collection, PS-65/1614, The Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center Archive, Tel Aviv University (hereafter GGDRCA)).

\(^60\) Jewish Telegraphic Agency, “Synagogue Council Condemns.” The participating groups came from across the Jewish spectrum, including Betar, Hillel, BBYO, B’nei Akiva, Hashomer Hatzair, the National Conference of Synagogue Youth (NCSY), the National Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY), Young Judea, United Synagogue Youth (USY), and the Young Israel Intercollegiate Council (Flyer for the Protest, undated, Abraham Duker Collection, PS-65/1614, GGDRCA).
Struggle for Soviet Jewry organization planned multiple rallies on behalf of Russian and Polish Jews. In August 1968 the group organized a Tisha B’Av (Jewish day of mourning over the destruction of the Temple) Sackcloth and Chains Sit-In at the Polish U.N. mission. In September, 1,500 participants boarded a chartered “Freedom Boat” for a Freedom Rally at the Statue of Liberty. They also organized a “Lights of Freedom Rally for Polish and Soviet Jews” Chanukah rally in December 1968, during which participants were instructed to bring their menorahs for a torchlight march from the Polish U.N. Mission to the Soviet U.N. Mission. These protests fit in well with the mood of the late 1960s in America when Jewish students were engaged politically as an identifiable Jewish group. Their commitment to protesting the campaign further demonstrates that the concerns regarding Polish Jewry were widespread, ranging from senior Jewish leaders to young American Jews. Furthermore, the range of organizations involved, and their often uncoordinated responses, indicates that this was an issue that the diverse American Jewish community could agree upon, even if they responded individually.

Yet a third mode of protest included circulating and signing petitions and passing resolutions. In early April the Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported that the Jewish Labor Committee sent a resolution, co-signed by a number of Jewish organizations, including other labor and Holocaust survivor groups, directly to President Johnson, urging him to “instruct the American delegation on the United Nations Human Rights Commission to call for an emergency session of that body to deal with the Polish Government's campaign against the Jewish

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61 S.O.S. Soviet Jewry Newsletter, Fall ’68, Abraham Duker Collection, PS-65/1716, GGDRCA; Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry Lights of Freedom Rally, Abraham Duker Collection, P-65/784, GGDRCA. The Lights of Freedom rally was also advertised on the S.O.S. Soviet Jewry newsletter cover during the fall of 1968. The newsletter also ran several articles about the spread of Soviet antisemitism under the guise of “anti-Zionism” into Czechoslovakia and Poland. The article about Poland, entitled, “Polish Jewish Life Fast Disappearing; Show Trials Prepared” highlighted the impact that the campaign was having on Polish Jewry, including those who considered themselves to be more Polish than Jewish. The newsletter also reported on the expected show trials for students, mainly Jews, who were involved in the March student protests. For months the newsletter included articles about the situation in Poland.
Although Johnson did not personally reply, a Department of State representative replied to the letter a little over a week later and assured Held that the U.S. Government was “also deeply concerned” about the current situation in Poland.

As they had during previous periods of crisis, American Jewish leaders appealed to both the governments of the United States and Poland to bring an end to the Polish campaign. At the local level, Jewish communities, mostly represented by Jewish federations, issued appeals or public statements about the events, urging their community members to take action, often through letter writing campaigns. The local Jewish federation in Cleveland, for example, issued a call to its community members, asking them to write protest letters to the Polish Embassy in Washington, D.C.

On March 20th, B’nai B’rith issued a memo to its regional and local leadership, as well as to its board of governors, regarding the situation in Poland. Providing a detailed explanation of the “Polish Crisis” – the student protests in response to the government’s closing of Dziady, the alleged connection between the students and the so-called Zionists, the fractions within the Party, etc. – B’nai B’rith’s President, William A. Wexler, pled with the organization’s leaders:

B’nai B’rith is determined that this contemptible tactic of using the Jews as scapegoats shall not succeed. It is necessary that each of you undertake to see that as many letters as possible – from Jews and non-Jews alike, from private persons

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63 U.S. Department of State to Held, April 12, 1968, General Records of the Department of State/Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 3089, SOC POL 14 (4/1/68), National Archives at College Park (NACP).

64 Jewish Federations, working under the umbrella “Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA),” fund and oversee Jewish life in America. Most major Jewish institutions, including synagogues, schools, summer camps, etc., receive funding through the Federation system. For more on the JFNA, see their webpage: “About us,” http://www.jewishfederations.org/about-us.aspx (accessed July 28, 2015).

and organizations – go to your newspapers and to the Polish embassy in your country protesting this dangerous development in Polish affairs. As you know, the more individual the letters, the more effective the protest. In the United States, address your letters to Jerzy Michalowski at Embassy.66

Wexler firmly believed in the power of the written protest. His plea that local leaders initiate a wide campaign, which included asking their friends, family, colleagues, and acquaintances (both Jewish and not) to write, indicates that he strongly believed that if enough people voiced their opposition, they could turn the tide of antisemitism in Poland.

A little over a week later, B’nai B’rith’s Executive Vice President, Rabbi Jay Kaufman, reiterated Wexler’s call to action in a memo to the organization’s district secretaries. He wrote:

The situation in Poland is still critical and volatile...there is a struggle between reactionaries and liberals throughout Eastern Europe. A victory over the reactionary anti-Semites in Poland will permit Jews to breathe more freely in all these countries of Eastern Europe. A defeat will worsen their situation. The need is urgent, therefore, for an effective follow-through on Dr. Wexler’s appeal of March 21st to 600 key B’nai B’rith leaders to get letters from Jews and non-Jews to newspapers and Polish embassies.

Some of you had already begun your own public opinion campaigns. Congratulations and thanks! I hope now that each of you will make at least six telephone calls to people who can write impressive letters to newspapers and the Polish Embassies. Ideally, some of these letters should be from non-Jews.67

Wexler and Kaufman both viewed the letter writing campaign as essential for their fight against the Warsaw government’s campaign, and they understood the need to spread the word and engage others in their fight against the anti-Semitic reactionaries who were attacking not only the Jews, but Polish liberals as well. Yet, the leaders were careful not to make this simply a Jewish issue that only Jews cared about. Presented in terms of reactionaries vs. liberals, this was an appeal based on Cold War sensibilities.

66 “Memo,” March 20, 1968, B’nai B’rith Collection, Folder 139 Poland I/II, AJA.

67 Rabbi Jay Kaufman to District Secretaries, March 29, 1968, B’nai B’rith Collection, Folder 139 Poland I/II, AJA.
The letter writing campaign was one of B’nai B’rith’s primary responses to the Polish government’s attack on the Jewish community in Poland, but they did not leave the letter writing solely up to their members (or member’s colleagues and other organizations). On April 3, Wexler wrote directly to Pope Paul VI asking for his support:

I recall with gratification your earnest assurance that wherever there is persecution against Jews, you would speak out against it.

May I now invoke your council and assistance in the tragic developments in Poland where Jews are being used as scapegoats to suppress the growing surge for freedom. I am mindful that the Church is itself a victim of gross discrimination in that land. But I believe too that the Church, because of the many millions of faithful still in Poland, may help to ameliorate, if not reverse the anti-Semitic campaign of the Polish government.

We believe it would be helpful also if Polish Catholic groups in such important countries as the United States and France were to condemn the shameful strategy of the Polish government.68

Wexler’s appeal to the Pope, who had apparently offered Wexler his support, demonstrates the perceived severity of the situation. Wexler believed that, given Communism’s attack on all religious institutions, the Pope could be a potential ally in their protest, particularly given how devoutly Catholic most Poles were. Thus, the Polish Church could prove to be an important force against the tides of government sponsored antisemitism. Yet, Wexler wanted more than the Polish Church simply speaking out against the situation. He hoped, as well, that the Pope would mobilize Polish Catholic groups abroad as well. By appealing to the Pope’s previous good will and earlier assurances to assist the Jews when they might be targeted, Wexler hoped that the Pope would be an important and helpful ally in the struggle against the Polish regime.

These hopes were not to pan out, however. Confirming receipt of Wexler’s letter, an Apostolic Delegate in Massachusetts wrote back:

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68 Wexler to Pope Paul VI, April 3, 1968, B’nai B’rith Collection, Folder 139 Poland I/II, AJA.
Your letter…addressed to His holiness, Pope Paul VI, has been received and its contents, which concern the plight of the Jewish community in Poland duly noted. You will understand that the Holy See finds it difficult to make any appeals along the lines suggested by your letter inasmuch as the Church itself is a victim of discrimination in that country.\(^69\)

While Wexler believed that the Polish government’s approach to religion could unite the two groups, the Pope preferred not to rock the boat, choosing silence over a response. Any response from the Church, then, would be done at the individual level, not from above, as Wexler had hoped would be the case. Despite the Pope’s reluctance to advocate for the Jews, by the end of 1968, it was clear that some Polish clergy had, indeed, spoken out against the anti-Zionist campaign. In yet another letter to the Pope, Wexler mentioned that Cardinal Wyszynski called on the Polish clergy to prevent “excesses” against Jews. He then extended his deepest appreciation for these steps taken by the Catholic Church.\(^70\)

Another tactic Jewish leaders employed was to meet with American government representatives and Polish officials at the Embassy in Washington, D.C. Rabbi Jacob Rudin, the President of the Synagogue Council of America, along with Congressman Herbert Tenzer and two other rabbinical representatives, met with U.S. Under Secretary Nicholas Katzenbach the week that the campaign broke out to express their concern that the latest events in Poland were reminiscent of the early attacks on Jews in Nazi Europe. Given Poland’s closer relationship with the U.S. than most other Eastern European countries, Rudin thought the government might be able to influence the Polish leaders.\(^71\) According to the State Department’s memo of this meeting, “Rabbi Rudin said the group had come to express the deepest kind of concern over

\(^{69}\) Delegate to Wexler, April 25, 1968, B’nai B’rith Collection, Folder 139 Poland I/II, AJA.

\(^{70}\) “Letter to His Holiness, Pope Paul VI,” November 21, 1968, B’nai B’rith Collection, Folder 139 Poland I/II, AJA.

what it saw as the ‘utilization of the most brazen, cold-blooded kind of anti-Semitism’ in recent statements by the Government of Poland and to voice the hope that everything was being done which could be in order to prevent the repetition of the events of Hitler’s time.”

Katzenbach was sympathetic, but told him that the U.S. government could do little to assert pressure on the government. They also had to take into account what the potential repercussions might be for the Jews living on Poland. Katzenbach suggested that they speak with the Polish Ambassador in Washington, ideally with backing from other rabbis and representatives of other religious groups as well. They might make more of an impact because if the U.S. government spoke out, Katzenbach said, it would be seen as a political statement, rather than a humanitarian statement.

While Rudin viewed this as a humanitarian issue, at least in part, he believed that the U.S. government also needed to speak out. When it was clear that they would not, Rudin requested a statement from the government, or, at the very least, that a question be planted during a press conference that would allow for the U.S. government to express their “awareness and revulsion” concerning the campaign.

The Department of State allowed for a question to be planted. On April 1st a press spokesman responded to a question about reports of antisemitism coming from Poland:

I don’t want to get into any assessment of what may be happening in Poland, but I do want to say that the United States condemns anti-Semitism wherever it occurs. History, particularly the events of this century, have clearly shown the tragic consequences which can result whenever anti-Semitism is encouraged in any form. And we would hope the lessons of the past would prevent this from happening again.

72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 State Department Press Briefing, April 1, 1968, General Records of the Department of State/Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 3089, SOC POL 14 (4/1/68), NACP).
This could be construed as a weak response, given that the historical events the Press Spokesmen referred to hit so close to home for those waiting for a response, but given that the Press Briefing was only a few weeks after the March events broke out, it is likely that the Department of State was still unsure of how best to handle the situation and caution seemed to be the best bet.

Even in Warsaw the situation was too complicated for U.S. representatives to understand fully what was occurring, at least initially. The U.S. Ambassador to Poland’s term ended at the end of May, and during his farewell reception, embassy officers used the opportunity to speak with several Polish Jews in order to find out what they believed the most helpful U.S. response would be. Given the Polish government’s defensive stance regarding what they perceived to be a simultaneous anti-Polish campaign in the West, the well-known poet Antoni Slonimiski suggested a carefully worded appeal to Poland’s rich history of tolerance going back to the time when Poland welcomed the Jews, thus enabling Polish-Jewish culture to flourish. This, he believed, would be better than an attack on the current regime. In contrast, film director Aleksander Ford thought that the U.S. government needed to send a strong message to the Polish government, even if it infuriated the Polish press. Ford, according to the Embassy official, was afraid after having been expelled from the Party, and he equated the current “terror” to that of the Stalinist period. He also thought that Radio Free Europe needed to take a stronger stance. He believed that the pressure might cause the Polish government to think twice about what it was doing. Actress Ida Kaminska’s daughter, Ruth, said that a statement from the U.S. government would be far more powerful than statements from Jewish groups, but she, too, was nervous even speaking about the situation. Yet another person the officials spoke to said that the best help would come in the form of visas to the U.S for those wishing to go there.75 Thus, there was no

75 Confidential Telegram, May 29, 1968, General Records of the Department of State/Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 3089, SOC POL 14 (5/1/68), NACP. The American Jewish Committee sent a delegation to meet
consensus when it came to what type of action the U.S. government should take; only a consensus that the situation was bad. The worsening situation was confirmed by Jerzy Strebski, the Chief of the North American Section of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Trade. Strebski noted that there was a brief tapering off of purges because of reaction from abroad, but he unabashedly admitted that he was ready for the purges to pick up again. He reportedly applauded some resignations of people he considered to be “guardian angels of those goddamned Jews.”

His statement further confirmed that this was an antisemitic, not anti-Zionist, campaign.

The suggestions that the American embassy officials gave after weighing all of these statements was that they really needed to be cautious because they ran the risk of causing more harm than good. Knowing that people like Strebski were in high positions could not have been reassuring. For now, they advised simply to issue visas to those Jews who had been able to leave Poland. Poland’s doors, unlike those in the Soviet Union, were open for Jews to leave. The Polish government generally went to great lengths to allow Polish Jews to leave, given that they were, according to some in the government, a disloyal fifth column. Yet, the decision to leave Poland at this moment came at a heavy price – the forfeiture of one’s Polish citizenship. Officially, immigration to Israel was the only one permitted (those who expressed a desire to go to Western Europe or the United States while still in Poland were often denied the possibility to emigrate). Yet, the great irony of the anti-Zionist campaign – namely that many of those who

with Polish Ambassador Michalowski to confirm that exit permits would be granted. The delegation also met with the State Department to request that U.S. Embassy officials in Warsaw would, “speed up emigration procedures at the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw so that Jews desiring to proceed to the United States could by processed by the Polish emigration authorities” (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, “Committee Asks Polish, U.S. Governments to Facilitate Exit of Jews from Poland,” April 4, 1968, http://www.jta.org/1968/04/04/archive/committee-asks-polish-u-s-governments-to-facilitate-exit-of-jews-from-poland).

76 Confidential Telegram, May 29, 1968, General Records of the Department of State/Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 3089, SOC POL 14 (5/1/68), NACP.

77 The documents that Jews leaving Poland at the time were issued gave them the right to leave for Israel, not the U.S.
were attacked were not Zionists – meant that Israel was not always the desired destination. An internal JDC memo noted at the very beginning of the campaign that this would be the case.

Writing to the New York office, a Geneva staff member declared:

> Should Poland start issuing travel documents for Israel in large numbers, it may be an answer to many, but not to all of the people who would like to leave. All kinds of Jewish officials who have been fired from the Civil Service, from the Army, from industry, and from the Party, and who rightly object that they didn’t deserve such treatment because they are devoted Party members and patriotic Poles, that the accusation of their ‘Zionism’ and double loyalty is absolutely unfounded, may find it hard, after their dismissal, to go to the Militia station to renounce Polish citizenship in order to go to Israel.  

This was, indeed, the case. As difficult as it was, however, over 15,000 renounced their citizenship, though most had no intention of going to Israel. A March 1969 telegram from the United States’ embassy in Vienna estimated that about 80% of the emigrants waiting in transit in Vienna wished to go to the United States. Thus, the American government became a major player during this wave of emigration from Poland, and being able to issue visas was crucial. If issuing visas became a problem or was not enough of a gesture as time went on, the officials wrote, they could take a more forceful stance. Until then, the media and “influential personalities” should be kept abreast of the developments, and the embassy would keep a close eye in case they needed to “take more vigorous action.”

Jewish representatives may have understood their reasoning on some level, but according to a memo from Katzenbach to the U.S. Ambassador to Poland, John Gronouski, about a meeting he had with some Jewish representatives in late Mary 1968, Jewish leaders were also strongly

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78 Kohane to Haber, April 2, 1968, Poland – Emigration, 1965-1969 – AR 65/14 - #325, JDCA.

79 U.S. Embassy in Vienna to State, General Records of the Department of State/Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969 Social – Box 3089, SOC 14 POL 4/1/68 (folder 2), NARA.

urging the government to condemn the Polish antisemitism more forcefully. They believed that doing so could impact the government in power and also help boost morale for Polish Jews. Jewish leaders were also concerned that the Polish Jews may not understand that although the U.S. was not granting visas in Poland, they were granting them to people once they were outside of Poland. Katzenbach’s private response to the Ambassador suggested that the Jewish representatives were making a lot of noise without thinking about the negative impact such noise could have. The memo noted that “responsible US officials, especially [the] President, unlike individuals who merely express opinions, had to face problem that their actions and words could result in injury to very people we all wanted to help.”

But at least on paper, there was no doubt that the U.S. government was trying to make the Jewish issue a priority. The memo continued, “He stressed that fate of Polish Jews was overriding consideration in determination of U.S. policy on this issue, rather than possible adverse effects on bilateral US-Polish relations.” Thus, the State Department was not (at least not at the moment) going to make any drastic moves that could potentially harm the Polish Jews still in Poland or prevent their emigration if they decided to leave. But if the U.S. government ultimately did take action, it would be in the Jews’ best interest even if it meant rethinking U.S.-Polish relations.

Around the same time, Katzenbach sent President Lyndon B. Johnson a secret memorandum entitled “Jews in Poland.” Noting that the Polish antisemitic campaign “masquerading under the guise of anti-Zionism” was largely an internal power struggle, he wrote, “The fact still remains that many Jews are suffering persecution and that Jewish opinion

81 Under Secretary’s Discussion of Polish Jews with Members of Conference of Presidents of Jewish Organizations,” May 23, 1968, General Records of the Department of State/Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 3089, SOC POL 14 (5/1/68), NACP.

82 Ibid.
outside Poland – and particularly in the United States – have been aroused.” Katzenbach believed that the “cautious course” the United States had followed up to that point was no longer sufficient from the Jewish perspective. Katzenbach’s memo noted the difficult place the U.S. Government was in at the time. Because Soviet policy prevented Jews from emigrating, there was a legitimate concern that the Polish government might change its policy and impose similar restrictions. Katzenbach had first asked Ambassador Gronouski, for advice. Gronouski warned Katzenbach that intervening too much could potentially jeopardize the Polish government’s willingness to allow Polish Jews to emigrate, and it was best not to intervene too forcefully.

Thus, rather than ask Johnson to issue any kind of public statement (he would do so later that summer, however), Katzenbach believed that the most appropriate course of action would be to make changes to American immigration policy in favor of those who might wish to immigrate to the U.S. as “refugees from religious persecution in Poland.”

According to the memo, Katzenbach believed that the U.S. should be willing to go so far as to “accept any Polish Jews who might wish to emigrate to the United States.” Katzenbach, realizing that American Jewish leaders would continue to demand more action, asked the President for permission to “authorize the Attorney General to be prepared to invoke the parole provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act to admit additional refugees…when the visa ‘numbers’ run out.” Furthermore, noting that he and Gronouski were to meet with the Conference of Presidents of Major

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84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid. He noted in the memo that visas would be granted “subject to the normal security check” and that they would be given only to those who were able to get out of Poland.

87 Ibid.
American-Jewish Organizations the following week, he knew that he would have to have a clear response regarding the official U.S. stance regarding immigration. He wrote to Johnson:

Right though I think our stand is, it simply will not wash with the vast majority of the American Jewish Community. Too many American Jews are extremely sensitive to our Government’s failure to lower immigration barriers during the Nazi period. They see our silence now as a repetition of our stand during the 30’s and 40’s.\textsuperscript{88}

Thus, he also asked for Johnson’s approval to tell the Conference of Presidents of Major American-Jewish Organizations that Johnson had decided to “set aside all numerical limitations on the immigration of Polish Jews to the U.S.”\textsuperscript{89} Katzenbach realized that the historical experience meant that they needed a clear plan with a reassuring answer that they could give the Jewish leadership.

While this appeared to be a generous offer, in fact, Katzenbach noted, there were actually more than enough visa ‘numbers’ to accommodate the number of Jews who might wish to immigrate to the United States. The problem, however, was that as of July 30, 1968, America’s immigration policy was to change and those numbers would no longer be open only to Poles wishing to immigrate. Thus, Katzenbach was suggesting a preemptive loophole that would ensure that even after the immigration policy changed, Jews wishing to emigrate to the U.S. from Poland would be able to do so. Katzenbach claimed that of the roughly 20,000 Jews in Poland, likely only 3-5,000 would wish to go to the U.S. This would hardly create a refugee crisis in the United States. The symbolic power of the decision was far stronger: allowing the Polish Jews who wished to immigrate to the U.S. would allay the fears of the Jewish leaders haunted by the memories of America’s shut door before and during the Nazi period.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
Believing that it was important for Johnson to demonstrate interest in the plight of Poland’s Jews, Katzenbach urged Johnson to approve the parole provisions, as well as to sign off on the assurances for the American-Jewish leaders that the U.S. would set aside all numerical limitations. Furthermore, Katzenbach noted the need to keep a close eye on the situation in Poland with the understanding that if the situation worsened, the administration might have to take an even stronger stance, for example through a public Presidential statement, “listing the steps we have already taken, declaring our willingness to admit all refugees from religious persecution in Poland, and restating in the clearest possible forms our national abhorrence of anti-Semitism.”90 Before getting to that point, however, Katzenbach believed that it was important to exhaust all private channels, as well as to constantly take into account the impact of a public statement on the Jews who were still in Poland.91

Generally speaking, those who left were considered stateless, since they had given up their citizenship in order to leave. The United States would, therefore, allow many of them to enter as refugees. Once in America, they could then begin the process of becoming American citizens. Yet this group’s immigration to the U.S. was complicated by the fact that many of them were members of the Polish Communist party. Technically, this should have excluded them from immigrating to the U.S. Yet, the State Department explained that history was the true motivation behind the granting of refugee status to so many, despite this connection. In a telegram from Katzenbach to Ambassador Gronouski, Katzenbach wrote:

Having in mind the profoundly serious consequences of refusals to Jews or other applicants who face prospect of religious persecution, I believe we should be very

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.
reluctant to question the veracity of such statements by such applicants as to their intentions.\textsuperscript{92}

The Consular section of the Warsaw Embassy was instructed to “pursue [a] line of questioning which will in most cases reveal Jewish refugees.”\textsuperscript{93} Thus, even in the midst of the Cold War, the government recognized that it could not have a black and white approach to the question of emigration. Recent history, namely America’s failure to provide refuge for so many Polish Jews before and after World War II, meant that the U.S. government would have to make exceptions this time.

For the Jews wishing to leave Poland, expressing a desire to leave because they were Jewish was key, as there was a difference between those who claimed they were fleeing from religious persecution (in this case simply as Jews) and those who were simply fleeing. The former would qualify for preferential treatment under U.S. immigration law’s section 203(a)(7), which “allowed persons from communist or communist-dominated countries and persons from countries in the general area of the Middle East to be admitted as “conditional entrants” under the seventh preference category.” Those who did not mention that they were fleeing persecution, or in the words of one U.S. consular official, did not reveal his or her “problem,” were only able to immigrate under a loophole which allowed them to apply for immigrant visas.\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{92} Department of State to Embassy Warsaw, May 24, 1968, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969 Social – Box 3089, SOC 14 POL 5/1/68 (folder 2), NACP. This was still the case over a year later. According to a letter from Martin Hillenbrand, the Assistant Secretary for European Affairs at the State Department, to the President of the Jewish Labor Committee, “We will continue to facilitate in any way we can the emigration of Jews who wish to leave Poland for the United States. We treat the visa applications of Jewish refugees from Poland who wish to come to this country as sympathetically and expeditiously as possible” (Martin Hillenbrand to Charles Zimmerman, September 1969, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969 Social – 1967-1969, Box 3089, SOC POL 14 (5/1/68), NACP).

\textsuperscript{93} Embassy Warsaw to Department of State, May 25, 1968, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969 Social – Box 3089, SOC 14 POL 5/1/68 (folder 2), NACP.

\textsuperscript{94} Embassy Warsaw to Department of State, May 28, 1968, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969 Social – Box 3089, SOC 14 POL 5/1/68 (folder 2), NACP.
The U.S. government found it difficult to accept those who admitted to being “voluntary” members of the Communist party, however. According to the Embassy in Warsaw, “As for those ineligible under 212(a)(28) because of voluntary membership, we have not intended to take special measures to permit them to come to [the] US. We understand Israel will accept them.”

Two exceptions to this particular section of the Immigration and Nationality Act included those who were involuntary members and those who were former members. In determining whether one could qualify for an exception, the memo stated that the Consular officers would be responsible for determining one’s degree of voluntariness [according to a telegram from the embassy sent a few days earlier, it appears that only those who revealed that their membership was for ideological reasons were to be refused refugee status].

The embassy recognized that not allowing these people into the United States could “lead to charges that we are not helping as we should,” but Warsaw wished to stick to this policy nevertheless.

The extent to which the State Department in Washington agreed with the embassy in Warsaw is unclear. While the embassy was reluctant to allow for too many exceptions, a document from Washington, D.C. sent to Warsaw stated that “The USG [United States Government] had made arrangements for granting US visas for any Polish Jews who succeeded in leaving Poland.”

Was this simply a statement made to appease the American-Jewish leaders or a true commitment on the part of the government to assist any Jew who managed to leave? It

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95 Ibid.
96 Ibid; Embassy Warsaw to Department of State, May 25, 1968, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969 Social – Box 3089, SOC 14 POL 4/1/68 (folder 2), NACP.
97 Embassy Warsaw to Department of State, May 28, 1968, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969 Social – Box 3089, SOC 14 POL 5/1/68 (folder 2), NACP.
98 “Under Secretary’s Discussion of Polish Jews with Members of Conference of Presidents,” May 24, 1968, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969 Social – Box 3089, SOC 14 POL 5/1/68 (folder 2), NACP.
appears that the government was, in fact, willing to find loopholes even for the Jews who technically should not have been admitted because of their membership in a Communist party. The United States government was aware that many Polish Jews had to join the Party in order to attend university or hold their particular position in Poland, and thus this was taken into account. This appears to address voluntary membership that for some was likely linked to at least a certain degree of ideological commitment, at one point or another. Thus, the United States’ official policy towards the Polish Jews who were attempting to immigrate to the U.S. appears to be somewhat more liberal than Warsaw’s, perhaps because they had direct contact with American Jews, whereas the embassy in Warsaw had to deal with the local government. According to the United Hias (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) Service, on May 29, the Department of State declared that the U.S. was prepared to accommodate “any foreseeable demand” by Jews who wished to immigrate to the U.S. The United Hias Service commended the government for its humanitarian efforts, and committed to assist, financially and otherwise, any Polish Jew who was able to leave Poland and go to the U.S.100

In addition to appealing to the U.S. government, representatives of leading American Jewish organizations, such as the American Jewish Committee, also met with Polish embassy officials in the U.S. with hopes that their concerns would be conveyed to the government in Warsaw. At least one American Jewish leader, Rabbi Herschel Schachter, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, met directly with Polish

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100 Jacobson to the Board of Directors (United Hias Service), August 27, 1968, AR65/74-0320, JDCA. The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society was a charitable organization founded in the late 19th century to assist Jews emigrating from Europe.
Ambassador Jerzy Michalowski on March 25.101 Memos between the embassy in Washington, D.C. and the Polish government indicate that the persistence of the American Jewish leaders made an impact (though not the one they intended), as embassy minutes show that Polish officials believed that Poland was under attack and that something had to be done to counter the “smear campaign of the Zionist centers.”102 Ambassador Michalowski informed the Polish Affairs Officer at the U.S. State Department, Doyle Martin, that Poland had not expected such a strong reaction in the U.S. and Western Europe, and that there was a “counter-reaction against Jewish pressures which was not to our [the U.S.’s] or anyone else’s benefit.”103 Thus, the Polish government refused to ignore what was occurring in the U.S., though precisely what the “counter reaction” entailed is unclear.

By mid-summer, as it became increasingly clear that the Polish government’s anti-Zionist campaign was not weakening, B’nai B’rith’s Wexler took a far stronger stance, lobbying Congress to revoke Poland’s MFN status. This was not the first call to revoke Poland’s status, however. Immediately after the campaign began, the Jewish Labor Committee had called an emergency meeting to pass a resolution calling for the U.S. government to revoke Poland’s MFN status, and urging the U.S. President to “review United States relations with Poland.”104 The

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103 “Department of State Memorandum of Conversation re: Current Developments in Poland and Czechoslovakia,” May 7, 1968, General Records of the Department of State/Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 2431, Political and Defensive, NACP.

Polish embassy was aware of this, and reported to Warsaw that, “American Jews are trying to blackmail us through economic sanctions. ‘There is no doubt that trade relations are certainly very important for our national economy, but not at any price.’”

Nevertheless, as a U.S. embassy telegram indicates, the Poles showed “increasing sensitivity to charges from abroad of [an] anti-Semitic campaign.” These charges, which included articles in newspapers, the demonstrations that Jewish organizations organized, and economic pressures on firms handling Polish trade, were all reported back in Poland. According to the telegram, the Polish government was responding in two ways. The first was to use prominent Polish Jews who remained in the Party to express their patriotism and condemn Israel. The second was to show that the Poles had helped Jews during World War II. But perhaps the greatest challenge that Poland faced in the public relations struggle was that the TSKŻ leadership still had not spoken up as of early April. The embassy’s comment in the memo was “it is clear that pressure on individual Jews and Jewish organizations to stand up and be counted is increasing.”

It was also clear that the Polish government was not reacting as the Jewish leaders abroad hoped they would.

Warsaw’s reluctance to respond to these threats did not deter B’nai B’rith from continuing to push for MFN revocation. In fact, it likely pushed the leadership to issue a resolution that was passed by the organization’s Board of Governors in May 1968. The resolution appeared in the June 4, 1968 U.S. Congressional Record, with an introductory statement from Virginia Senator Harry F. Byrd, Jr. Byrd pointed out that Poland was granted

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106 Embassy Warsaw to Department of State, April 1, 1968, General Records of the Department of State/Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 3089, SOC POL 14 (4/1/68), NACP.

107 Ibid.
MFN status in hopes that by doing so, Poland would become increasingly independent from the Soviet Union. This, he argued, was not the case. Instead, Poland was benefiting from favorable trade relations with the U.S., while simultaneously following Moscow’s line and sending arms to North Vietnam. He believed that Poland’s MFN status needed to be reevaluated.  

B’nai B’rith’s resolution, which appeared directly below Byrd’s call to reconsider Poland’s MFN status, read:

In 1958, Congress authorized the President to extend the most-favored-nation tariff benefit to Yugoslavia and Poland, whose governments were then moving away from Soviet domination and were seeking closer relations with the West. Poland continues as one of only two nations of East Europe that enjoys the privilege of its exports entering the United States at the lowest duties imposed by the tariff act. Ironically, Rumania and Czechoslovakia, substantially independent and genuinely seeking better relations with the West, have not been granted this economic advantage.

In view of the Polish government’s encouragement of anti-Semitism and hostility to the West, B’nai B’rith calls upon the President of the United States to declare that the conditions which led to granting most-favored-nation benefits to Poland no longer exist and that therefore this preferential status be rescinded.

A systematic, government-organized campaign of anti-Semitism can no longer be regarded as simply a matter of domestic concern. Our generation knows too well the ultimate cost in lives and civilized standards. The governments of the world must speak out against this reactionary menace.

By highlighting that the original reason Poland had been granted MFN status, namely its desire to move closer to the West, was no longer relevant, the B’nai B’rith Board of Governors hoped that the U.S. government would reconsider. Also calling attention to the fact that Romania and Czechoslovakia, which had done precisely what Poland had failed to do, did not have this status further indicates that the B’nai B’rith leaders viewed this as a Cold War issue, not only a Jewish issue. Because of the geopolitics of the time, it appears as though Wexler believed that couching

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108 “Communist Poland’s Trade Status with the United States” June 4, 1968, B’nai B’rith Collection, Folder 139 Poland I/II, AJA.

109 Ibid.
the need to revoke Poland’s MFN status in Cold War terms would be more successful than simply drawing attention to the government’s antisemitism.

Yet, this was a Jewish issue, as their resolution indicated at the end. Jewish leaders, recognizing that they could perhaps more effectively influence policy by presenting this as a Cold War issue, also believed that World War II, which had ended only a little over twenty years before, still resonated with American government leaders. The perception that America had not done enough to save European Jewry was real. Thus, while the appeal to Cold War sensibilities was practical, highlighting the Jews’ distress in Poland in 1968, appealed to their emotions and conscience.

On June 12 and 13, Herman Edelsberg, the director of B’nai B’rith’s International Council, went before the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Banking and Currency Committee to read Wexler’s statements regarding Poland’s MFN status. He read:

Poland has clearly moved away from the West and is more subservient to Moscow than ever. The Poland of 1968 is not the Poland of 1963; she no longer qualifies as an ‘independent.’ The economic benefits of 1968 are nonetheless still tailored to the Poland of 1963. In view of Poland’s government inspired anti-Semitism and her consistent aping of her Soviet master, Congress should rescind the tariff benefits.

There are two kinds of precedent in our history to guide us. In the 1930’s as the Hitler menace grew with one conquest after another, and his appetite was whetted by appeasement, the West continued business as usual. The tragic verdict of history is, as the book “While Six Million Died” reminds us, that the American governmental indifference, apathy and inaction – inaction that was reflected in other Western states – permitted the Nazi crematoria to murder hundreds of thousands – perhaps millions – who might have been saved.

There is, however, another precedent and another guide. In the first decade of the century, the pogroms and brutal discriminations of Tsarist Russia shocked the conscience of Americans. Protests mounted in the press and in the Congress. President Taft refused at first to take any action, claiming that the larger American interest was in continued trade with Russia. But on December 13, 1911, the House of Representatives in an action that rebounds to its eternal credit, voted 301 to 1 to direct the President of the United States to terminate its commercial treaty with Russia, which had been in force since 1832. And the treaty was scrapped…
It is, we submit, contrary to America’s national interest to grant economic privileges to this Polish government, which by its shameful conduct has forfeited the right to such privileges. Congress, we earnestly hope, will so declare and rescind most-favored-nation treatment for Poland.\footnote{110}{“Statement of Dr. William A. Wexler of Savannah, GA, President of B’nai B’rith Before the House Ways and Means Committee,” June 12, 1968, B’nai B’rith Collection, Folder 139 Poland I/II, AJA; “Statement of Dr. William A. Wexler of Savannah, GA, President of B’nai B’rith Before the Senate Banking and Currency Committee,” June 13, 1968, B’nai B’rith Collection, Folder 139 Poland I/II, AJA.}

Thus, Wexler’s statement, far more blunt than any of his previous statements, stated loud and clear that America had a moral obligation to revoke Poland’s MFN status. His references to history and America’s relatively recent failure to save more of Europe’s Jews could only have been intended to pull at Congressional heartstrings. He then presented an important historical precedent in order to demonstrate that there was an example of Congress making a difference.

Wexler also appealed to individual members of Congress who he believed he could convince to support his fight to revoke Poland’s MFN. Wexler had reason to believe that some of them would be willing to help, as several, including Representatives Seymour Halpern and Edward J. Derwinski, had spoken out immediately after the campaign broke out. Both commented on the irony of the proximity of the events to the 25th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which they saw as a powerful and politically provocative coincidence. Representative Leonard Farbstein also spoke out, linking the Polish campaign to historical Polish pogroms and stating that “it was an old tactic in Eastern Europe to divert the masses by use of anti-Semitism.”\footnote{111}{Jewish Telegraphic Agency, “Warsaw Anti-semitic Campaign is Denounced from Floor of Congress,” March 14, 1968, http://www.jta.org/1968/03/14/archive/warsaw-anti-semitic-campaign-is-denounced-from-floor-of-congress.} American politicians continued to speak out against the campaign, even after the initial outbreak. On July 15, Connecticut Senator Thomas J. Dodd wrote to Wexler thanking
him for his interest in Dodd’s resolution proposing the revocation of Poland’s MFN status and expressing great pleasure that B’nai B’rith had previously endorsed such a move.  

Wexler also believed that the press would be an important avenue through which to promote their cause. In a series of letters to the editor of the New York Times, Wexler explained why revoking Poland’s MFN was in the best interest of the American public:

> When it was last renewed in 1964 by President Johnson, he stated bluntly that our purpose was to ‘encourage peaceful efforts toward loosening of control from Moscow.’ Both countries, he said, ‘are prepared to undertake considerable risks to maintain and increase their independence.’

The events of this spring showed dramatically that our confidence in the present Polish government was altogether misplaced. The Poland of 1968 is, with the possible exception of Eastern Germany, the most servile of the Moscow satellites. When the students of Poland petitioned for an end to Moscow-dominated censorship of their theater and their press, and for greater freedom generally, they were put down with police clubs and fire hoses. When it seemed that the general Polish population, long dissatisfied over the Soviet Union’s domination of Poland’s economic and foreign policy, might join forces with the students, this Polish government resorted to the shameful device of scapegoating the Jews, in an effort to confuse and divert the upsurge for freedom.

Our trade policy should reflect the realities of 1968, not our hopes of 1964. It should recognize that Czechoslovakia and Romania at considerable risk have moved away from Soviet domination and towards more normal relations with the West; yet they do not enjoy most-favored-nation status. It must recognize too that the present Polish government has flouted the West and has deliberately embarked upon a campaign of anti-Semitism.

Throughout the Eastern European bloc, there are hundreds of thousands of young people and liberals who yearn for greater freedom and independence and better relations with the West. If the United States thoughtlessly continues most-favored-nation treatment for Poland, it turns its back on these potential friends of the West. It says, in effect, that it makes no difference that their efforts have been crushed by brute force and by no less brutal government-inspired anti-Semitism; America will do business as usual.  

112 “Letter from Thomas J. Dodd to Wexler,” July 15, 1968, B’nai B’rith Collection, Folder 139 Poland I/II, AJA.

113 “Letter to the Editor,” June 18, 1968, B’nai B’rith Collection, Folder 139 Poland I/II, AJA.
Not dealing with the situation in Poland, he claimed, would be turning America’s back on potential allies in the fight against Moscow and Communism. It would, in a sense, continue to reward the Polish government for its bad behavior, rather than hold it accountable. America, he argued, needed a partner and MFN was designed to reward potential partners. With Poland toeing the Moscow line, Poland was hardly an ideal partner. He underplayed the Jewish issue, instead revealing the far more serious repercussions, at least from the perspective of most New York Times readers, in the larger Cold War battle.

Calls to revoke Poland’s MFN status alarmed the State Department and White House. Responding to early calls for the revocation, William B. Macomber, Jr., the Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations, wrote in mid-May that:

> Most-favored-nation treatment for Polish imports is subject, of course, to review in the light of changing conditions. We have concluded, however, that the withdrawal of most-favored-nation treatment from that country at this time would not contribute to an improvement of the situation … It would be more likely to jeopardize what ability we have to influence events and would be damaging to United States interests and policy objectives as a whole.¹¹⁴

Macomber’s response explained that the government could not put aside its larger interests in Poland at the present time. Furthermore, he argued, that perhaps revoking Poland’s MFN status would also be against the Polish Jews’ interest, given that another major challenge for Jewish organizations was working to ensure that the Jews who were leaving Poland could resettle in the United States. The American government, too, was focused on facilitating immigration. When U.S. Congressman Joshua Eilberg inquired as to whether the U.S. government had warned Poland that their continued attack on the Jews would lead to stronger demands to revoke Poland’s Most-Favored-Nation status, Macomber replied:

We have been mindful of the importance of facilitating so far as we are able to emigration of those Jews who wish to leave Poland. Provocative public statements or official acts of severe retaliation against Poland – such as the withdrawal of MFN treatment – could be counterproductive in effect by causing the Poles to cut off the flow of emigration.115

Thus, the revocation of this status, which only a few years later would be a major card dealt to the Soviet Union at the height of the Soviet Jewry movement, was not considered to be in the best interests of either the U.S. government, or the Jews in Poland, and was subsequently rejected. The United States government was reluctant to issue any harsh statements or levy sanctions against the Polish government, despite pressure to do so from American-Jewish leaders.

In July, Katzenbach wrote to the President telling him that he heard that Congressman Farbstein was planning to offer an amendment that would withdraw MFN from Poland. Katzenbach believed that the amendment would pass if they did not take action immediately. From Katzenbach’s perspective, revoking MFN could potentially harm emigration or make things worse for the Jews remaining in Poland. It would also harm the U.S. relationship with Poland and make it difficult to restore MFN status in the future.116 During a phone call with Ambassador Michalowski, Michalowski confirmed that a revocation of MFN would be seen as a result of “Jewish pressures” that would likely lead to a “backlash.”117 Katzenbach noted that although B’nai B’rith had been pushing for the passage, he had spoken to B’nai B’rith Director of International Affairs, Herman Edelsberg, who said “he and his colleagues can probably


116 Urgent note to the President from Katzenbach re: Polish Jews and MFN, July 8, 1968, General Records of the Department of State/Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 3089, SOC POL 14 (6/1/68), NACP.

117 Embassy Warsaw to Department of State, June 29, 1968, General Records of the Department of State/Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 3089, SOC POL 14 (6/1/68), NACP.
prevent passage of the amendment (by avoiding a roll call vote) if he can assure proponents of the measure (including Farbstein) that there will be a strong Presidential statement – within the next several weeks, but after the Foreign Aid Bill has passed – condemning anti-Semitism in Poland.”\(^{118}\) Without an understanding of the checks and balances in place in the American government, it sounds as though Katzenbach was admitting that the Jews were more powerful than the President of the U.S., and such an assessment would almost certainly be made by the Polish government.

Katzenbach advised the President to be prepared to issue a statement if the amendment could be blocked, but “if the Jewish leaders cannot prevent passage of the amendment, there will be no need for a Presidential statement.”\(^{119}\) If the President was prepared to issue a statement, however, Katzenbach was ready to tell Edelsberg that the President was prepared to make a public statement of concern either at a press conference, before a group of Jewish leaders, or in response to a letter from a group of Jewish leaders. Furthermore, Katzenbach said that he would meet with the Polish ambassador to inform him that they would try to prevent the withdrawal of MFN, but “the responsibility for the public outcry which this amendment represents rests wholly on the shoulders of the Polish Government.”\(^{120}\) In the long run, if things did not change, Katzenbach would warn the Ambassador, there was no way they could prevent it from coming up in the next Congress where it would likely pass.\(^{121}\)

\(^{118}\) Urgent note to the President from Katzenbach re: Polish Jews and MFN, July 8, 1968, General Records of the Department of State/Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 3089, SOC POL 14 (6/1/68), NACP.

\(^{119}\) Ibid.

\(^{120}\) Ibid.

\(^{121}\) Ibid.
Katzenbach drafted a statement for the President’s review, just in case this was the route they would take. The statement emphasized both nations’ commitments to human rights and dignity, including religious freedom. The statement then spoke about the President’s concern, like millions of other Americans, regarding the recent developments and the fear and uncertainty for the few Jews who remained in Poland. The statement did not delve into any particulars regarding the causes, but simply stated that whatever the “purpose and motivation,” the government’s actions have deeply impacted Polish Jews. Then came the stern punchline:

The world needs no reminder of how anti-Semitism can spread like a pestilence, leaving horror and tragedy in its wake. The lessons of history remain too vivid and too stark to ever again permit civilized nations to make innocent men the victims of political stratagems or maneuvering. Together with my countrymen, I condemn anti-Semitism wherever it may exist, whatever form it may take, whatever it may be called. I call on the Polish Government, and on men of good will everywhere, to join with me in this condemnation.\textsuperscript{122}

The President responded to Katzenbach that he should inform Edelsberg that the President would make a statement if the MFN amendment did not pass. After about four months, the Jewish leaders who had been pushing for a Presidential statement were about to get one, ironically, if only they could prevent Congress from passing the amendment that so many of them had been pushing for.\textsuperscript{123} Either way, it seemed, the government would be taking a stance, thus securing the Jewish lobby a victory.

American Jews were not only aware of the Polish government’s antisemitic campaign beginning in March 1968, but American Jewish leaders immediately mobilized in response as the attacks on both individuals and Jewish institutions in Poland continued. Given that Polish Jews were unable to really fight on their own behalf, American Jews engaged in the most vocal

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
response to the Polish campaign. They were not using Zionist rhetoric to fight the anti-Zionist campaign, however. Instead, they were turning to previous periods of antisemitism in Poland, as well as to contemporaneous instances of minority (particularly racial) oppression within the United States. This demonstrates that they immediately understood this as an antisemitic, not anti-Zionist, campaign. They also understood this as being part of a larger political struggle in Poland, in which the Jews were viewed and targeted as scapegoats. Finally, they recognized that this was a Cold War battle, and they appealed to the U.S. government officials and their fellow Americans on such grounds.

While initially they hoped that statements, protests, and petitions condemning the campaign would be sufficient, the continued attack on Jews, combined with the consistent flow of emigration from Poland, forced American Jewish leaders to take a harder stance that pushed for revocation of Poland’s MFN status and ensured that despite restrictions on immigration for those who had been members of the Communist party, Polish Jews could, indeed, gain entry into America. So, how effective was the collective Jewish attempt to end the campaign? The campaign lasted about three years, and to be sure, Polish-American relations suffered during this period. While Poland’s MFN was not revoked, damage had been done, and according to the Polish embassy in Washington, D.C., Poland believed that it was facing a major public relations fiasco, and they would work to counter what they perceived to be a Jewish anti-Polish campaign for the remainder of the Communist period. But in an ironic twist, efforts to end the campaign ensured that negotiations between Western Jews and the Polish authorities continued, and even as Jews streamed out of Poland, the Polish government worked to ensure that some semblance of Jewishness continued. They believed that they had to take into account the perceptions that they had regarding Jewish power and influence in the West.
As to why the American Jewish response to 1968 has largely been forgotten, the documentary evidence provides several possibilities. The rhetoric comparing what was going on in Poland in 1968 with earlier episodes of widespread antisemitism in history indicates that this could have been seen as just one more example of Polish antisemitism. The inability, or perhaps undesirability, to distinguish between periods of antisemitism and instead to see this as one of many instances of Polish antisemitism constructs a Poland that is unequivocally and continuously antisemitic. It also may have been viewed as part of the larger Soviet Jewry movement occurring at the time, since Poland was part of the Soviet bloc. Another possible explanation is that by 1972, the waves of emigration from Poland had ended and the country had a new, more Western-looking government. The development of closer ties with America and American Jews by the late 1970s may have overshadowed the earlier events. Finally, I believe that the rhetoric that cast the anti-Zionist campaign as being the final chapter of Polish Jewish history led many simply to forget about Polish-Jewry until the appearance of articles in the 1990s and 2000s celebrating the “revival” of Polish-Jewish life. Thus, the politics of memory are very much at play here, and perhaps this may explain why the campaign has received so little attention from American Jewish historians.

Although American Jews were ultimately unable to halt either the 1968 Polish campaign or antisemitism in the region in general, they certainly tried to do whatever they could, believing that it was their obligation, given the Talmudic concept, “kol aravim ze bazez,” (all of Israel is responsible for one another). In Chapter 3 I will explore the impact of the campaign in Poland, both for the TSKŻ, as well as on the religious community. Once again, the American Jewish community played a central role in sustaining Jewish life. While they were not supporting the TSKŻ financially, the TSKŻ served as the face of Polish Jewry, which the Polish government
officials hoped would ensure American Jewish leaders that there was still Jewish life in the country. At the same time, American Jews continued to serve as the financial and spiritual lifeline for the dwindling religious community. Demographically ravaged by the campaign, the Polish-Jewish community in the post-1968 period would continue to have a strong symbolic significance with Jews abroad, which the Polish government recognized and took into account when determining its policies towards the community.
CHAPTER 3
FROM UNCERTAINTY TO A NEW NORMALCY

As evidenced in Chapter 2, the leaders of American Jewish organizations participated in a form of religious diplomacy in the late 1960s in order to curb the state-sponsored antisemitism in Poland. While scholars have written about the Jewish lobbies for Israel and Soviet Jewry, there is less extant literature about American-Jewish activities just west of the Soviet border.\(^1\) Poland’s central place in Jewish collective memory – both in terms of Poland’s rich Jewish history and perhaps more strongly, the Holocaust’s epicenter and subsequent impact on the once center of Jewish life in Poland – mobilized many American Jews to react strongly to the Polish government’s anti-Zionist campaign. Jews and Poles co-existed peacefully during much of the 1,000 year Polish-Jewish history, and both Poles and Jews left indelible marks on each other’s traditions, languages, and cultures.\(^2\) Those who could view Poland without looking through the lens of the Holocaust were able to recall the rich material heritage. Some continued to live in Poland even after the bulk of Polish Jewry no longer did. Whether they or their ancestors had left Poland or they continued to live there themselves, Poland remained significant for Jews long after it was no longer a world center of Jewish life.

The Polish authorities recognized this connection, and even as factions within the government carried out the anti-Zionist campaign, there were others who understood that they had to sustain some semblance of Jewishness in Poland. The perception that foreign Jews held a tremendous amount of power and influence in the West was strong in Poland, so there was a

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\(^1\) According to Yossi Shain, “organized lobbies of Jewish-Americans have long been cited as the most powerful diasporic voice in affecting U.S. foreign policy” (Yossi Shain, *Marketing the American Creed Abroad: Diasporas in the U.S. and their Homelands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 133).

\(^2\) This is somewhat simplified, since it suggests that the two groups were totally distinct, which they were not.
need to differentiate between the anti-Zionist policies and antisemitism. Making this distinction enabled the Party to fund the TSKŻ after the Joint was removed from Poland. It also allowed the authorities to overlook the Joint’s continued involvement when it came to the religious Congregation. In 1967 the Joint allocated over $425,000 dollars in aid for welfare, the religious Congregation, materials for the cooperatives (which subsequently supported the TSKŻ) and for other administrative costs.\(^3\) If the Polish government followed through on its threat to cut off support offered by the Joint, the costs would have been prohibitively high. Fortunately for the Jews of Poland, the Joint was able to continue operating in Poland under the cover of the Geneva based Société de Secours et d’Entr’Aide (SSE). The SSE was established in 1953 when the Joint was no longer able to operate in a number of Soviet Satellite states, including Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. The funding came from the Joint, but the SSE was viewed as an independent organization, and as such, was allowed to continue operating in Poland after December 1967. Together, the Joint (unofficially) and SSE (officially) sustained Polish Jewry both materially and spiritually.\(^4\)

While Chapter 2 explored reactions to the outbreak of antisemitism in Poland, Chapter 3 focuses on internal developments in Poland, and in particular, on the continuation of Polish Jewishness throughout the campaign, from 1968 to roughly 1972. After a brief glimpse into

\(^3\) Kohane to Louis Horowitz (Budget for Poland-1967), December 7, 1967, AR 65/74-0321, JDCA. The welfare assistance, which amounted to $365,000 of the $425,000 included financial assistance for those in need, medical assistance, funding for the Old Age Home, school canteens, youth clubs, cultural activities, ORT courses, summer camps, cemeteries, the Jewish Historical Institute, Cooperative building investment, the Jewish museum in Kraków, administration, and miscellaneous expenses. Not all of this money was spent, however, as starting in September, the government prevented certain aid, such as stipends for Jewish university students and canteens in Yiddish schools, to be distributed. In some areas, however, such as the Congregation, they spent more than had been allocated. Of the over $425,000 allocated, they only spent $381,483.

\(^4\) For more on the SSE and Joint, see Shachtman, I Seek My Brethren. For more on the Joint’s work in Poland specifically, see Schneider, Sze’erit hapleta.
Jewish life before 1968, I will discuss how even as individuals flocked to the train station to emigrate, the leaders of the Jewish institutions in Poland, some of whom had only recently been appointed by the state as the former leaders packed their bags, worked to sustain Jewish life in the country. The various leaders of the TSKŻ, including Lejb Domb and Edward Rajber, and the editor of the *Folks Sztyme*, Samuel Tenenblatt, continued to plan events and organize meetings. The Congregation leaders, Isaac Frenkiel, Chaim Rotner, and Maciej Jakubowicz also worked tirelessly to ensure that the Congregation had what it needed to sustain religious life and provide food for the kosher canteens. Undoubtedly, the uncertainty of 1968 was intense, and it was unclear what the long-term impact on the Polish Jews would be. But by mid-1969, both the TSKŻ and the Congregation began to establish a new “normal.” The TSKŻ held elections in April 1969, and a few months later, the government allowed Frenkiel’s wife to go to Geneva to speak with the SSE about the Congregation’s needs. Undoubtedly, the government’s commitment to these two organizations was motivated by their concern for Poland’s image abroad. Both the government, and the Joint/SSE understood this, and they pushed each other to determine what the other’s limits would be. How much, for example, could the Congregation request from the SSE? When things did not go as the Joint/SSE hoped, as for example with currency exchange rates, the Joint/SSE threatened to go to the press. Thus, once again, perceptions shaped reality.

**Jewish Life on the Eve of the March Events**

Before we can understand the significance of the post-1968 (or really the post-1967) Jewish experience in Poland, one must first understand the characteristics of Jewish life in People’s Poland before June 1967. In 1966 the Joint’s Akiva Kohane sent a detailed report to the Director, Charles Jordan, about his August visit to Poland. His visit was longer than usual, so it provides a great deal of description about what was actually happening on the ground. Because
he visited during the vacation period when government and TSKŻ officials were not in the office, he was “in the field,” so to speak. Thus, Kohane’s report was based more on his observations and discussions with individuals than on meetings he had with higher ups in the government, and as a result, he was able to focus on the reality in Poland, rather than listen to prepared statements about the Jewish community. Based on his conversations, one of the first things Kohane described in his report was that there were tensions within the communist party, and that some wished to change the Joint’s work because:

> It is a thorn in the side to some people that the Jews are getting more welfare benefits in various fields of activity than non-Jews…Some people in the Party are jealous that the TSKŻ can afford to build a large House of Work and Culture, that they can afford to organize a Congress of Jewish Youth in Krakow, that they have a festival of Jewish choirs and dramatic groups in Wroclaw, and so on. The same applies to the Jewish cooperatives, and last but not least, to the very existence of the TSKŻ. It is a fact that not only Polish Communists, but also some leading Jewish Communists, don’t believe that a “Yevsekcje” of the Communist Party is necessary.  

Kohane understood that with the dwindling Jewish population, there were many who believed that the Jewish community did not need as much assistance as it had in the immediate post-war period when there were hundreds of thousands of Jews in Poland. Furthermore, as Poland’s economic woes worsened, the “benefits” that Jews received through the Jewish community may have brought about unwanted attention and jealousies. He also noted that there were whisperings that this could impact the rate of currency exchange for the Joint, which had been favorable until this point. Such a change would impact not only the Joint’s Polish budget, but potentially the

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5 Kohane to Jordan re: trip to Poland, September 7, 1966, AR 65/74-0322, JDCA. The “Evsektiia” was the Jewish section of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union. One of many nationalist sections of the Party, it was disbanded, along with the others, in early 1930 (The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, s.v. “Evsektiia,” http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Evsektiia (accessed May 24, 2015)).

6 Kohane to Jordan re: trip to Poland, September 7, 1966, AR 65/74-0322, JDCA.

7 Ibid. Though there were some intense negotiations, in the end the government dropped their attempts to change the rate (Telegram to Jordan from Geneva).
organization’s budget for the other countries in which they were working. Thus, Kohane could already see a change in attitude well before the 1967 Six Day War, though of course, he had no way of knowing what was to come.

Kohane also discussed the youth in his report. In 1966 there were still four Yiddish schools (in Łódź, Wrocław, Legnica, and Szczecin), but he noted that there would not be more than five first graders in any of these schools come fall. The upper grades had more students, and thus he believed that the schools would remain open, though he admitted that the small enrollment for the younger grades, “looms as a great danger for the future.” While he could only predict school enrollment, he witnessed first-hand the Jewish youth at the five summer camps he visited. As with the schools, the majority of attendees were teenagers and university students, or in other words the offspring from the post-war baby boom, while among the younger children the numbers were declining. For the first time, he wrote, there would be a September term in addition to the July and August terms for university students. Kohane also noted that the TSKŻ was starting to view the summer camps as the main source for Jewish identity building, since the schools were suffering. As a result, he noted, “the TSKŻ has issued a special circular about the ‘Yiddishezacje’ [Yiddishization] of the summer camps and youth camps, putting a much heavier emphasis than in the past on the Jewish program.” At the same time, though, they were having trouble finding Jewish staff. In fact, at one camp, the director was not Jewish.⁸

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⁸ While the proper spelling for the TSKŻ is with the “Ż,” the JDC’s typewriters were not Polish and therefore they did not have the symbol. Thus, when I am quoting directly, I will use their spelling. They also refer to them as the Kulturverband. I also refer to the religious Jewish community as the “Congregation,” since that is the term they use. Finally, there are multiple ways to spell Folks Sztyne, the Yiddish newspaper from the Community period. The JDC often refers to it as the FOLKSSTIMME, which is the spelling I will use when quoting from their documents (Kohane to Jordan re: trip to Poland, September 7, 1966, AR 65/74-0322, JDCA). The goal of Yiddishization continued into the post-1968 period. As late as January 1970 there were still TSKŻ leaders who wanted to organize a Jewish school with Yiddish Courses. The alternative plan was to organize Yiddish courses in the TSKŻ clubs (Protocol 9 – Presidium Meeting, January 9, 1970, 1970 Protocols, TSKZA).
Another area of concern for Kohane was the rising tension and power struggle between the TSKŻ and the Congregation. Though there had been tensions long before, as August Grabski and Albert Stankowski have shown, the Congregation was feeling increasingly vulnerable given the strong connection between the TSKŻ and the government.9 Sometime in late 1966 the chair of the Congregation, Frenkiel, learned that the TSKŻ leadership went to the Ministry of Religious Affairs to suggest that the 7,309 member TSKŻ incorporate the 5,500 member Congregation, along with its eleven synagogues, nineteen houses of prayer, eighteen kosher canteens, and sixteen kosher food stores.10 The authorities refused, stating that the Congregation was a religious body guaranteed by the constitution. As long as it worked within the law, which the government constantly verified, the Congregation had a right to exist. Furthermore, they were told that “any step against the congregation would have a very hostile press abroad, which they would like to avoid.”11 Thus, even before 1966, the fear of bad press factored into the government’s approach to the organization, and this fear continued well into the post-’68 period, arguably even strengthening as world Jewry redirected its gaze to Poland. So while the law could


10 Ibid., 266. According to Grabski and Stankowski, much of the tension stemmed from the TSKŻ devout secularists’ anger towards the TSKŻ branches that were not anti-religious, such as Krakow, for example, where there were closer relations and some membership overlap, and in those locations some even served on the leadership for both the Congregation and the TSKŻ.

11 Kohane Report on Visit to Poland November 15-18 to Jordan, December 1, 1966, AR 65/74-0322, JDCA. According to Frenkiet, the TSKŻ representatives also attacked Frenkiel and Jakubowicz personally, calling them Zionists, enemies of Poland, agents of Israel, and accusing them of being in contact with foreign organizations hostile to Poland, especially the Joint. Kohane noted in his report that he didn’t believe this last bit because the TSKŻ actually had much closer contact with the Joint. Kohane then noted that Frenkiel and Jakubowicz had been told by the authorities not to accept any office in the soon-to-be elected Congregation Committee. Frenkiel would, however, continue to be a paid General Secretary of the Committee and, with Kohane’s approval, he would continue as the Vice-Chairman of the Central Relief Committee, despite pressures from the TSKŻ side for him to resign. Rotner took over the position of the Chairman of the Congregation. This would be the first of many shifts in power within the Jewish institutional leadership.
be changed and bogus charges of violating the law could have been made, the fear of bad press internationally was likely the main motivator staying the government’s hand during the period.

To get a sense of the Joint’s financial “power” before it was removed from Poland, one should look at the projected Joint budget for January 1967, which amounted to 1,195,000 złoty. This amount included monthly relief aid, grants for university students and unspecified one time grants, assistance for the youth clubs, school canteens, the old age home, medical services, and administrative costs.\textsuperscript{12} The Congregation received over 350,000 złoty monthly from the Joint and SSE, in addition to their additional income sources of matzah, kosher meat, and Sliwowitz sales, membership fees, and other sources.\textsuperscript{13} The kosher kitchens, which were funded by the SSE, provided 8,625 free meals and 2,675 subsidized meals each month.\textsuperscript{14} It was not a stretch to say that the Joint was single-handedly providing a lifeline for a significant portion of Polish Jewry.

Arguably, the Joint’s most important program was the assistance they provided for the elderly, thus relieving the Polish government of the burden of providing those services. Before the post-war emigration waves began, 350,000 Jews lived in Poland. With each wave of emigration, those who chose to leave were the young and active Jews. This meant that the Polish Jewish population even before the March 1968 emigration wave was on the older side, and a


\textsuperscript{14} Kohane to Jordan: Report on Poland – January 24-27, 1967, AR 65/74-0321, JDCA. According to Kohane, “relief” included actually salary costs because the government prohibited the Congregation from spending more than 40% of the aid sent from the JDC and SSE on administrative costs. It also included payment for services to the community, such as acting as a shames or gabbai (people who assist in the running of religious services) (Report on Poland – Budget for Jewish Religious Congregation in Poland, February 2, 1967, AR 65/74-0321, JDCA).
large portion of this group had no children in Poland to help care for them.\textsuperscript{15} In fact, of the 17-18,000 Jews that the JDC estimated lived in Poland, only about 2,500 people were under the age of 25, a couple thousand were between 25-50 years old, and approximately 15,000 were over 50 years old.\textsuperscript{16} The 18,000 estimate did not include the so-called “marranos” – or Jews who had hidden their roots – of Poland, who according to Lejb Domb, a TSKŻ leader, numbered around 5,000, and were generally younger than the typical Polish Jew.\textsuperscript{17} Nevertheless, even with the ‘marranos’ this was a population that was overwhelmingly middle aged and older, and as the economic situation in Poland worsened, they became increasingly dependent on aid from abroad.

For hundreds of elderly Polish Jews, the Joint’s assistance was their only source of income and they received food from the Congregational canteens. These canteens were life-savers, as food was expensive in Poland at the time. According to A. Kemp Welch, families were spending half of their budgets on food alone by the end of 1970.\textsuperscript{18} The overall situation for the elderly was so dire that the Old Age Home in Warsaw, which was supposed to house seventy people, was housing 100 instead. Even the extension that was underway for an additional 50

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Kohane to Jordan: Report on Poland – January 24-27, 1967, AR 65/74-0321, JDCA.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} It is nearly impossible to cite exact numbers of Jews in Poland for a variety of reasons, and estimates varied widely. In one report from Kohane, this problem was highlighted. He stated that the number the TSKŻ gave the JDC from their Fifth Congress was 18,000, but Domb retorted that he believed the number was closer to 25,000 because there were also “marranos,” Jews who were not involved in the community and in most cases denied any connection to Judaism. This pejorative term was used to describe the crypto-Jews of the Iberian Peninsula who were forced to convert to Christianity in the late Middle Ages. Domb believed that these people would find their way to the Jewish organizations (which many of them did after 1989), and that this group tended to be younger than the general Jewish population in Poland. Nevertheless, Kohane noted that the TSKŻ used the figure 30,000 in public statements, and that this number did not include the “marranos” (Kohane to Jordan: Report on Visit to Poland – February 21-24, 1967, AR 65/74-0321, AJDA).
  \item \textsuperscript{18} A Kemp-Welch, \textit{Poland Under Communism: A Cold War History} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 180.
\end{itemize}
residents – intended to open in fall 1967 - would not have been able to solve the problem of the long waiting list. As a result, Kohane wrote that they were starting to plan for a second Old Age Home, either in Wrocław or Krakow. The government was fully on board, and plans were eventually approved for both homes, though neither would actually come to fruition. These homes were essential, given that Poland’s Jewish community was demographically skewed towards the elderly, and if the Joint did not provide assistance, the government would have to.

While the TSKŻ was largely self-sufficient, bringing in high profits from the cooperatives for which the Joint provided raw materials, the Congregation was almost totally dependent upon the Joint’s assistance.¹⁹ In December 1966, Kohane met Rotner, the new Chairman of the Congregation, and Frenkiel to discuss the 1967 budget. Both Frenkiel and Rotner expressed to Kohane that they needed more funds, since they were receiving less than they had previously, and the money they received was exchanged at a lower rate than in the past.²⁰ Though he could not promise the Congregation leadership any increase, he was sympathetic. In a letter to Jordan he requested an additional $36,000, and wrote:

The Jewish Religious Congregation has a very difficult time anyway, being under constant relentless pressure of the authorities, the Party, and last but not least, of the Kulturverband [TSKŻ]. We are their only support. Without this support they would have collapsed already years ago. I believe that we should not deny them this support for Jewish, for religious, for humanitarian, and for political reasons.²¹

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¹⁹ Kohane to Kass, October 3, 1968, AR 65/74-0320, JDCA. Memo from The TSKŻ also used some of these profits to support other institutions, such as the Yiddish Theater.


²¹ Budget for the Jewish Religious Congregation in Poland, February 28, 1967, AR 65/74-0321, JDCA.
This was, from Kohane’s perspective, a moral obligation that the Joint had to fulfill. Though in the end not all of the money was approved, their budget was increased.\(^{22}\)

Regardless of what the actual demographics were, the above figures and instances reveal just how essential the Joint was for the survival of Polish Jewry. It was immediately clear that the Jewish community in Poland would suffer substantially if the Joint could not continue to send funds to the Congregation after it was forced to leave Poland at the end of 1967. While it was clear that their agreement with the TSKŻ had ended, it took a while before the Joint received any clear message about whether they could continue to send aid in for the Congregation, likely because the government was well aware of the potential repercussions if they cut off funding entirely from the primary aid organization sustaining the elderly Jews in Poland.

Yet, on September 25, 1967, Jakubowicz called Kohane to inform him that the authorities had notified the Congregation that after January 1, they would not be able to receive money from the Joint, and that they would have to be self-sufficient. According to Frenkiel, the only concern that the authorities had regarding the Congregation was that there would be money to continue employing Rotner in Warsaw, though they seemed unconcerned about where the money would come from (they mentioned that the Congregation would have to raise more money from its members). Jakubowicz did not know whether this meant an end only to Joint money, or if the SSE’s grants for the kosher canteens were also involved. Believing that the government had not yet fully thought this through, Kohane reiterated his belief that the government would not go through with this for fear of the negative publicity. He wrote to the Joint office in New York:

I have to admit that I didn’t believe that the authorities would go so far, because without our help the very existence of any organized religious life in Poland is endangered, including the maintenance of synagogues and cemeteries. I believed – and to some degree I still believe – that such a consequence the Polish People’s

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\(^{22}\) Kohane to Jordan: Report on Visit to Poland – March 12-17, AR 65/74-0321, JDCA.
Republic can hardly afford, from the point of view of publicity. However, it seems that everything is possible with that Government, which lost any good sense it may have had after June 5th.  

Precisely because anything was possible in Poland at that moment, Kohane asked Jakubowicz for a list of names of needy people throughout Poland (he already had the list from Krakow) in case things got worse and the Joint needed to find a way to send money directly to individuals, rather than through the Congregation. Kohane felt Jakubowicz’s desperation through the telephone line, writing to Haber:

Jakubowicz is a broken man, who doesn’t know what the future will bring. He asked the JDC not to forget the last few thousand Jews who are living in Poland. He also asked whether it would not be possible to send some more money to the Congregation before the end of the year, so that they should have at least some small reserve when the meager years will start.

Unwilling to sit back without some kind of response to the Polish situation, Joint official Samuel Haber was prepared to go to the highest ranking Polish official he could access in Washington, D.C., the Polish Ambassador. Though Haber himself had no real power, especially since the Joint was committed to its non-political stance, he was determined to remind the Ambassador of the “unfortunate public reaction in the United States” following the mysterious murder of Charles Jordan in Prague, as well as the news of the increase in antisemitism in Eastern Europe since the Six Day War. Jewish officials hoped to use the threat of negative press to convince the Ambassador to speak with officials in Warsaw and have them reconsider the Joint’s removal.

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23 Kohane to Haber, September 25, 1967, AR 65/74-0321, JDCA.

24 Ibid.

25 Confidential Memo to Akiva Kohane, September 28, 1967, AR65/74-0321, JDCA. Jordan was mysteriously murdered in Prague in 1967. The Czechoslovak government’s refusal to seriously investigate was a serious problem for the JDC (Shachtman, I Seek My Brethren, 18-19).
from the country. Thus, the Joint officials were aware of the perceived power of the press and public opinion, and they were willing to use that to their benefit.

Given the uncertainty over whether the Joint or SSE could continue to support the Congregation, Kohane believed that there may have been a change of heart in Warsaw as the authorities began to realize precisely what an end to the Joint’s assistance would mean for them. In order to determine whether there had been such a shift in policy, Kohane mentioned to Rotner and Frenkel in early November 1967 that he had not received a budget from them for 1968. Kohane wrote that he could hear the pride and happiness in their voices when they told him that “business [would continue] as usual” and that they expected the same amount of aid in 1968 as they received in 1967 ($60,000 plus money for matzah, holiday grants, and money for the synagogue renovations). While he was unable to promise more than $5,000 a month, Kohane agreed to discuss the additional costs with them in Warsaw.26

Having received an unexpected positive response to the Joint’s expected contribution, Kohane decided to check on the status of the SSE’s contributions. He followed up by asking, “because of my great interest in the program, I would like to know what are the plans for the kosher mess halls for next year?” Again, the response was “business as usual,” with Rotner even going so far as to ask whether an increase would be possible.27 Once again, Kohane mentioned that they should speak the next time he was in Warsaw, indicating either that Kohane believed – or at least strongly hoped – that he would be in Warsaw again soon, despite not having heard back from the authorities whether or not he could return, or that he was trying to drop hints to see

26 Memo re: telephone conversation with Rotner, November 8, 1967, AR 65/74-0321, JDCA.
27 Ibid. The kosher dining halls provided kosher meat to the members of the community, serving both a religious and/or charitable function.
if he could gather any other information from Frenkiel or Rotner. In any case, the mixed signals sent to the Joint regarding whether they could continue to help the Congregation reveals that the government itself seemed unsure of how to navigate its financial and political stance toward local Jewish life in Poland. But it seemed as though the Joint would be able to continue sending money directly to the Congregation, despite not being able to operate officially in Poland.\(^{28}\)

But continuing their work would come at a high cost. Literally. On December 14, Rotner called Kohane to follow up on a letter he sent in late November asking for a loan of one million złoty to begin purchasing flour and packing materials for matzah baking for Passover 1968. Part of the urgency, he explained, was that the more favorable exchange rate that the Congregation had at the time (52.7 złoty to the dollar) was going to expire on December 31. Also, he explained that they had to start baking matzah soon in order to be ready for Passover. Kohane stated that he had thought that the exchange rate was settled, to which Rotner said that it was, but that it had not yet been put into writing. Frenkiel, who was also on the line, jumped into the conversation, saying, “Nothing is settled as yet and we do not know when and if we get the license.”\(^{29}\) While Rotner seemed to trust that things would work out, Frenkiel was far more skeptical and seemed worried not only about the exchange rate, but also about whether money could be sent at all. After months of the government wavering, Kohane seemed unwilling to take the risk and he wrote to NY saying that $20,000 should be sent immediately so that it arrived before the end of the month. The payment would provide the community with the funds needed for matzah baking (according to Kohane, they would be able to repay most of the loan by February with the funds raised from selling matzah), while also giving them extra funding for 1968, just in case the

\(^{28}\) Haber to A.L. Easternman of the World Jewish Congress, December 20, 1967, AR 65/74-0321, JDCA.

\(^{29}\) Aide-Memoire on a Telephone Conversation with Mr. Rotner, December 14, 1967, AR 65/74-0321, JDCA.
government changed its mind once again.\textsuperscript{30} Thus, as the new year began, all they could do was wait to see what would happen.

In early February 1968, the Joint received confirmation that the SSE’s first payment for the canteens in 1968 was accepted and exchanged at the previous rate. Having successfully sent the money in from the SSE for the kitchens, the Joint was ready to move forward and send the Congregation its first payment for the year.\textsuperscript{31} This payment did not go as smoothly. When Kohane failed to receive a receipt for the Joint’s $5,000 transfer, he called the Congregation and Frenkiel told him that they had no license to receive payment from the Joint, just as Frenkiel had predicted during their last discussion in December. Rotner, he said, had gone to the authorities to ask what to do with the money, and Frenkiel would write immediately once Rotner returned with an answer. Kohane began coming up with a plan B, should the authorities not allow them to send money directly at the rate of 52.70 złoty, which was the rate for religious organizations. He decided to ask Maître Erwin Haymann, the head of the SSE, to inquire as to how much they could send from the SSE. Perhaps the Joint could include its payments within the SSE transfers, since that payment had gone through without incident.\textsuperscript{32} After all, the SSE was a Joint loophole. Even after the Joint had been invited back into Poland in 1958, the SSE continued to operate, allocating funds for the kosher canteens. Thus, the infrastructure was already in place for a time when the Joint could no longer send the funds directly.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{31} Kohane to Horwitz and Feder, February 6, 1968, AR65/74-0320, JDCA.

\textsuperscript{32} Telephone Conversation with the Religious Congregation, Warsaw, February 21, 1968, AR65/74-0320, JDCA.
The next day Frenkiel and Rotner sent a letter to Geneva saying, “Please be informed that the amount of 5,030.79 American dollars which we received from you by mistake should be taken back by you.” The verdict was in: the Joint could not continue its work in Poland, at least not openly. In March 1968, after months of uncertainty and – perhaps not coincidently – just days after the official anti-Zionist campaign broke out, the religious community was officially informed (again) that it could not accept any Joint money sent directly into Poland.

**Working through the Loophole: the Joint’s Continued Involvement**

On the surface, it seems bizarre that the SSE would be able to continue sending funds while the Joint could not, particularly since it was an open secret that the SSE was funded by the Joint. Yet, in March the religious community, which could not functionally make requests without the government’s consent, asked that in addition to the $4,000 the SSE sent monthly for the kosher canteens, they also send an additional $5,500 to cover the administrative costs. This was exactly the amount that the Joint had paid for administrative costs until then.

This could not have been a coincidence and it speaks to the power of perceptions. It was clear that the Polish government wanted the Joint’s money. However, because of the Joint’s ties with Israel, which the government had recently twisted into accusations that the Joint engaged in...

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33 Letter from the Jewish Religious Congregation in Poland, February 22, 1968, AR65/74-0320, JDCA.

34 In one memo, Kohane noted that people were writing directly to the JDC or to Kohane, thanking them for transfers that were coming in through the names of individuals in Geneva who were sending on behalf of the SSE. That means that the censors were not stopping the letters. Kohane does not seem alarmed that people knew the connection between the organizations though (Kohane to Haber, August 29, 1969, AR65/74-319, JDCA). If the connection was not clear before 1973, an article in B’nai B’rith’s *The National Jewish Monthly* “outed” them (“Mission to Poland,” September 1973, B’nai B’rith Collection 139/Poland II-II, AJA).

35 Kohane to Haber, March 15, 1968, AR65/74-320, JDCA.
espionage on behalf of Israel and the United States, they could not send the money directly.\footnote{The Communist Youth newspaper in Poland “Sztander Mlodych” published the accusation that the JDC is a Zionist organization working as an intelligence organization for the U.S. and Israel (Memo, AR65/74-320, JDCA).}

Ideologically, the Joint was problematic.\footnote{To indicate just how problematic the JDC, or “Joint” was after 1967, a widow of a U.N. employee stopped receiving her late husband’s pension checks because, according to the U.N. office, had failed to send her follow-up letters that were necessary to continue sending the checks. When she looked into what was happening with her letters, she discovered that the censors were stopping the letters, which were addressed to the “U.N. Joint Pension Fund,” under the assumption that they were letters going to the Joint (Memo from Kohane to Haber, January 16, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA).} Financially, it was essential for Poland and its worsening financial situation. Davies writes of the American dollar, “In a country where the Party’s official theory held that the American dollar lay at the root of most evil, the reigning monetary situation was pure Alice.”\footnote{Norman Davies, \textit{God’s Playground}, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 469. He writes that the złoty was “virtually worthless.” In contrast, the dollar was in high demand.} The SSE, which did not have the same explicit connection to Israel as the Joint (the Joint had an office in Israel), served as a neutral intermediary, sending in the much needed hard currency that allowed for the continuation of Jewish life in Poland. Despite its neutrality, however, the SSE officials were not permitted into Poland after 1967.

While they were willing to send funds regardless, they were also curious as to the actual situation on the ground in Poland. With little access to direct information, Haymann and Kohane decided to consult the Jews who were leaving Poland at that very moment.

Because the Joint actively helped to facilitate the post-1968 emigration, providing aid for transit and living while émigrés waited for visas to go to destinations other than Israel, they heard about the situation in Poland from those who had recently left. Indeed, the émigrés played a major role in determining how the Joint could best help those who remained in Poland. Kohane and other Joint representatives interviewed them in order to learn about the conditions
for Jews who had stayed behind. These interviews provided essential information, since the JDC had little to no direct communication with the Polish Jewish leadership.

In June 1968 Kohane issued a detailed, strictly confidential report on the situation of the Jews in Poland, based on extensive talks with Polish Jews in Vienna. In the report he discussed the prevalent antisemitism in Poland, reactions to this antisemitism, and the fate of Jewish organizations in Poland. Kohane went into great depth discussing the tragic economic conditions for the Jews, particularly those who had already made the decision to leave. In his discussion of the TSKŻ, he noted the terrible situation that many of the former TSKŻ leaders were in. One former presidium member had gone so far as to kill himself. Domb, who had tried three times to resign, had not been released from his duties, though he never went to the office. This was a particularly fascinating use of power. Domb had basically stopped working, but the government would not allow him to resign from his position, perhaps because they believed that by remaining in power, he might help the government fight off accusations of antisemitism from abroad. Another former leader, Hersz Smolar, had been kicked out of the Party and fired from his job. Both of his sons were sent to prison. David Sfard’s son, too, was in prison, and Sfard had also been kicked out of the Party after stating during the TSKŻ presidium after the March events, “I will never be a Judenratler.” Referring to those who had been members of the Jewish Council, or Judenrat, in the World War II ghettos, Sfard voiced a somewhat common objection

39 “Situation of the Jews in Poland,” June 10, 1968, AR65/74-0320, JDCA. The term “Judenratler” refers back to the Holocaust period when the members of the Jewish Council, or Judenrat, were accused of collaborating with the Nazi government. The use of this term demonstrates just how suspicious the people were of their leadership, and how some Jewish leaders, such as Domb, viewed his comrades. This highlights that there was a clear split between the “Polish Jews,” who were Poles dedicated to Jewish causes and continuing Jewish life in some way, and those who were merely working in these positions because they were appointed by government higher-ups.
to those who were seen more as puppets of the government than leaders who had the Jewish community’s best interests at heart.

There was, Kohane pointed out, a serious crisis in leadership. The government had removed the former leaders, the last of the “Polish Jews,” and was replacing them with government lackeys. This was true for both the TSKŻ and the Congregation, though Jakubowicz continued in his position for the Congregation, and therefore the Joint and SSE felt that they had at least one reliable contact within the Congregation. They did not, however, trust any of the TSKŻ leaders. Regarding the country’s leadership, Kohane wrote in 1974:

Maybe nothing better illustrates the tragedy of Polish Jewry who had as their leaders some of the most outstanding personalities, intellectual giants, men of great learning and wisdom, of great devotion and courage, today in the present final phase the leaders are people like Finkelstein [the head of the Congregation after Frenkiel’s emigration] and Reiber [sic], both elected by nobody, appointed by a rather low ranking official and directly responsible to him.⁴⁰

Amongst the Folks Sztyme staff, Kohane noted that the young men who were helping Mr. Felhendler, were “considered by the Polish Jews as ‘Judenratlers.’” Kohane’s lament for the leadership was really a lament for the rapidly changing world of Polish Jewry, and his opinion was shared by many of the Polish Jews who left, as well as by some of those who remained, but refused to associate with the official Jewish community. This attitude illustrates yet another reason why the period has been seen as one of darkness and absence, for the Jewish community no longer represented a genuine or authentic Polish Jewishness. The TSKŻ in particular was more of an extension of the government.

⁴⁰ Kohane to Haber, May 22, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.
The “inauthentic” Jewishness of the TSKŻ post-March served mainly propagandistic purposes. For example, though it had “practically no subscribers,” the Folks Sztyme would appear as long as the authorities wanted it to, according to Kohane.\footnote{“Situation of the Jews in Poland,” June 10, 1968, AR65/74-0320, JDCA.} Indeed, the TSKŻ board – and the authorities as well – viewed the paper as the “Ambassador of Polish Jewry,” popularizing and promoting “the Jewish word” in Poland and abroad.\footnote{“Notatka dot. plenum Zarządu Głównego TSKŻ,” May 25, 1972, Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych (MSW) BU_1585_7159, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (hereafter IPN).} Given their concern for all of the negative press abroad, the Folks Sztyme played a crucial role in providing a very different picture of Polish Jewishness. Despite the propaganda, certain aspects of Polish Jewish life had undeniably ended after 1968. There would be no more Jewish summer camps (and according to Kohane there was no hope that they would ever exist again), youth clubs, or cultural circles, and most likely, the Yiddish schools would be converted into Polish state schools.\footnote{“Situation of the Jews in Poland,” June 10, 1968, AR65/74-0320, JDCA; a letter from the JDC to the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry indicated that there had been 2,500 people involved in the summer camps in 1967. These camps, Katzki wrote, were closed by the authorities because the “children had been imbued with a deep feeling for foreign countries.” (Katzki to Glenn Richter, July 19, 1968, AR65/74-0320, JDCA).} The cooperatives, too, were being impacted. Former Jewish chairmen were replaced and they were becoming “normal Polish cooperatives.”\footnote{“Situation of the Jews in Poland,” June 10, 1968, AR65/74-0320, JDCA.} Kohane’s report suggests that the TSKŻ, along with its affiliate organizations or sponsored activities, was just a few months away from liquidation.

In contrast, Kohane was far more hopeful in his report on the Jewish Religious Congregation, which he believed the government was ready to help keep in existence, “in line with other Communist countries.”\footnote{There were Jewish communities throughout the Eastern Bloc. The largest was in the Soviet Union, but the “poster child,” so to speak, was Romania, where Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen had a very positive relationship with the government. Poland and Bulgaria were the only Bloc countries without rabbis.} Unlike the TSKŻ, which was a uniquely Polish Jewish
institution, the religious Congregation was highly symbolic for Jews worldwide, and it also played a major propagandistic role for the government.\textsuperscript{46} As Kohane’s statement indicates, the Congregation (or its equivalent) was an institution common in the Communist bloc, and to close it would undoubtedly make Poland stand out. While Kohane believed that the Congregation would continue to exist, they too, would be faced with serious issues that they would have to overcome. Like the TSKŻ, the Congregation was also experiencing a crisis of leadership. In a period of intense fear and paranoia, Rotner, who had been appointed by the government, suspected Frenkiel of being a security agent, and vice versa. Furthermore, there was almost no oversight when it came to how the Congregation spent the funds that were sent. While the Joint and SSE had previously used the Congregation’s financial reports to keep an eye on the organization, the government now prevented the leaders from sending reports, saying that “the Jews will send you money anyway.”\textsuperscript{47} The government understood the Joint and SSE’s desires to remain active in Poland, and believed they would do whatever it took to continue sending in money. Frenkiel advised Haymann not to buy into this argument and to demand that the SSE continue to receive full reports or they will stop sending money, Frenkiel believed that it was important to call the government’s bluff.\textsuperscript{48} This would, of course, return the power to the SSE as

\textsuperscript{46} An article in the Communist Party USA magazine, \textit{Jewish Affairs}, on the Jewish Historical Institute reveals that the major differences between the two organizations was a potential cause of the tension between the TSKŻ and Congregation. Sol Flapan wrote that at the Jewish Historical Institute Executive board meeting “there was an angry shaking of heads when he said the Warsaw synagogue has become a mecca ‘for a certain group of foreign Jews visiting Poland’ for whom the JHI, the Jewish State Theater, the weekly \textit{Folks Shtime} and the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland are of little or no interest” (Sol Flapan article in \textit{Jewish Affairs} “Poland’s Jewish Historical Institute,” Jan-Feb. 1975, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (hereafter YIVO)).

\textsuperscript{47} “Situation of the Jews in Poland,” June 10, 1968, AR65/74-0320, JDCA.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
the primary funding agency, and since the SSE leadership understood that they were providing important funds, which would otherwise have to be provided by the government, they knew that they had some leeway for their own demands. Throughout this entire period, both the SSE and the authorities pushed each other’s limits to determine how far they could take their demands. Thus, despite their reputation for being all powerful, the authorities were to some extent at the mercy of the Joint/SSE.

The Joint, via the SSE, worked throughout the year to continue sending aid to individuals in Poland. They sent 4,491 aid transfers to Jewish Poles in need of assistance in 1968 alone. 1,348 of these were $40 transfers for those who had been promised visas and the rest were $20 transfers to aid needy families. According to Kohane, this aid likely benefitted over 6,000 people. With time, the JDC stopped sending aid to those who were preparing to emigrate (they would be assisted once they had left), focusing exclusively on those who were not likely to leave. By the end of 1968, only 1,148 of the cards in their index file of people receiving aid were still active. Most of the 1,436 files that had been closed were deactivated due to death or emigration, though a few people refused to accept the offered aid because of the source. While more than half of the files were closed over the course of the year, Kohane warned that he was not sure whether the total number of transfers in 1969 would decrease because they were still receiving large numbers of new names. This seemingly endless supply of Jews needing assistance ensured that the Joint and SSE could continue to operate. This meant that government would not be responsible for these Polish citizens, and at the same time, the Joint and SSE could guarantee that they were receiving aid. It was a win-win situation for both sides, though perhaps the Joint and the SSE were the true winners, since their perceived power and influence made

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49 Kohane to Haber, January 10, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.
them indispensable, despite the ideological issues. As the only foreign Jewish organization with a presence in Poland at the time, the SSE (and thus indirectly the Joint) was the singular lifeline for Polish Jewry during this period of crisis, and the government was unprepared to cut it off.

1968 was undoubtedly a chaotic year filled with uncertainty for Polish Jewry and its supporters. However, by 1969, they were starting to settle into a new normalcy. In mid-January 1969 Rotner called Haymann to ask for more money because the income from canteen meals was not enough to cover their expenses. Without the money, he claimed, the Congregation would have to end the canteen meals and the welfare activities, and stop maintaining and repairing synagogues, cemeteries, etc. Frenkiel, however, wrote to Kohane, sending the letter through his housekeeper who mailed it from West Germany, saying that the Congregation had sufficient funds for about six months, and there was no need to send any more money for now. This power struggle, between Rotner and Frenkiel, who went to great lengths to send a message to Geneva, shows that the government was likely behind Rotner’s request, and Frenkiel was warning them of this less than altruistic request for funds. Around the same time, Kohane discovered that the Congregation had been told that they could not receive funds from abroad anymore. In response, the Congregation leaders sent a letter to the authorities stating that the SSE was a purely philanthropic organization interested only in helping to maintain religious life. Furthermore, they wrote, the SSE gave money with no strings attached and without asking for any kind of spending reports. The decision was reversed, revealing that the Congregation leaders understood

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50 Memo on the financial situation of the Union of Jewish Congregations in Warsaw, January 17, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA. Upon hearing this last point, Kohane was confused because the SSE had received reports in the past, but he concluded that either they were forced to say this by the authorities, or the leadership said it without provocation, but either way, Kohane knew that they would likely not be getting any reports in the near future. Given Frenkiel’s note and the fact that the SSE really had no idea what the financial situation was, Kohane made the decision, an attempt to wield some of their own power over the Congregation leadership and/or the government, not to send any more money for the time being until they received a report or an SSE representative was able to go to Poland to assess the situation (Memo for the files, February 25, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA).
correctly that the state was willing to allow funds for religious activities, particularly if the funds came in without any strings attached. Once again, this reveals that there were government leaders who were unwilling to cut off the aid, likely because they feared bad publicity.

About a year after the campaign broke out, in March 1969, Kohane reported that there were practically no more TSKŻ activities and that the organization’s Presidium no longer existed after the chairman, Mr. Domb, resigned. Everyone else, he wrote, had emigrated or been removed from the Party (or both). According to Kohane, even though Frenkiel had suggested at a meeting during which the representatives of both Jewish organizations discussed what to do with the funds remaining after the Joint’s departure from Poland that at least some of the money go towards the Old Age Home and individuals who were most in need, the TSKŻ representatives rejected the proposal, despite the approval of two Ministry of the Interior representatives present at the meeting.\(^{51}\) It seems strange that the TSKŻ would have veto power over the Ministry of the Interior, but because these two men were against the idea, Kohane stated that nobody else was willing to fight the issue. Their objection to the plan was not surprising. One of the representatives, Edward Rajber, Kohane wrote, was the only one who went to the TSKŻ office in Warsaw regularly, mostly to collect the outstanding Joint loan payments, for which he and Mr. Felhendler (who did the work before he emigrated) were rewarded. They were given 12,000 złoty each by the authorities in recognition of their “great services.”\(^{52}\) This shows that both these men as well as the state were benefitting, and thus it makes sense that the money would instead be set aside for the TSKŻ’s Work and Culture Center, which Kohane wrote, “is developing into a

\(^{51}\) Memo from Kohane, March 18, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.

\(^{52}\) Ibid.
big, luxurious block and which will surely never serve Jewish people.” Any surplus amount, he concluded, was likely to be taken over by the state. This report corroborated the increased cooperation between the TSKŻ and the state.

In March 1969, Kohane wrote that:

The building at Nowogrodzka 5 with its four floors of office space is completely deserted – just a few people who are coming to the FOLKSSTIMME and Rajber with his two secretaries. The buffet on the second floor exists and even serves cholent on Saturday, which is being brought from the former Jewish restaurant cooperative ‘Amica,’ and on that day more people are coming to Nowogrodzka 5 than usual. Consequently, the TSKŻ is now being called among the Jews ‘the cemetery with cholent.’

The FOLKSSTIMME has not found a Chief Editor until now, and probably they will never find one. Mr. Tenenblatt is the Acting Editor, and he plays a very unpleasant role in this last stage of the life of the TSKZ. The contents of the FOLKSSTIMME are filled out almost completely, although anonymously, by Mr. Smolar, for whom this is the only source of income. I say ‘anonymously’ because, as a person who has been expelled from the Party, he could not do it under his own name. Anyway, the FOLKSSTIME, which is now a weekly, doesn’t print any articles on actual Jewish or political matters. Anybody reading the paper has to check on the date in order to know whether it is being published now, one year ago, or ten years before.

This assessment that Jewish life in Poland had ended, or was, at best, on its last legs, fits well within the absence narrative. Between 1968 and 1969, Polish Jewishness, particularly within the secular institutions, was largely unrecognizable.

Finding a New Normal

The demographic impact of the campaign, combined with the changes occurring within the Polish Jewish institutions, undoubtedly had a profound impact on Polish Jewishness after 1968. Things would never be as they were before the campaign’s outbreak. But by April 1969, the new leadership began to rebuild. According to the Folks Sztyme, the TSKŻ leadership met

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid. Nowogrodzka was the street where the TSKŻ office was.
April 9 and 10 with Władysław Skrzypczak, Secretary of the Section for National Minorities of the Central Committee of the Party and Wiesław Tomala, from the Ministry of the Interior. According to Kohane, both were known antisemites, but to varying degrees. In speeches given at the two-day meeting, both Rajber and Skrzypczak said that the authorities wanted the TSKŻ to continue to exist, though of course, there would be some changes in light of the new demographic reality.

According to the article, Skrzypczak believed that the organization must continue to work especially in the areas of culture and education, and thus there would also be some changes to their program. In particular, he said:

The Party sees the place and the role of the Kulturverband of the Jews in Poland within the framework of the country-wide future Polish political campaigns – for instance, elections to the Polish Parliament, to the municipalities, celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Polish People’s Republic, of the 30th anniversary of the attack of Hitler Germany on Poland, etc.55

Thus, it was clear that the TSKŻ would be expected to display its Polish patriotism, and according to this plan for 1969, there would be little in the way of Jewish activity.56 The Party was against expressions of nationalism, Skrzypczak said, but they were determined to allow national groups to continue with their cultural activities, as long as those activities were in line with the socialist principles and Polish traditions. He concluded with a positive outlook,

55 Memo from Kohane re: Reorganization of the Kulturverband in Warsaw, April 24, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.

56 One clear example of the TSKŻ’s determination to prove its loyalty to the government was a fundraiser that they conducted throughout the local branches to raise money for the Warsaw Royal Castle (“Informacja z przebiegu posiedzenia Zarządu Głównego TSKŻ, March 2, 1971, MSW BU_1585-7159, IPN). The Congregation was also expected to display its loyalty. When Jakubowicz asked the Ministry of Religious Affairs how he should respond to questions from a group of American rabbis visiting in 1970, he was told “before everything, as a loyal Pole” (“Notatka służbowa dot. pobytu na terenie m. Krakowa grupy rabinów z USA,” May 23, 1970, MSW BU_1585_7186, IPN).
emphasizing that he saw very good possibilities for the TSKŻ to continue their activities.\textsuperscript{57} According to Kohane’s evaluation of the article, “It is obvious that the government wants and needs the existence of the Kulturverband – at least on paper – to counteract the protests abroad against anti-Semitic Polish propaganda.”\textsuperscript{58} Thus, once again, some semblance of Jewish life had to exist – and had to be supported publically by the authorities, for the purposes of public relations.

Rajber’s speech agreed with most of what Skrzypczak said, though he also expressed a commitment to the organization commemorating the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (this could, after all, play a very important role in public relations, proving that the government was not, in fact, antisemitic).\textsuperscript{59} More important, however, was that Rajber’s speech revealed a clear disparity between the situation for the TSKŻ club in Warsaw and elsewhere in the country.\textsuperscript{60} The Warsaw branch, he said, was not really functioning, but other branches in various cities were still

\textsuperscript{57} Translation of the article in Folks-Shtimme (The Cultural Association of the Jews in Poland Must and Will Exist: From a Speech by the Chairman of the Association, E. Reiber), AR65/74-0319, JDCA.

\textsuperscript{58} Memo from Kohane re: Reorganization of the Kulturverband in Warsaw, April 24, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.

\textsuperscript{59} Rajber stayed true to his commitment for the 26th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. According to Kohane’s memo regarding the anniversary, the usual ceremony took place at the Ghetto Heroes’ Memorial, complete with the Polish Army giving military honors and the band playing the Polish national anthem. In attendance, according to the \textit{Folks Sztyme} article were both Polish Jewish organizations, including the TSKŻ, the Yiddish Theater, Jewish Historical Institute, the \textit{Folks Sztyme} editorial office, and representatives of the Warsaw cooperative “Uptima.” Representatives of the International Auschwitz Committee, the Polish veteran’s organization, ZBOWID, the Polish government, members of the Union of War Veterans and youth organizations also participated, placing wreaths at the monument.\textsuperscript{59} The commemoration, Kohane explained, was part of the government’s attempt to counteract the “Zionist propaganda” about the anti-Zionist campaign. Kohane noted that another attempt to counteract the bad publicity surrounding the campaign was for embassies around the world to send out material, particularly to journalists, about the authorities’ positive attitude towards the Jewish population at the Warsaw Ghetto (Memo from Kohane re: Ghetto anniversary in Warsaw, April 30, 1969, AR65/74-0319 JDCA). Kohane noted that the material had just been delivered to U.H.S. (United Hias Service) from the Polish Embassy in Rome.

\textsuperscript{60} A great example of the wide variation can be seen in the National Secretary meeting notes from January 1972. The Wroclaw and Katowice secretaries spoke about the youth coming to their clubs, while the situation in Krakow seemed much direr (Protocol, January 29, 1972, 1972 Protocols, TSKŻA).
functioning, albeit on a small scale.\textsuperscript{61} This is an important distinction, as it indicates that blanket statements that the TSKŻ ceased to function after 1968 – or was headed in that direction – should be qualified. This should hardly be surprising, since Polish Jewry was highly diverse even before 1968. Nevertheless, the historical narrative has focused on an absence that was far more characteristic of Warsaw than places like Katowice or Krakow.

Rajber’s speech continued with his hope for greater stability in the near future. Signs were already pointing in that direction, as the \textit{Folks Sztyme} still appeared regularly and Szymon Datner worked to further stabilize the Jewish Historical Institution.\textsuperscript{62} Furthermore, they decided to have a convention the following year, as well as to hold elections at the various branches.\textsuperscript{63} Perhaps the greatest indication that the TSKŻ leadership saw this as the beginning of a new chapter of Polish Jewry was that those in attendance elected a new Presidium. Rajber (Warsaw) was elected the new Chairman, Ruta Gutkowska (Warsaw), an old Party member and Stalinist, according to Kohane, was elected secretary. The rest of the Committee included new names with the exception of Mr. Tenenblatt (Warsaw), who in this memo was named the “actual” editor of the \textit{Folks Sztyme}, disproving Kohane’s earlier prediction that the paper would never have another editor. Kohane’s assessment of Tenenblatt was negative: “[he] has the reputation of a

\textsuperscript{61} Translation of the article in Folks-Shtime (The Cultural Association of the Jews in Poland Must and Will Exist: From a Speech by the Chairman of the Association, E. Reiber), May 1, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA. Antony Polonsky writes that, “the TSKŻ now ceased to operate almost entirely,” after 1968. This is a bit of an overstatement (Polonsky, \textit{The Jews in Poland and Russia}, 704).

\textsuperscript{62} Translation of the article in Folks-Shtime (The Cultural Association of the Jews in Poland Must and Will Exist: From a Speech by the Chairman of the Association, E. Reiber), May 1, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA. The article ran about three weeks after the meeting. In the November 15, 1980 \textit{Folks Sztyme}, there was a report saying that the kiosks would no longer be carrying the paper, indicating that at least for a period, this had been the case, although there are no documents confirming this (Kohane to Goldman, November 24, 1980, Poland. General. 1976-1980, JDCA).

\textsuperscript{63} Translation of the article in Folks-Shtime (Plenum of the Presidium of the Cultural Association of the Jews in Poland), May 1, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.
government agent and Judenratler – and probably he deserves this reputation fully." The new names included representatives from across Poland: Szymon Datner (director of the Jewish Historical Institute), Lejb Dratewko (Wrocław), Samuel Zang (Katowice), Mendel Tempel (Warsaw), Adolf Elsner (Bielsko-Biała), Arnold Ryner (Wrocław), Chil Szechter (Łódź), and Abraham Sztajn (Włocławek). Of these new members, Kohane said that half were Stalinists and former security agents, while the rest had never been active in the organization. Kohane noted that the former leaders, including even those still in Warszawa, were gone from the list. Kohane had a pessimistic view of this new reality. But under the thumb of the Communist leadership, the organization still functioned throughout the country, and the leadership continued to organize lectures, anniversary commemorations, and theater performances.

Despite the revival, Kohane remained skeptical about the TSKŻ’s future. In his July report, he wrote,

In Warsaw, the TSKZ is practically a fiction – a government sponsored organization which moved from Nowogrodzka 5 to the new building of ‘Jewish Work and Culture.’ Obviously enough, this building will not serve its original purpose. They have already moved into this building a number of non-Jewish organizations, like the ‘Kulturverband’ of the Lithuanians and others. The Yiddish Theater may also be moved into the building, but it will be a very temporary matter as most of the present actors in the Yiddish theater are preparing to emigrate.

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64 Memo from Kohane re: Reorganization of the Kulturverband in Warsaw, April 24, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.

65 Translation of the article in Folks-Shtimme (Plenum of the Presidium of the Cultural Association of the Jews in Poland), May 1, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.

66 Memo from Kohane re: Reorganization of the Kulturverband in Warsaw, April 24, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA. A report from Kohane in June 1968 already indicated that the Old Guard was in bad shape. One member, a Mr. Burg, had even committed suicide (“Situation of the Jews in Poland,” June 10, 1968, AR65/74-0320, JDCA).

67 Kohane to Horwitz, July 10, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.
Of course, Kohane could only surmise what might happen. The building, which today is used by both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations, still serves its original purpose and the theater continued to perform, even after most of the Jewish actors emigrated. While it is true that it looked like these organizations might cease to exist, they did not. They were, undoubtedly, too important for Poland’s image abroad, and with some modifications, they continued to function. For example, non-Jewish actors memorized Yiddish scripts in order to continue performing Yiddish plays.

In mid-September the Folks Sztyme also went through an overhaul. From that point on, there would be a weekly Polish section of the paper, replacing the Polish monthly supplement, Nasz Glos. The issue in which this was announced also carried a vaguely written editorial about the organization’s future. The editorial stated that the TSKŻ had always performed the tasks expected of all cultural and educational institutions in Poland and that this “must” continue. How it would continue, however, was unclear. The editorial read:

It is most certainly necessary to be patient until the moment when we will be able to realize with whom we will have to deal and what we will have to deal with, what will be the realistic possibilities of activity. What we are doing at present and what is difficult not to consider as a matter of exceptional importance is to maintain the local sections of our Farband, to maintain Jewish institutions. We believe – as we already mentioned – that after a certain time – when we will be able really to evaluate with whom and with what we deal – it will be possible for us (with a qualitatively new and naturally quantitatively new Jewish population), within the framework of our possibilities, to join together and to carry out the tasks of the cultural-educational 1969/1970 year and, as in the previous years, to be active in satisfying the cultural-educational necessities of the Jewish population linked with our Association.68

Despite its role as a propagandistic organ, the paper did not give a false impression of what was occurring at the time. Their cryptic language revealed their uncertainty. They could not give an

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68 Translation of an article in the “Folksstimme,” September 6, 1969 (The New Cultural Season, by S. Ampel), AR65/74-0319, JDCA.
accurate assessment of the situation, nor could they speak to the future. But they believed that they would have opportunities to continue their work in new ways, and they declared their commitment to do so to their supporters.

The Congregation also began to adjust to the new, post-1968 normal. The government issued a new exchange permit for the Congregation, thus enabling the SSE to continue sending in money. Half of the money would be exchanged at the old tourist rate of 24 złoty to the dollar, while the other half would be at the 72 złoty bank rate. The actual rate would come out to 48 złoty to the dollar, which was slightly lower than before, but still higher than the current tourist rate.69 Beginning in April 1969, transfers to Jewish individuals inside Poland were sent from individuals who had good relations with the SSE, rather than in the SSE’s name.70 The change in policy stemmed from new difficulties that the SSE experienced with the Polish authorities, some of whom were declaring the SSE an organization non grata. Each individual sent money to about ten recipients, which the Polish bank cleared as long as it did not appear as though the money was coming from the SSE. This aid would be limited to those who were over sixty-five years old, in bad financial situations, sick, or in special cases. Anyone else would receive aid through other channels.71 Once again, as long as the SSE was willing to jump through its hoops, the government would allow it to continue its work.

In September 1969 Mrs. Frenkiel went to Geneva to meet with Haymann. Frenkiel explained that the Congregation needed $4,700 a month to continue their activities, including the canteens. From this, the Congregation could provide $2,200, and thus they really only needed a

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69 Memo from Kohane re: Meeting with Haymann, April 17, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.
70 Memo from Kohane re: Transfers to Poland, April 17, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.
71 Kohane to Horwitz re: Transfers to Poland, April 20, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.
balance of $2,500 from the SSE. The SSE committed to sending this amount for the next month, but said that they would continue to monitor the situation. Frenkiel assured Haymann that he would be invited to Poland once the emigration was complete, and that they would request assistance from the SSE for those who remained in Poland. Until then, Haymann could not visit Poland, nor could a representative of the Congregation visit Geneva (which explains why she and not her husband was in Geneva). Similarly, they could not send financial reports to the SSE. Nevertheless, even Mrs. Frenkiel could not go to Geneva without the government’s knowledge and permission, so one can conclude that the government was using this visit as a way to give the SSE its much-desired reports. Around the same period Kohane noted that he had received messages from Jakubowicz (via a messenger in London) and another member of the Congregation in Krakow (during his stay in Vienna) asking him to please send some aid to the Congregation so that they could ensure the continuation of community activities, as well as individual transfers.72

When Haber expressed some reservations about sending money to Poland without any kind of report coming back, as well as suspicions of Mrs. Frenkiel’s seemingly risky trip to Geneva, Kohane agreed that it was a surprise.73 Yet, he said that it was typical for such surprises from countries like Poland. Furthermore, he wrote, “even if somebody may be skeptical about the Frenkiels’ activities, one thing is very clear – that the Congregation is in urgent need of money unless this last bastion of Jewishness in Poland is to disappear.”74 He said that there were other reports asking for assistance, as well, from people they trusted, such as Jakubowicz.

72 Kohane to Haber, September 4, 1969, AR65/74-319, JDCA.

73 Haber to Kohane, September 9, 1969, AR65/74-319, JDCA.

74 Kohane to Haber, September 16, 1969, AR65/74-319, JDCA.
Kohane was convinced that this was something that had to be done, even if it meant that they would not have total control over what was going on. He wrote, “Now the kosher messes are more important than ever before because the old, sick, lonely, and left behind – many of whom never before needed the services of the kosher canteens – are coming to eat there.”

Furthermore, he wrote, “it was the feeling of everybody concerned that not to send the money because of the difficulties in reporting and in personal contacts between Warsaw and Geneva would be too high a price to pay.” This was, then, a clear humanitarian mission that the Joint, together with the SSE, had to embark upon. It may have been feeding into the demands of the authorities, but it undoubtedly benefitted the Jews in Poland as well, which was, after all, the Joint’s main mission.

Yet there were limits on how far the Joint and SSE would go. In December 1969 Mrs. Frenkiel called Haymann asking for an increase in funds. The $2,500 was no longer sufficient. Now they needed $3,500 a month for the canteens and Congregation’s needs. At stake, she said, was “the survival of Jewish religious life in Poland.” Without the money, some of the Congregations would have to be closed, and this would be permanent. Furthermore, Mrs. Frenkiel talked about the hungry Jews who needed the meals in the canteens. Indicating that the government had asked her to call the SSE, she said, “the Polish government feels that the foreign Jews are responsible for their brethren.”

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

77 Memo from Kohane re: Relief in transit in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, December 10, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.
Haymann flat out refused the increase, telling her that “if Jews are hungry it is first of all the responsibility of the Polish government because the government has to take care of all its citizens.” Haymann remarked to Kohane that the Frenkiels had previously discouraged the SSE from sending additional funds into Poland, at least when Rotner was in charge, but since then they had been asking for increases. He said that while the Congregation had previously had some money in reserves, those reserves were now gone. Nevertheless, it was clear that the $2,500 should be sufficient for the shrinking community. Both Haymann and Kohane believed that the authorities were putting pressure on the Frenkiels to “produce” more funds, but neither was willing to take the bait. For now, they would continue with the $2,500 monthly payment, especially since no SSE representatives had been to Poland yet, and they would use Rotner’s impending arrival in Vienna to get a better assessment of the situation in Poland. The most important aid, they agreed, was the individual transfers, which they were sending as quickly as they could, though the agency through which they sent the money had a tremendous backlog as other organizations were sending aid as well.

One major concern that arose in the reports coming from Vienna was that there were more non-Jews than Jews eating in some of the canteens. In Dzierżoniów, for example, there were reports that 90% of those eating in the canteens were not Jewish. Also in Wrocław, Kohane was told, the majority was not Jewish. According to the reports, they merely wanted

78 Ibid.
79 Ibid. Wandycz writes that in 1971 alone, some $50 million was earned through tourism and transfers by individuals (The United States and Poland, 396).
80 The canteen remained opened, and it had 15 people eating there as of December 1973, though the number did not break down how many Jews or non-Jews. (Letter regarding the Communities in the Wrocław Region, December 8, 1973, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/504, AAN).
good, cheap food. Kohane decided to interview those leaving the nine locations where the canteens still operated in order to gain more accurate information.\footnote{Memo from Kohane re: Visit to Vienna - November 26-27, 1969, December 3, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.}

One key source of information was Rotner, who had decided to emigrate. After he arrived in Vienna, Kohane spoke with him via telephone. Kohane prefaced his report with a clear caveat, that Rotner’s reliability was questionable.\footnote{Haber wrote that he had trusted Rotner more than the Frenkiels, but that given the circumstances under which they all lived, “to expect any other behavior pattern is like whistling in the dark” (JDC Archive NY AR65/74-0319, Memo from Haber to Kohane, December 30, 1969). Despite his trust, Kohane was clearly frustrated with him. Before speaking with Kohane, Rotner proved to be difficult, asking for special assistance since he considered himself to be a “former JDC employee.” When he was told that he would receive the same as everyone else, he said bitterly, “Oh, Mr. Kohane wants information from me but he is not ready to support me. Because of this, Kohane did not make a special trip to Vienna to meet with him, but he was eager to speak with him over the phone and report back to NY on what he said (Kohane to Horwitz, December 24, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA).} Rotner confirmed some of the reports about the canteens, saying that there were only a handful of people eating at some. He also said that there were more and more non-Jews eating in the canteens. He believed that if the canteens were to be closed, few people would feel any kind of hardship. Kohane followed up by saying that he had heard that in Krakow the canteen was indispensable for the elderly who remained and were alone. Rotner said that perhaps Krakow was the only exception. When asked how much aid he believed was necessary to send to the Congregation each month, Rotner replied that the Congregation did not need the funds; individuals needed the funds. Kohane then asked him whether the Congregation would survive without funds, to which Rotner replied hesitantly, “Oh, send them maximum $1,000-1,500.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Given the information collected in Vienna, Kohane wrote in his penultimate memo of 1969 that they would need to make some decisions before March regarding the aid that they would send the Congregation. The Joint really wanted Haymann to go to Poland to get an
accurate sense of what the situation was, and they planned to notify the Congregation, once
again, that future payments would depend on his ability to visit. Kohane said that if Haymann
could not visit, they would likely have to cut their allocations because of the reports that they
were receiving from emigrants, although he and Haymann believed that this could be “very
harmful.” Haber believed that only individual transfers should be made in the future, but he
understood why Haymann and Kohane would believe otherwise.

Kohane’s final memo in 1969 indicated that due to the bad publicity surrounding Poland
in the West, the Poles had, to a large degree, ended their anti-Zionist and antisemitic propaganda.
This, he believed might be one explanation for why the number of emigrants had been dropping.
It appeared as though the flow was becoming a trickle, but, as Kohane ended his letter, there
would be other problems to come in 1970. Kohane was correct. According to the Congregation
board meeting minutes from February 1970, Frenkiel reportedly said, “We need cash to bake
matzah. It would be a shame for [the SSE director] not to let us bake matzah…the authorities
give us permission and a wheat mill.” This attempt to guilt the SSE, while highlighting the
government’s kindness towards the community, reveals the extent to which both he and the
government viewed the Congregation’s activities not as the government’s responsibility, but
rather as the responsibility of foreign Jewry. The government seemingly absolved itself of any

84 Kohane to Horwitz, December 30, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.
85 Haber to Kohane, December 30, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.
86 Kohane to Haber, December 31, 1969, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.
87 Protokoł posiedzenia Zarządu Związku Religijnego Wyznania Mojżeszowego w P.R.L. w Warszawie, odbytego w
dniu 24 lutego 1970. [Minutes from Congregation Executive Board Meeting], February 24, 1970, Urząd do Spraw
Wyznań 131/507, AAN.
real financial responsibility, taking advantage of the loyalty that international Jewish leaders felt for their co-religionists, particularly during this time of crisis.

The Congregation continued to use guilt in their correspondence with the SSE. In early 1970 they stated that they did not agree with the reports that the SSE officials were hearing from those who left. If the reports were accurate, they argued, they would have had to close some of the Congregations already, but all of them remained opened and functioning. Sure, they were giving out fewer meals, but they were still giving out meals. The elderly depended on those meals and the Congregation helped support kitchen employees. This, they wrote, provided an important form of assistance in addition to the pensions. While they could fire them, these people allegedly had no skills. They could not read or write Polish and they had no professional training. The community allowed them to work within the faith. Thus, it was essential that they continue employing these people, which, of course, they could only do with SSE assistance.88

Once again, Frenkiel asked for an increase in the monthly allocation to $3,500, arguing that as the SSE had stated before, “the lower the number, the bigger the need.”89 They needed money for the kitchens, and the meals required ritual slaughterers, butchers, employees, workers, coal, vegetables, potatoes, etc. They also needed to renovate some of the kitchens, like the kitchen in Szczecin, which they had closed temporarily the past winter because they could not afford the renovations. Those twenty-five to thirty members of the community, however, needed those meals.90 Undoubtedly, Frenkiel was trying to play on Haymann’s emotions. He wrote:

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88 Frenkiel to Haymann, January 12, 1970, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.

89 The early 1970 report from Kohane wrote that about 11,000 Jews, including a substantial number of ‘marranos’ had left Poland, and they guessed that there were about 8,000 Jews remaining, of which about 2,000 were younger Jews who remained in Poland (Memo: Polish Refugee Movement since Six Day War until 31 December 1969, January 23, 1970, AR65/74-0319, JDCA).

90 Frenkiel to Haymann, January 12, 1970, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.
The scope of the activity of our Kehiloth [Congregation] is to enable our members to live a full religious life. It would therefore be ridiculous that the reason for the liquidation, be it of a Kehila or even a kitchen at a Kehila, comes from a charity organization such as the Société de Secours.

The undersigned is because of material reasons not interested personally in the existence of the Kehiloth – which is known to you, Mr. Chairman. However, he is aware of the need for the Kehiloth to exist. He talks to the people and observes that this kind of people, when they meet in the synagogue or in the kitchen, feel entirely differently, because this is their House of Culture, Theater, Cinema, Café, etc. It would be a shame if the initiative for the liquidation of kitchens, which means at the same time the liquidation of the Kehiloth, were to come from the Société de Secours. It would be too unfortunate to cross out with a stroke of the pen that which has existed already 1000 years.\(^91\)

He ended his guilt trip by writing that it was “painful to us to remark the apparent mistrust with regard to our needs.”\(^92\)

Kohane wrote to NY with a copy of Frenkiel’s guilt-ridden letter and said that Haymann would respond to the letter by saying that the tone and remarks were “unacceptable” and “unjustified,” as it was “not the S.S.E.…bringing to an end the Story of Polish Jewry which has existed for 1,000 years.” He also wrote that the SSE would provide $2,500 for the first quarter of 1970, but that after that someone would either have to go to Poland to evaluate their program, or if that were not possible, they would have to make decisions based on the information that they had, suggesting that the information from those leaving Poland would inform their decisions.\(^93\)

Preliminary discussions indicated that Kohane was thinking that they would adjust the allocation to between $1,000-$1,500 a month, thereby compromising between those leaving Poland who

\(^91\) Ibid.

\(^92\) Ibid.

\(^93\) Kohane to Horwitz, February 4, 1970, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.
claimed that no money should be sent at all and Frenkien who insisted on even more money.\textsuperscript{94} In any case, such a drastic cut would arouse the attention of the government.

Around the same time, Jakubowicz wrote directly to the former Joint office, though he did not include the organization’s name in the address. In the letter, in addition to asking for medication, he wrote:

There is nothing new with us. We are healthy. How are you and your family? As I know that you, as a person originating from Krakow, are deeply interested in information about our town, I am informing you that yesterday a film has been made in the synagogue Remu and in the temple, showing how we are praying. It was really very festive, and I hope that the film will be beautiful and you surely will have the opportunity to see this film.\textsuperscript{95}

This strangely worded letter, Kohane concluded, was a sign that the authorities were continuing their propaganda campaign to show the world that they were not antisemitic, and that the Jews in Poland had the freedom to pray and practice their religion.\textsuperscript{96} He knew this because even before the campaign broke out, only one synagogue in Krakow was used regularly, and only on holidays were both used. Furthermore, he noticed that the film was shot was a Tuesday, which would have required people to come to the synagogue specifically for the film.\textsuperscript{97} Perhaps most strangely, however, was that Jakubowicz sent the letter to the Joint. Once again, this indicates that the Polish government was well aware that they were still sending aid to Poland. Furthermore, they were clearly going to great lengths to create a propaganda video to prove that

\textsuperscript{94} Kohane to Haber, February 24, 1970, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.

\textsuperscript{95} Kohane to Horwitz, January 14, 1970, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.

\textsuperscript{96} There was a sense in the Jewish world that only Romania had free Jewish life within the bloc. Poland, too, had at least relative freedom too. But it appears that the Polish government may have been taking its cues from Romania where Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen used free Jewish life in Romania to convince the world that the government was tolerant (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, “Behind the Headlines Rumanian Jewry: Pent Up Longings,” September 7, 1977, http://www.jta.org/1977/09/07/archive/behind-the-headlines-rumanian-jewry-pent-up-longings).

\textsuperscript{97} Kohane to Horwitz, January 14, 1970, AR65/74-0319, JDCA.
there was an extant Jewish life, which indicates that they felt the need to deny the claims to the contrary and provide proof. The government allowed a group of American rabbis to visit Poland in May 1970, and according to some who were close to the community, they informed the group that they were being used by the authorities as an “export to show their [the authorities’] innocence.” Thus, the government was undoubtedly feeling pressure to prove that they were supporting Jewish life.

By July 1971, Mr. Frenkiel was permitted to go to Geneva to meet directly with the SSE. He described himself as a “shaliach,” or messenger/representative of the Jews in Poland, as well as the “president of all the Jews of Poland.” He asked Haymann for help in three areas. The first was for assistance with the twenty-three cemeteries still in use in Poland. Though there were 800 cemeteries throughout the country, he was concerned about these twenty-three in need of repair. He left paperwork from the government showing that repairs could be conducted at an exchange of 24 złoty to the dollar. The Joint representative, Ted Feder, asked why the government did not contribute, to which Frenkiel responded that the government would not support religious cemeteries. The second issue was a request for aid to help organize a Passover seder for the seventy Jews in the Old Age Home in Warsaw. He also asked for some pocket money for these aged Jews who, unlike their non-Jewish neighbors, did not have family visit and bring them

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98 “Notatka służbowa dot. pobytu na terenie m. Krakowa grupy rabinów z USA,” May 23, 1970, BU_1585_7186, IPN. In fact, the authorities took into account that given its proximity to Auschwitz, the Krakow Congregation and TSKŻ clubs received a substantial number of visitors from abroad and that it was important to maintain both organizations (Sprawozdanie z działalności Zarządu Towarzystwa Społeczno-Kulturalnego Żydów w Polsce, Oddział w Krakowie za okres od m-ca marca 1966 do 24 czerwca 1972 r., MSW BU_1585-7196, IPN).

99 Memo from Feder, July 21, 1971, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.
things. Feder acknowledged that there was some aid already being given to them, but Frenkel argued that it was not sufficient.¹⁰⁰

Finally, he asked for aid that the Congregation could distribute to those who were unable to go to the canteen to receive food. At this point, Feder asked Frenkel whether the authorities knew that he was meeting with the Joint representatives, to which Frenkel replied that he had been told he should contact the Joint. Feder asked whether this meant that the authorities might want them to come back and Frenkel responded, “very vigorously, of course, but nobody wants to take the initiative.” Feder said that he was not sure that the Joint would come back even if asked, to which Frenkel replied that the aged were suffering and that the Joint should come back if asked. Frenkel then said that if the Joint was prepared to help, they could send the money through the SSE.¹⁰¹ This is the first time that anyone outside of the Joint or SSE vocalized the connection between the two organizations, indicating that it was, indeed, an open secret that the Joint funded the SSE.¹⁰² Surely if Frenkel knew, the authorities knew. Thus, only a few years after being removed from Poland, the Joint was beginning to sense that it might be soon be able to resume its operations.

After Geneva, the Frenkiels visited Kohane in Israel, telling him that the situation in Poland had “completely changed” and that it was “better.” Furthermore, they told him, Jews were returning to Poland and they were sure that the Joint would be invited back to Poland to help out the 12,000-15,000 remaining Jews. While things did seem to be improving, Frenkel’s

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Any Jewish community representative traveling to Geneva was both briefed and debriefed upon their return, and, since according to Kohane, they reported everything that happened during their meetings, it can be assumed that they mentioned that the JDC representatives were also present at the meetings (Kohane to Haber, May 22, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA).
assessment seemed to be an exaggeration. Kohane noted in his memo that he did not remind the Frenkiels that the press was still printing antisemitic propaganda, but he did tell Mr. Frenkiel that mostly non-Jews had returned to Poland and that the figures generally accepted abroad were that there were only 6-7,000 Jews remaining, with more expected to leave. Frenkiel, Kohane wrote, did not argue with him, and he felt as though he was simply telling Kohane what he had been told to say.\textsuperscript{103} Frenkiel raised a number of issues with Kohane, including that of the Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Kohane understood the difficulties, of course, and advised Frenkiel to tell the Ministry of Religious Affairs that “sooner or later the Jewish press abroad will condemn the situation” and ask how, without any income, they could be expected to maintain even just the active cemeteries.\textsuperscript{104} So again, Kohane understood the power of the press – or at least the threat of it – and he believed that this was the best strategy to use with the Polish government.

Even as the TSKŻ and Congregation worked to find their new normal, tension between the two continued to develop. In early 1972, the \textit{Folks Sztyme} ran a front-page article in Polish in early 1972 about the dilapidated synagogue in Wroclaw, as part of the TSKŻ’s attempt to convince the government, once again, to merge the two institutions. Entitled “Who Will Save the Synagogue in Wroclaw?,” the author, Jacob Oporczynski, wrote that the deteriorating synagogue was under nobody’s protection, despite a sign in the front which claimed that it was a historical building under the protection of the state. He then attacked the Congregation. Oporczynski ended the article with the following charge: “It is high time to end the silence about the synagogue in Wroclaw. The Congregation, as well as the Wroclaw branch of the Kulturverband, should with more energy intervene with the proper authorities for the preservation of this important

\textsuperscript{103} Memo on the Frenkiels’ visit in Israel, August 6, 1971, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
monument of Jewish culture.” The Folks Sztyme editorial staff added its own section, stating that the paper had been receiving letters from concerned people regarding the insufficient protection of Jewish cultural sites. The editor wrote that the Congregation was responsible for Jewish cemeteries, synagogues, and other Jewish sites, but that the TSKŻ leadership could not sit back while the Congregation remained uninterested in the matter and that they needed to act more energetically. Thus their reasoning behind printing the article.

Frenkiel was furious. In a letter to Haymann, he wrote that the TSKŻ was trying to take over their work. Frenkiel wrote:

Believe me, Mr. Chairman, that such a development would be a very happy one, as it would indicate that the people, who until now have had the greatest contempt for any religious activities, suddenly want to do something in this field. However, it is clear that they are not interested in the ‘Hagadah but in the knedlech’ (well-known Jewish proverb meaning that somebody is not interested in the matter but in the financial gain involved); that means they believe that the cemeteries and the renovation of synagogues would be a source of a lot of money, and if the Kulturverband will take over those activities, then they would be the recipients of the transfers and they would be able to benefit from it, as has been the case until the year 1968.

He continued:

The Kulturverband is conducting a whispering campaign for the fusion of both organizations, as they are aware that the Congregations are attracting a lot of people (thanks to the subvention of the Société and the fact that the canteens are serving good and tasty meals), while the Kulturverband offices are everywhere empty because even their own comrade-members are boycotting them.

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106 Ibid.

107 Translation of an excerpt from a letter addressed to Haymann by Frenkiel, February 25, 1972, AR65/74-0324, JDCA.

108 Ibid.
Frenkiel’s assessment reveals a fundamental shift that was underway in Polish Jewishness after 1968. Before the anti-Zionist campaign, the TSKŻ had more members and was better off, resource-wise. Now, however, Frenkiel indicated that the opposite was true, and that the Congregation had more to offer, since they provided meals and financial assistance, and had foreign backing. Thus, he believed, the TSKŻ was determined to gain access to such funds by merging the two organizations.

Surprisingly, despite his criticism of the TSKŻ in the past, Kohane did not see this as a TSKŻ plot to access SSE funds. Rather, he saw this as a political tactic, partly as a way to take over some of the Congregation’s activities, but also an attempt to improve their image by taking care of Jewish properties. He wrote to Horwitz:

They believe that coming up with this problem has great propaganda value for the Kulturverband, which is now completely discredited by the very small remnant of the remnants of Polish Jewry who are very well aware that the people who are running the Kulturverband and the FOLKSSTIMME are stooges appointed by the security.  

Nevertheless, Kohane was surprised that the authorities would even allow the Folks Sztyme to print the article. Given that the authorities had rejected previous suggestions to merge the two organizations, it begs the question why it was printed. The state had been receiving complaints, and perhaps this was a way to show the world that until that point the cemeteries and synagogues had been the responsibility of the Congregations, which the TSKŻ realized was a problem. Perhaps it was meant to stir up aid for these projects? The state knew

109 Kohane to Horwitz, March 15, 1972, AR65/74-0324, JDCA.
110 Ibid.
that there was no way that the TSKŻ would really be able to raise the money, but allowing the TSKŻ to attempt to attract attention from abroad could have been a good tactical move.\footnote{This is particularly true since the government refused to give the SSE a favorable exchange rate for cemetery repair, nor would they contribute anything towards the costs themselves (Kohane to Haber re: Jewish Cemeteries in Poland, June 6, 1972, AR65/74-0324, JDCA).}

The amount of money needed to care for the Jewish cemeteries in Poland was astronomical. In fact, Kohane said that the entire Joint budget would not even come close to covering the costs. But he suggested two possible solutions on the matter to the Joint New York office. The first was to make a demarche with the Polish authorities (either the embassy in Washington, D.C. or the government in Warsaw), though he was skeptical that any institution, organization, or rabbinical group would have much success with this.\footnote{Isaac Lewin met with the Polish Ambassador in Washington and believed that the Ambassador supported his request. Kohane was skeptical that this would achieve anything though. Lewin also decided to ask Dr. Nahum Goldmann of the World Jewish Congress to appeal to Chancellor Brandt for financial assistance since, after all, according to Lewin, the Germans destroyed the cemeteries, they should also pay for their renovation and maintenance (Kohane, to Haber, July 3, 1972, AR65/74-0324, JDCA). Members of the United States Congress also got involved in this issue. On December 4, 1975 Edward Koch and Sidney Yates co-signed a letter to Polish Ambassador Witold Trampczynski, requesting that he review the matter of Jewish cemeteries in Poland with his government (Edward I. Koch and Sidney R. Yates to Ambassador Witold Trampczynski, December 4, 1975, AR65/74-0324, JDCA).}

His other suggestion was to find some funds to cover at least some of the cemeteries, though he acknowledged that even this would likely be prohibitive. However, it was clear that something had to be done, as Kohane reported that he was hearing almost daily about acts of vandalism, not to mention reports of cemeteries being taken over for factories, apartment buildings, or construction.\footnote{Kohane to Haber re: Jewish Cemeteries in Poland, June 6, 1972, AR65/74-0324, JDCA.}

The government also knew that something had to be done. About two weeks later, the Polish government informed Frenkiel, who in turn informed Haymann, that the authorities were willing to pay for the repair, care, and maintenance of the cemeteries in Łódź and Warsaw. However, this decision was quickly reversed. Frenkiel reported that shortly after the government...
had made their promise, the authorities met with the TSKŻ leaders, who had promised that they could get funds from Jews abroad to help cover the costs of rebuilding cemetery walls, caring for and maintaining the cemeteries. According to Frenkiel, the authorities subsequently reneged on their commitment to him. Once again, Frenkiel revealed his fury with the TSKŻ when he informed Haymann that he believed Rajber, who had represented the TSKŻ, was trying to assert the TSKŻ’s prominence by taking charge. Furthermore, he told Haymann, he believed that Rajber’s assertion that he could obtain the money was based on the promises of foreign Jews during past visits to Poland, which rarely came to fruition.\footnote{Memo from Kohane, June 19, 1972, AR65/74-0324, JDCA.} In this case, the power struggle between the Congregation and the TSKŻ appeared to have backfired. Why would the government pay for the cemeteries when the Jews abroad were apparently willing to pay for it?

Even as the two Jewish organizations squabbled with one another (perhaps further indicating that they had reached a period of normalization, since this, after all, was not uncommon within Jewish communities), the TSKŻ leadership was busy applauding itself on what it had accomplished since the difficult years in the late 1960s. In September 1972 they held their Sixth Congress at which they discussed all of their accomplishments at the local clubs, with the Folks Sztyme, Jewish Historical Institute, and the Yiddish Theater. Rajber said that the organization’s accomplishments should encourage them to think about the future, and that was what should be the primary topic during the Congress. The delegates truly viewed themselves to be on a mission, as an integral part of Polish society, to realize the possibilities that The First Secretary of the Party, Edward Gierek, spoke about during the Polska Zjednoczona Partia
Robotnicza (Polish United Workers’ Party, or PZPR) Sixth Congress regarding social organizations: all, including the TSKŻ, mattered.\footnote{Notes from the Sixth TSKŻ Congress, September 30, 1972, 1972 Book, TSKŻA.}

Before the TSKŻ Congress, the TSKŻ leaders discussed inviting Jews from abroad, not just from socialist countries, to attend. According to the Security officials’ notes from the meeting, this was important because there were some Jews abroad who defended Poland. More importantly, according to one of the speakers from Czestochowa, it could “show the rest of the world that in Poland, contrary to what the ‘Zionist enemy centers’ preach, the Jews have all the conditions for the free development of cultural, educational, and organizational activities.”\footnote{Notes from the TSKŻ Executive Board Plenary Meeting, May 20, 1972, MSW BU_1585_7159, IPN.}

This may have been in reference to the repression that the Jews in the Soviet Union were subjected to, and which Western Jews were loudly protesting. It is not clear whether they invited foreign guests, but this consideration shows that public opinion amongst Western Jews was, at least on some level, a concern.

There were big changes in store for the Congregation, too. Frenkiel decided to leave Poland for Israel in July 1973. In his letter to the Minister of Religious Affairs he recommended Mozes Finkelstein, who was relatively unknown in the Congregation circles, as his successor. Jakubowicz should, in his opinion, continue his duties as the Secretary.\footnote{Translation of a letter from Frenkiel, July 2, 1973, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.}

The government’s antisemitic stance, which led to the final wave of Jewish emigration from Poland between 1968-1972, ushered in a period of great uncertainty for the Polish Jewish community. The demographic impact was huge, and both the TSKŻ and Congregation lost a
number of its members and leaders. There were other considerations as well. Without the Joint’s financial assistance, how would the TSKŻ fare since it now had to rely on the government. Would the antisemitic authorities use this as an excuse to stifle secular Jewish life? How would the Congregation fare once the Joint could no longer operate in Poland after December 1967? For a while, there were a number of questions regarding the contemporary Jewish community, but there were also major questions as to what the future would hold. There was a real sense that this could be the beginning of the final chapter of Polish Jewish history.

Yet, the government’s perception of Jewish power abroad kept them from doing away with either Jewish institution. The Polish authorities understood their significance amongst Jews abroad, and recognized that actually going so far as to prevent Jewish life in Poland could have serious ramifications that they were not prepared to deal with. They imposed certain demands on the TSKŻ (and to a lesser extent the Congregation), but the authorities refrained from seriously attacking Jewish institutions. They continued to function to varying degrees throughout the country, thus suggesting that the popular narrative of absence in the post-1968 period is exaggerated. To be sure, the immediate post-1968 period indicated that this might be an accurate prediction, but it never came to fruition. Instead, the government actually helped sustain Jewish life, believing that it was important to do so for public relations purposes.

Jewish life in Poland did not disappear or “cease to exist.” Instead, the TSKŻ and Congregational leadership worked to create a new normal in late-Communist Poland. This new normal continued to develop throughout the 1970s. When the doors opened up to foreign Jews visiting, as they did by 1973, this was the view of Polish Jewishness that the visitors got. For some, it was depressing to see that there were few youth. For others, it was a sign of their resilience. Many of these Jews were Holocaust survivors who had survived the latest outbreak of
antisemitism in Poland. However they were perceived, however, they existed. As foreign Jews arrived in greater numbers, they needed to see that there were still Jews in Poland. From the government’s perspective, foreign Jews had to be convinced that Jewish life continued, at least relatively freely, in Poland. For the most part, foreign Jews, perhaps expecting the worst from the Polish government, particularly in light of reports of serious limitations placed upon Soviet Jewry, were pleasantly surprised when they observed the Polish Jewish community. The Polish government understood that this would help Poland’s image abroad, and by the end of 1972, there were clear indications that the Polish government was ready to begin building relationships with other Jewish organizations as well. The efforts to improve relations with foreign Jewish leaders reveals that the Polish government’s approach to the Jewish community locally, but also, as Chapter 4 will demonstrate, internationally, is part of a much larger Cold War story.
CHAPTER 4
BUILDING BRIDGES

Isaac Frenkiel’s visit to the SSE in Geneva in July 1971 was the first visit abroad to discuss Jewish community matters for a Polish Jewish leader since the March 1968 events. The period between 1968 and 1972 was marked by infrequent contact between foreign Jewish organizations and Polish Jewry. This changed after Gomułka was removed from power and Edward Gierek, who became First Secretary of the Party in 1971, adopted a more open approach to the West. Détente brought about significant changes for Poland, as there was an increased eagerness to make connections with the West, both culturally and economically. Piotr Wandycz writes that détente provided a:

Protective umbrella for dealings with the West, and Gierek seized the opportunity for attracting American capital and technology and stimulating trade relations. A phase of close American-Polish economic involvement began. Politics were pushed back into the background, although ultimately they continued to provide the rationale for American economic diplomacy toward Poland.¹

Poland’s tendency to lean westward was welcomed by American foreign policy circles, who viewed this as a chance to create stronger relations during détente. Indeed, according to a RAND Corporation report on American policy toward Poland, American policy in Eastern Europe in the 1970s had successfully focused on “bridge building.” The report states that American policy reacted favorably to policy changes occurring within Poland, and that cultural

¹ Wandycz, The United States and Poland, 395. U.S. State Department files indicate that Gierek was determined to improve Poland’s relations with the U.S. Two U.S. cabinet officers visited Poland in 1971, the first such visits since 1963. In an effort to raise the standard of living and material well-being in Poland, in addition to approving more cultural and scientific exchanges, Pan Am Airways began service to Warsaw, a new Intercontinental Hotel was contracted, and both Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola entered into contracts for bottling plants. Gierek viewed better technology as an essential component of modernization, and for this he would turn to the west and take out substantial loans. The Embassy officers saw a tremendous potential in terms of long-term influence in Poland under the Gierek regime (Embassy Warsaw United States Policy Assessment – Poland for Department of State, February 8, 1972, General Records of the Department of State/Political and Defense, 1970-73, Box 2554, POL 1-Pol-US (1/1/70), NACP).
and educational exchanges increased, as did a network of NGO ties. A U.S. Embassy report from early 1972 stated that:

It is not impossible that there may be times when because of external pressure or internal fears, the regime feels a display of coolness is required. Nevertheless, it seems well worth the relatively small risk to continue quietly to seek ways to improve our relations. The Gierek regime, which a year ago was an unknown quantity has shown itself to be a definite improvement over its predecessor, and it would seem to be even more true today than a year ago that we should take actions which will strengthen the position of those, now apparently in the ascendency, whose outlook is more pragmatic than ideological and who tend to favor improved relations with the West.²

Richard Nixon’s visit to Poland in June of that same year helped solidify commitments from both sides to improve relations.

Improving Polish-Jewish relations was also a matter of interest for the U.S. government. In 1973, the American Ambassador to Poland, Richard Davies, helped bring two B’nai B’rith leaders to Poland to begin discussions about Polish Jewish matters with the Polish authorities. Polish government officials met with American Jewish Committee officials in the United States as well. Once again, perceptions - namely that some Jews held important positions in the U.S. - motivated much of the dialogue from the Polish side. American Jewish involvement in Poland, therefore, should be viewed within the context of these developments, for without them, perceptions of American Jewish power and economic influence would have mattered significantly less. American Jewish organizations used the Polish perception of their power and economic influence to their advantage as Poland’s economic situation gradually worsened. Poland’s need for Western income, as well as Poland’s perceived need for “legitimacy” with

² Ibid.
Western governments, enabled American Jewish leaders to negotiate on behalf of Poland when they were so inclined.

In Chapter 4 I explore the initial contacts between the Polish authorities and foreign Jewish leaders in the post-1968 period. One of the most prominent contacts between American Jewry and the Polish authorities was through Isaac Lewin, a former Polish politician, leader in the Orthodox Agudath Yisrael movement and professor at Yeshiva University whose primary concern was for the religious community. Lewin’s contact with the American government and with the Joint helped make him the perfect shtadlan, or intermediary, between the Americans and the Poles. The Polish government’s initial contact with a major foreign Jewish organization was with the B’nai B’rith, which had a long history of advocating for Jews worldwide. While no explanation was given for why they were the first organization invited in, their strong role in helping to challenge Poland’s MFN status in 1968 may have indicated to the Polish authorities that they held a great deal of power in Washington. Furthermore, while many Jewish organizations were headquartered in New York, B’nai B’rith was headquartered in Washington, D.C., giving their leaders quick access to the major decision makers in the nation’s capital. Finally, the American Jewish Committee, or AJC, also began to develop a relationship with the Polish authorities. Like B’nai B’rith, the AJC also had a history of political activism, and they were also actively promoting Polish Jewish dialogue in the U.S., particularly in areas with large Polish populations. While Lewin’s interventions on behalf of the Congregation did achieve some concrete results, generally speaking, however, in this initial period, the Polish authorities’ goal was relationship building.
Increased Contact with Foreign Jews: a Modern Day *Shtadlan*

With the exception of the Joint and SSE, there was little foreign Jewish involvement with Polish Jewry in the immediate aftermath of the Anti-Zionist campaign. This changed after Gierek came to power, as prominent individuals and Jewish representatives of major organizations began meeting with Polish officials. Such contact was beneficial for both sides, as it ensured that foreign – and mostly American – Jewish leaders could keep an eye on what was actually occurring in the Polish Jewish community and to the remaining Jewish material culture in the country. For the Polish authorities, these contacts helped them in their fight for legitimacy with Western governments. While the Joint and SSE provided essential funding, these were apolitical organizations. If the Poles wanted to benefit from the perceived political power of Jews, they would need to engage with individuals in influential positions as well as with leaders of more political organizations, such as B’nai B’rith and the American Jewish Committee. Thus, it is hardly surprising that they began meeting with these officials by 1973.

One of the most prominent individuals who took an interest in Polish Jewish life in this period was U.S. based Rabbi Isaac Lewin of Agudat Israel, who spent considerable time speaking with the Congregation leaders in Poland and then bringing their concerns to the SSE and the Joint. Lewin became a key intermediary, or modern day *shtadlan*, between the Polish Jewish community, the Polish government and American Jewish organizations during this period, and thus crucial part of the power structure.³ A politician in Poland before the war, Lewin

insisted that though small, the community in Poland needed people with halakhic [Jewish legal] expertise to guide them Jewishly. For the most part, the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Warsaw was ready to oblige. The Ministry’s documents indicate a strong sense of respect for and trust towards Lewin (at times seemingly stronger than the trust that Joint officials had for him), perhaps because he had served in the Polish government in Łódź before the war. There also seemed to be an acute awareness of his potential connections abroad. In 1974 during a visit to Warsaw he was picked up and taken to the airport by a Ministry of Foreign Affairs car. Upon Lewin’s suggestion, two cantors were sent to Poland to help with High Holiday services in Wrocław and Warsaw in 1973. Two years later, Lewin arranged for a rabbi to spend several weeks in Poland, advising on Jewish issues. Lewin also had connections with the Polish Embassy in Washington, and, during a moment of crisis when it appeared that kosher meat would no longer be available in Krakow in early 1975, he successfully intervened. Whether it came to ensuring that there be matzah for every Passover and lulavim and etrogim for each Sukkot, Lewin was heavily involved in ensuring that religious life continued unabated in Poland. While the JDC and SSE leadership had their reservations over whether the community really required everything that Lewin suggested, his commitment to the community and clout

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4 Memo from Feder, July 24, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

5 Memo to Kohane, October 8, 1973, AR65/74-329, JDCA; Memo from Kohane, January 23, 1975, AR65/74-329, JDCA. The High Holidays include Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and several other holidays. It turned out after their visit that only one was really a cantor. Both men, however, urged the JDC to send matzah for the following year (Kohane from Haber, October 23, 1973, AR65/74-0318, JDCA); The report to the Ministry for Religious Affairs indicated that there were about 550 people at the Yom Kippur service with the American cantor (Letter regarding the communities in the Wrocław Region, December 8, 1973, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/504, AAN).

6 Memo to Kohane, January 27, 1975, AR65/74-329, JDCA.

7 The lulav and etrog are the four species mentioned in the Torah (Leviticus 23:40) that are used on the Jewish holiday of Sukkot.
with Polish officials in Washington and Warsaw helped ensure that Jews in Poland could continue to be Jewish despite the dwindling population. In fact, Maciej Jakubowicz, the leader of the Jewish community in Krakow reported in early 1973 that, “We have everything a Jew needs, we only lack people.”

Lewin was also deeply committed to preserving and maintaining Jewish cemeteries throughout Poland. In August, Frenkiel informed Akiva Kohane that the Minister of Religious Affairs was expecting a visit from Lewin and that Lewin expected “millions of dollars” from German reparation funds for the purposes of renovating Jewish cemeteries in Poland. When Lewin had trouble raising these funds, he approached the Joint for assistance. Haber responded to Lewin’s request by saying that they would not provide any funds for the cemeteries, that “we have enough problems taking care of the living,” thus signaling the Joint’s main concern: finances. However, Lewin did not give up. Instead, he went back to the government to negotiate.

Another yearly issue he dedicated himself passionately to solving was the best way to get matzah to the community. Although most Jews in Poland did not actually observe Passover (or kashrut for that matter), matzah was nevertheless provided for free or at a low cost to those who could afford it. There was another benefit to sending matzah, besides allowing those who wanted

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8 Maciej Jakubowicz (chair of religious congregation in Kraków) to Kohane, February 27, 1975, AR65/74-0318, JDCA. The World Jewish Relief helped with religious support (Kohane to Goldman, August 17, 1978, “Poland – General, 1976-1980,” JDCA). In conversation with Historian Gershon Bacon in Wielka Lipa, Poland in July 2014, Bacon mentioned that he heard Jakubowicz say that line when he met him in the 1970s. Thus, it seemed to be a phrase that Jakubowicz repeated to visitors.

9 Report on Meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Frenkiel in Israel, August 16, 1973, AR65/74-0318, JDCA. Reparations funds were paid by the German government as compensation for damages and losses incurred during World War II.

10 Memo from Feder to Kohane, August 27, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.
to keep the holiday to do so (and simply providing some food for free). Thanks to Frenkel’s list of matzah distribution in 1973, the JDC had detailed statistics for Poland’s remaining Jews who still maintained some connection with the Congregation. 1,182 families (roughly about 2,300 people) received free matzah, though statistics for actual numbers of people were only available in some locations. There were, for example, 405 people in 208 families in Warsaw. 11

In 1973 Lewin received a letter with an update from the Congregation, which he forwarded to the Joint. The fact that they sent it to Lewin, and not the Joint themselves, indicates that by this time, the Congregation leaders were more inclined to speak with him than with the JDC or SSE directly. They informed him that the etrogim were on their way from Rome, and that they were also awaiting the Jewish calendars. 12 The writer then asked Lewin for assistance in obtaining 20 tons of matzah for the next Passover. 13 Lewin could only advise the Joint on matzah issues, not actually make any decisions. But the fact that the leaders contacted him at all indicates their awareness that they had an attentive ear in Lewin for all religious matters. Because of his own religious convictions, he was always willing to speak with the Joint leadership and urge them to provide whatever he deemed appropriate for the community. The

11 Report on Meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Frenkiel in Israel, August 16, 1973, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

12 Rabbi Moses Rosen sent 100 Jewish calendars to Poland that year (Moses Levine to Haber, November 5, 1973, JDC NY AR65/74-0318, JDCA).

13 Kohane to Haber, October 31, 1973, AR65/74-0318. While Lewin could help with the matzah issue, ultimately he could only advise the Joint, not make any real decisions. Kohane wrote to Haber that year that they were looking into the possibility of repairing the matzah baking machines in Poland, rather than importing it. The repair would cost about $1,400, in contrast to the $12,000 that it would cost to import matzah. Furthermore, Kohane wrote that they – or as had been the case in recent years the Central British Fund - would cover the cost of 5 tons of matzah, which would be the allocation for free distribution, and they would charge the Congregation for anything more than that, since they could make a hefty profit off of the matzah that they could sell to the general population and Jews who could afford to pay. While the matzah machine was, undoubtedly a cheaper option, according to an AJC report, the ZIH Executive Board believed that the matzah machines were further contributing to the synagogue’s deterioration because of the vibration (Sol Flapan article in Jewish Affairs, “Poland’s Jewish Historical Institute,” Jan-Feb. 1975, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO).
relationship was not one way, however. The Joint also requested assistance from Lewin when the need arose. For example, Lewin was asked to intervene when the sanitation authorities threatened to close the kosher canteens in the country, which were in dire need of renovation, if they did not pass the Sanitary Department requirements.\(^\text{14}\) Lewin took the threat quite seriously, as he understood the impact that the closures would have on the aging community. Despite the poor conditions, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, with whom Lewin had a relationship, intervened and prevented the canteens from being closed immediately because “elimination without warning could cause unnecessary repercussions outside of the country.”\(^\text{15}\)

Another one of Lewin’s major objectives was to obtain spiritual leaders for Poland. In spring 1974 Lewin wrote to the Joint, asking for them to consider sending a rabbi, along with an assistant, to Poland for six months. Lewin wrote that this would be in the tradition of the Joint’s commitment to help the remnants of Polish Jewry. In the letter he clarified that he would take care of finding a candidate and obtaining the visa. In fact, he wrote, the Polish embassy assured him that they understand the need to have a rabbi in Poland, indicating that this was something he began planning and consulting with the government on long before raising the idea with the Joint.\(^\text{16}\) Furthermore, it indicates that the Polish government looked favorably upon this plan, which could put the Joint in a difficult position if they refused to fund the trip.

The Joint was not always willing to approve Lewin’s requests. For example, they were willing to send two cantors to Poland in 1973, but were more dismissive of his newer request for

\(^{14}\) Letter to Lewin, September 14, 1973, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

\(^{15}\) Letter regarding the communities in the Wrocław Region, December 8, 1973, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/504, AAN.

\(^{16}\) Lewin to Haber, May 9, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.
a long-term rabbi. In a message to Kohane, Haber wrote that he was against this plan, but that he knew that there would be significant pressure to send a rabbi, which he could deal with if Kohane agreed that this would be “throwing out money.”

Following a meeting with Jakubowicz and Finkelstein, Kohane wrote back to Haber that “There is no justification to send any rabbis to Poland. It would be not only a waste of money, but as Jakubowicz says – nonsense.” However, Jakubowicz did not want this opinion communicated to Lewin, as Lewin had been very upset with him the last time the issue was raised and Jakubowicz rejected the idea. Despite clear differences of opinion between Jakubowicz and Finkelstein on many issues, neither believed that sending a rabbi or a cantor was worth the money, though Finkelstein noted that it was very nice when tourists volunteered to act as cantors and pray in the synagogues. Sending someone exclusively for this purpose seemed superfluous, as there had been no bar mitzvahs or circumcisions for years. Jakubowicz was adamant that it was unnecessary:

For God’s Sake, for whom do we need a rabbi? Din torahs we don’t have; Talmud torahs we don’t have; questions of kashrut (Sha-a lot) we don’t have; religious divorces we don’t have; religious marriages we don’t have; circumcision we don’t have; bar mitzvoth we don’t have; funerals where we would need a rabbi to officiate we have not had for the last twenty years. What would such a rabbi do? Look at the empty synagogues.

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17 Haber to Kohane, May 13, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

18 According to the memo, Finkelstein would, nevertheless, approve even if “Rabbi Lewin will suggest sending twenty rabbis to Poland.” (Kohane to Haber, May 21, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA).

19 Ibid.
Instead, he argued, the Joint should send the money that would be spent on a rabbi – or even 1/5 of that amount – with which they could help many people.\(^{20}\) The conflict ultimately came down to economics vs. emotions. The financial needs were too great to justify something like this.

When Lewin asked the JDC again that fall to send cantors to Poland, Haber told him that he did not think that the last visit was successful, but he would consider sending a single cantor, rather than two families like the last time.\(^{21}\) The Joint, understandably so, was viewing this from an economic perspective. Sending a rabbi was not necessarily the wisest investment. In contrast, Lewin’s perspective was emotionally driven. He truly believed that this was important for Polish Jewry. Lewin then raised the issue of the rabbi with Jakubowicz and Finkelstein. When Jakubowicz told him that he did not think sending a rabbi to Poland was justified, Lewin responded that “every Jewish community must have a rabbi; otherwise it is not a community.”\(^{22}\)

While Lewin’s religious perspective may have led him to believe that a rabbi was an essential component of all Jewish communities, he was willing to compromise with a temporary rabbi. In the fall of 1975 he helped send Asser Zibes, a rabbi from America who had lived in Poland until sometime around 1967. Despite his initial hesitation to support such a venture, Finkelstein welcomed Zibes at the Congregation’s board meeting in Warsaw on October 25, 1975.\(^{23}\) Finkelstein expressed “his hope and belief that the arrival of Rabbi Asser Zibes will

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\(^{20}\) Ibid.

\(^{21}\) Haber to Kohane, August 27, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

\(^{22}\) Kohane to Haber, May 24, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA; Haber to Kohane, August 27, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

\(^{23}\) In a memo to Kohane, Haber wrote that he had offered $1000 to help defray the costs of Zibes’ visit and that Lewin definitely considered this a useful endeavor. Upon Zibes’ return, Lewin translated a letter from Jakubowicz thanking Lewin very much for making Zibes’ visit possible. Haber ended the memo by saying, “I think it is a good investment, and I wanted you to have this information for your records.” This is the second time that Haber mentioned that he thought sending a religious leader to the community would be a good investment. He wrote something similar in his memo about the cantors who went in 1973. Perhaps Kohane was skeptical, and that is why Haber justified his contributions (Haber to Kohane, November 11, 1975, AR65/74-0329, JDCA). Lewin gives
greatly contribute to the elevation of the level of Jewish religious life and will favorably influence the development of Jewish religious matters.” The board jumped right into their discussion with Zibes sitting there to offer advice. The first issue up for discussion was the challenge of finding ritual slaughterers among the community members. Zibes suggested that the board go to the government and request permission to bring in ritual slaughterers from Hungary or Romania for periods of three months. The board agreed and Finkelstein planned to speak with a Vice-Director at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Tadeusz Dusik. Dusik would be the one to provide permission, but funding was another issue. When Finkelstein said that the Congregation did not have the funds, Zibes promised to speak with Lewin after he returned to the U.S.\(^\text{24}\)

A month after Zibes’ visit, Lewin wrote to Haber to ask for funds to help support, as Zibes had suggested, a ritual slaughterer in Poland to help the communities with kosher canteens. These canteens, according to Lewin, “are of the utmost importance for the Jews in this country.”\(^\text{25}\) According to Lewin, the government was ready to provide visas for ritual slaughterers coming from Hungary or Romania. Once again, he dealt with the Polish authorities first, perhaps as a way of putting pressure on the Joint. He asked Haber whether the:

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\text{J.D.C. – which has such a glorious tradition with respect for helping Polish Jews in meeting their religious needs – would allocate for the coming year a certain amount (approximately $50,000.-) in order to make possible that a rabbi and two shochetim be sent to Poland.}\]

\(^\text{24}\) The High Holidays in 1975 were in September, so if he was just being welcomed in mid-October, it is highly unlikely that he was there specifically for the holidays. According to a letter from Lewin in November, he was there for “several weeks” (Lewin to Haber, November 12, 1975, AR65/74-0329, JDCA).

\(^\text{25}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{26}\) Ibid.
Once again Lewin was concerned about the perceived religious needs of the community, but when it came down to the logistics of funding, he was unable to ensure that the needs would be met. The Joint could have easily refused to work with Lewin, given how far-fetched some of his proposals seemed to be in their minds. But just as the Polish government depended on Lewin to act as an intermediary, the Joint also needed him to act as an intermediary on their behalf.

For example, in 1974 the Joint and the SSE were having serious trouble with the authorities regarding the rate of exchange. Not only was the more favorable rate to be discontinued, but the government also wanted a reimbursement of over $60,000 for the alleged improper exchange rate that had been in place for the previous four years. The SSE and Joint officials were unwilling to budge, however, and they told Jakubowicz and Finkelstein that they were not accepting this rate change. In fact, they would continue to send the same amount of money as before, despite the decrease in the Jewish population figures, on the condition that the government continued to honor the previous exchange rate. They specified that if the government did not accept this proposal, they would send money only for a few of the expenses they had previously covered and that “responsibility for not meeting other needs will rest on those who suggest an unrealistic rate of exchange.”

The international Jewish aid organizations clearly felt that they had the upper hand in issuing this ultimatum, and that the government would be willing to negotiate with them. Furthermore, they seemed to believe that the government would be potentially interested in the SSE expanding its work in Poland, but the SSE refused to do so without being able to send representatives into Poland in an official capacity to discuss the new activities with the proper authorities.

27 Kohane to Haber, May 22, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

28 Ibid. The SSE was advised to apply for visas in October 1974, which, they were told, would be granted (Kohane to Haber, October 4, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA).
mentioned during a meeting with Jakubowicz and Finkelstein that they were relieving the
government of the burden of having to provide assistance, such as food, to the “most unfortunate
Polish victims of Nazism.” Furthermore, because the SSE received funds from other Jewish
organizations worldwide, the SSE leadership was concerned that the donor organizations would
end their support. Rhetoric such as that used by the SSE board member used likely would have
been enough to prevent the outside funding agencies from cutting off their aid to those
“unfortunate Polish victims,” but it was, understandably, a cause for concern.

Jakubowicz and Finkelstein were unable to accomplish anything, so Rabbi Lewin was summoned to negotiate with the embassy about the rate of exchange. In late July he informed the Joint that at meetings at the Ministries of Foreign and Religious Affairs he was told that the government would reconsider the rate of exchange by September. He was optimistic, believing that they would continue at the same rate or find a compromise, but that he had been told that the new rates were the same as the ones given to other religious groups who bring in foreign currency. When the final word arrived, it appeared as though the Joint officials had gambled correctly. The current rate of exchange was extended through the end of the year, though no promises were made for the future. As a result, Kohane decided to send in extra funds just in case the rate was changed again. This way, he wrote, they’ll have the money for the free

29 Minutes from meeting between the Congregation and the SSE, May 20, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.
30 Ibid.
31 During his meeting with Dusik, he expressed his hope that the government would show understanding and good will and adjust the rate. If not, he worried, the higher rate might be “misinterpreted by foreign organizations and Jewish community, which might in turn, limit their generosity to the Congregation” (Notatka z rozmowy tow. Wicedyrektora T. Dusika z rabinem Izaakiem Lewinem z USA, odbytej w dniu 17.VII.1974 r. w Urzędzie do Spraw Wyznań [Notes from a discussion between Dusik and Lewin], July 17, 1974, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/516, AAN).
32 Memo from Feder, July 24, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.
distribution of matzah, matzah baking machine repair, and funds for their allocations several months into 1975. Furthermore, he increased the allocation from $3,250 to $3,500 per month.  

Throughout the seventies, Lewin played an important role as an intermediary between the Joint and the authorities, since the Joint was still unable to work officially in the country. According to Lewin, he always thought of himself as an unofficial representative of the Joint, and that he hoped that his efforts would be helpful in the JDC’s continued work in Poland. Thus, he informed the Joint that he had discussed their possible return to Poland during a visit to Poland in 1974, but that there was a “terrible accusation against the JDC” in the government’s files on the organization. While he did not know what the accusation was, he was trying to look into the file. Whatever the accusation, however, Lewin believed that with time the authorities would reassess their position. For the time being, at least, they had a good relationship with Lewin who acted as the important intermediary between the two sides.

B’nai B’rith Goes to Poland

While there seemed to be hints that the government might wish for the Joint to return, the clearest sign that the Polish government was beginning to open up to the idea of speaking with foreign Jewish organizations came in March 1973. According to a discussion between the U.S. Ambassador to Poland, Richard Davies, and Polish Vice-Minister Romuald Spasowski, the Polish government had not had any official contact with American Jewish organizations because of the American Press’ reports on the “alleged attitude of the Polish government towards Jews.”

33 Kohane to Haber, September 20, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

34 Memo from Feder, July 24, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

35 Ibid.
Nevertheless, Spasowski said the government believed “it would be good for Polish-American relations to develop such contacts.”

The first organization invited to meet with the Polish government was not the Joint, but B’nai B’rith. In mid-1973 two B’nai B’rith leaders, Herman Edelsberg and David Blumberg, visited Poland. While no explanation was given for why B’nai B’rith was the first organization invited, their strong reaction to the anti-Zionist campaign, and subsequent ability to threaten Poland’s MFN status, likely indicated to the government that this was - at least seemingly - a powerful organization with strong connections in Washington. Their impression may have been reinforced by a National Conference on Soviet Jewry (NCSJ) meeting held at the B’nai B’rith building in late September 1972. The meeting, attended by about 125 leaders of Jewish organizations and local Jewish federations, hosted a special guest, Senator Henry Jackson, who introduced his amendment that would “deny the trade benefit to any ‘non-market’ (meaning Communist) country that prevented its citizens from emigrating.” The NCSJ board debated the amendment and ultimately endorsed it. According to J.J. Goldberg, this was a “decisive turning point, not only for the NCSJ and the Soviet Jewry movement, but for American Jewish politics in general.” While B’nai B’rith was merely the host of this monumental meeting, undoubtedly it was on the Polish government’s radar as an important center of American Jewish political activity.

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36 Telegram: B’nai B’rith Visit to Poland (From Warsaw to Tel Aviv and State), March 16, 1973 [Electronic Record], Central Foreign Policy Files (Created 7/1/1973 - 12/31/1978 documenting the period 1973 - 12/31/1978 - Record Group 59), National Archives and Records Administration Online Records [retrieved from the Access to Archival Databases at www.archives.gov] (hereafter NARAAAD).

37 Goldberg, Jewish Power, 164.

38 Ibid., 165.
Their mission to Poland, organized by the U.S. embassy in Warsaw, was to erect a bridge between Jews and Poles that would look towards the future, not to the past.\(^{39}\) According to Frenkel’s report of his meeting with the pair, during which he claimed they were able to speak freely because their escorts from Interpress were seated at another table, the TSKŻ painted a false picture of Jewish life in Poland for the men, discussing the large number of Jewish youth and children who intended to remain in Poland.\(^{40}\) Kohane wrote of hearing Frenkel’s report “I just didn’t believe my ears when I heard Mr. Frenkel’s report.”\(^{41}\) He could not understand how the B’nai B’rith representatives could have gone to Poland without any knowledge about the Jewish situation in the country or of the Joint/SSE work in country at the time. Consequently, Kohane wrote, “those people have been exposed to false propaganda statements by the authorities as well as by their Jewish stooges in the Kulturverband.”\(^{42}\) That they were willing to forget the past and focus on building mutual understanding also struck Kohane the wrong way. He believed that they were being naïve, and while he was reluctant to believe most of what Frenkel reported, he concluded in his letter that, “it seems to be a fact that the gentlemen from B’nai B’rith came to Poland not completely prepared and briefed on the real situation there, and consequently they have not been immune to the propaganda of the Polish authorities and their Jewish and non-Jewish agents.”\(^{43}\) Haber tried to allay Kohane’s fears by reassuring him that:

If Mr. Frenkel thinks that Herman Edelsberg was fooled by the Poles he’s got 28 more guesses coming. He is a very sharp cookie, has been around a long long time

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\(^{39}\) Translation from Polish of a statement by Mr. Frenkel, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.

\(^{41}\) Report on Meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Frenkel in Israel, August 16, 1973, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

\(^{42}\) Ibid.

\(^{43}\) Ibid.
and I can assure you is quite capable of reading between the lines and knowing how to distinguish between propaganda and reality.\textsuperscript{44}

From Haber’s perspective, their visit had few potential negative consequences. He wrote to Kohane, “So the Poles rolled out the red carpet, and if good comes of it, \textit{b’vakasha} [please]. If not, nothing has been lost. So a new bridge has not been built.”\textsuperscript{45} Of course, Kohane might have been upset that B’nai B’rith was invited before the Joint or the SSE. Nevertheless, Haber viewed this as a positive move in the right direction for Polish-Jewish relations.

U.S. Ambassador Davies was particularly integral in making their visit possible, and he personally greeted them at the airport, hosted them in his home, and provided them with advice and support.\textsuperscript{46} Indeed, from Davies’ perspective, Polish-Jewish relations were an important component of American-Polish relations.\textsuperscript{47} That the U.S. government was also involved indicates that this was a matter of importance at the diplomatic level, not simply a meeting of representatives from a religious organization.

\textsuperscript{44} Haber to Kohane, August 21, 1973, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{46} In Blumberg’s thank you note, addressed informally to “Dick,” he wrote that they felt positively about the visit, and that they were “determined that the door you opened for us will be kept open wider.” Thus, this visit should also be seen as an act of American diplomacy, since the U.S. Embassy played such an important role (Blumberg to Ambassador Richard Y. Davies, August 10, 1973, B’nai B’rith Collection 139/Poland II-II, AJA.

\textsuperscript{47} In his memo to the State Department regarding the August 20, 1973 review of U.S.-Polish relations, Davies wrote that he told Vice-Minister Spasowski that he was “very encouraged” by the discussions between the government and American Jewish community organizations. He also used the opportunity to warn him that moving forward with plans that would lead to cemetery destruction would not, however, further the dialogue (Memo re: U.S.-Polish Bilateral Relations (IV): Jewish Cemeteries in Poland (from Warsaw to State), August 20, 1973 [Electronic Record], Central Foreign Policy Files (Created 7/1/1973 - 12/31/1978 documenting the period 1973 - 12/31/1978 - Record Group 59, NARAAAD)). A year later, Davies followed up with him on the cemetery issue, which was one of the “pending bilateral issues,” and was told that they were thinking about having Isaac Lewin represent the American Jewish Community, upon the suggestion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Memo re: Old Jewish Cemetery Warsaw (from Warsaw to State), April 17, 1974, [Electronic Record], Central Foreign Policy Files (Created 7/1/1973 - 12/31/1978 documenting the period 1973 - 12/31/1978 - Record Group 59, NARAAAD)).
In fact, this was a major milestone. Blumberg wrote about their impressions of the government:

At a farewell lunch, one of the officials of the Polish Foreign Ministry urged us when we made our report not to write anything that would be counterproductive, that might shut the door. He believed that a constructive process had been started and that we should ‘keep the door open.’ We agreed with this advice even though there are many things we saw and heard that are not easy to accept.48

In his thank you note to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Party, Piotr Jaroszewicz, Blumberg reiterated the fact that they felt that this was a good start towards mutual understanding and better relations, and that everything was done in a constructive spirit.49

Despite having been warned that they would likely not be able to see the Jewish pavilion at Auschwitz because it was closed “on principle…because the keys are not available or the manager is sick,” the men were permitted to see the block upon request.50 They were also wined and dined by the government, and they met with a member of the Polish Parliament, a high-ranking member of the Party, and with the Minister of Religious Affairs. Thus, it was clear that the Polish government was invested in their visit, and hoped that it could bring about sincere cooperation. According to Frenkiel, Bloomberg and Edelsberg believed that Poland might change its attitude towards Jews and Israel if Poland received “some advantages.” Though the men did not get any “binding commitments,” Frenkiel noted that the talks had begun and in a private conversation with the Minister of Religious Affairs, Frenkiel was told that the government understood B’nai B’rith’s importance, “that Poland is eagerly awaiting concrete

48 Blumberg to the B’nai B’rith Board of Governors, August 20, 1973, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.
49 Letter to His Excellency Piotr Jaroszewicz, August 13, 1973, B’nai B’rith Collection 139/Poland II-II, AJA.
50 This was a common complaint heard from Jews visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau at the time.
suggestions from American Jewry, and that he considers those talks as the beginning of a
dialogue.”51 Furthermore, Frenkiel expressed to Blumberg in a letter after the visit that the
latter’s visit changed Dusik’s outlook on Polish-Jewish history. According to Frenkiel, Dusik
now viewed 1968-1970 as a “period of errors, but this period should not be given too much
weight in contrast to the thousand years of living together.”52 If Dusik’s reassessment of the
period was genuine, this would have been a major victory for the Jewish leadership.

In a letter to B’nai B’rith’s board of governors, Blumberg and Edelsberg provided an
extensive behind the scenes report of their visit to Poland. The visit, which they successfully
obtained through the U.S. embassy in Warsaw and through meetings with the Polish Ambassador
to Washington, was considered to be a high priority meeting. They did not find out until the very
last minute that they would not be meeting directly with Gierek, but with mid-level ministers
instead. Neither seemed fazed by this, however, as they noted that given B’nai B’rith’s vocal
stance on the Soviet Jewry issue, it was understandable.53

Despite Kohane’s concerns that the men had been duped by the TSKŻ and government
officials, Bloomberg noted that the TSKŻ was an organization of stooges, while the “real Jewish
community” and synagogues were in shabby condition. He also acknowledged the state-
sponsored antisemitism. But, he wrote, “We think we can accomplish something.” This seemed
particularly true with respect to their focus on Israel. Despite having been warned not to discuss
Israel, “even after you have had two cognacs,” Bloomberg and Edelsberg raised Israel because,
as Edelsberg explained to the Polish Minister who warned him not to discuss the Jewish state, “I

51 Translation from Polish of a statement by Mr. Frenkiel, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.
52 Letter to Mr. Blumberg, August 13, 1973, B’nai B’rith Collection 139/Poland II-II, AJA.
53 Blumberg to the B’nai B’rith Board of Governors, August 20, 1973, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.
will tell them what is important to Jews, and Israel is important.” Both men were unwilling to work on improving relations without discussing Israel. Much to their surprise, they were told that there would be an improvement with Poland’s relationship to Israel, given time and from the perspective of détente.\textsuperscript{54} From Bloomberg’s perspective, the trip was a success, and they would continue to work towards improving the treatment of the “Jewish remnant and of the unique historic sites.”\textsuperscript{55}

Further demonstrating how positively they felt about their trip to Poland, Blumberg and Edelsberg wrote an article in the B’nai B’rith magazine, \textit{The National Jewish Monthly}. Though they predicted that “Poland is on the way to becoming the first \textit{Judenrein} [Jew-free] country in Europe,” the tone of the article was largely positive. Aside from using the loaded term “Judenrein,” which alluded to the Nazi period and intentional liquidation of the Jewish community, thus suggesting that the Polish government was (or had been) also intentionally carrying out such a plan, they tried to remain as objective as possible. They wrote:

\begin{quote}
In the light of these observations some will say that a goodwill mission comes too late – others that it comes too early. Too late to do anything for the Jewish remnants, too soon to forget the very recent past. But without minimizing the past, we believe that the overriding consideration must be to improve the present and build for the future. The example of America’s détente with the Soviet Union and communist China is too recent and pertinent to be ignored. And so we came to Poland determined to look for honest ways to build bridges of reconciliation and normalization.\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

Summarizing their meeting with the “most important party official” they met, Wincenty Krasko, the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Polish Sejm, they wrote that he bid them

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} David M. Blumberg and Herman Edelsberg, “Mission to Poland” in \textit{The National Jewish Monthly}, September 1973, 34-37, B’nai B’rith Collection 139/Poland II-II, AJA.
farewell with the following statement: “We want good relations with the Jewish people because we want good relations with the United States.” This was perhaps one of the clearest indications that the Polish government believed that good relations with the Jews would benefit them in the long run, and that Polish American relations were somehow linked to Polish-Jewish relations.

A year later, Herman Edelsberg wrote to Haber to inform him of a recent lunch he had with the Polish Ambassador Witold Trampczynski, at the latter’s invitation. During the lunch, the Ambassador shared the good news that he had just been advised that the Polish government would renovate the Nożyk Synagogue and preserve the Jewish cemeteries in Warsaw and Łódź. They were also considering the preservation of six other cemeteries throughout Poland. This was, by far, the greatest concession that the government had made since 1968, aside from allowing the SSE to continue sending in money.

Edelsberg also informed Haber that, “during our conversation the Ambassador indicated too that consideration was being given to bringing the Joint back.” Edelsberg likely imagined that this would be good news for Haber, but Haber’s response to Edelsberg indicated that it was not necessarily so. Haber wrote that he had heard from Lewin that the Joint’s potential return to Poland had been raised, but “for your confidential information, I can only tell you that we have

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57 Ibid.

58 Letter from Edelsberg to Haber, September 30, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA. In December 1975 a letter from the American Jewish Committee New York office to the Paris office indicated that Hyman Bookbinder, Edelsberg, and Ambassador Davies met and discussed the synagogue and cemetery issues. The government, it seemed, would be following through with its promises regarding the synagogue in Warsaw and construction had already begun (Morris Fine to Abraham Karlikow, December 5, 1975, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO).

59 Edelsberg to Haber, September 30, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.
no interest in going back to Poland whatsoever. It has neither political, nor any other interest for us, and those few people who still need our assistance are getting it one way or another." His response was strange. Perhaps this was an attempt to not get his hopes up or maybe he did not want to sound too eager, lest the government think it could take advantage of that eagerness. Perhaps the Joint had no intention of expanding its program, since their current activities were already so costly. Only weeks before Haber wrote to Kohane that he told Lewin that he didn’t care about the government reconsidering the JDC’s return, but “if for any reason the Polish Ambassador would want to see me, I would be glad to go to Washington with Rabbi Lewin, or alone.” A trip to Washington, D.C from New York hardly sounds like a sign of total disinterest. He may have been expressing a reluctance to work with the Polish government again, but he was clearly not ready to give up his seat at the table quite yet.

A report of the good news, written under the headline “Progress in Warsaw,” appeared in the November issue of *The National Jewish Monthly*. It read:

B’nai B’rith was hearing the news before anyone else, Ambassador Trampczynski explained, because it was the Blumberg-Edelsberg mission to Warsaw last summer and their constructive recommendations to his government…made it all possible. The Ambassador himself and the U.S. Ambassador to Poland, Richard Davies, were largely instrumental in changing the Polish government’s policy.

Blumberg commented that he hoped this was the “first step toward a true détente between Poland and world Jewry.” This Cold War terminology would have been familiar to the magazine’s readers, bringing them a sense of relief and hope for peace between the two groups.62

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60 Haber to Edelsberg, October 3, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

61 Haber to Kohane, September 20, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

62 “Progress in Warsaw” in *The National Jewish Monthly*, November 1974, B’nai B’rith Collection 139/Poland II-II, AJA.
It is not clear just how much influence B’nai B’rith’s visit actually had, though by all accounts it was significant. But the decision to be more proactive in Poland may also have been a reaction to pressure from world Jewry. At the end of November 1972, for example, the Brooklyn based World Center of European Rabbis wrote to its members, asking that they help put pressure on the U.S. government to intervene during the Polish Minister of Commerce’s visit to the United States.\(^\text{63}\) According to a Polish Ministry of Religious Affairs memo on matters regarding Jewish cemeteries, Western Jews, especially in the U.S., tended to blame the Polish authorities for the state of Jewish cemeteries and they had unleashed anti-Polish propaganda and actions against Poland. As a result:

> The reactions of World Jewry on matters of Jewish cemeteries in our country should be the subject of attention for our state authorities. World Jewry is, in fact, a viable political force in the economy which should be reckoned with and we should seek solutions that eliminate harm to our country.\(^\text{64}\)

This may not have been a new policy though, since two years before, in August 1972, a contact in the Jewish community said that he or she believed that the government was not moving ahead with plans to build a road through the Warsaw cemetery “for fear of international reaction.”\(^\text{65}\)

\(^{63}\) Rabbi R. Greenwald from the World Center of European Rabbis, November 29, 1972, General Records of the Department of State/Social, 1970-1973, Box 3091, SOC 12-1 POL (1/1/70), NACP. The State Department and Department of Commerce received a slew of letters in the fall of 1972 from Rabbis, to which they replied that, “The Embassy has discussed the matter with the appropriate Polish authorities, who had also received similar inquiries. The Embassy was assured there was no basis in fact for the allegations regarding Jewish cemeteries” (Department of State to Rabbi Martin Erkowitz, December 12, 1972, General Records of the Department of State/Social, 1970-1973, Box 3091, SOC 12-1 POL (1/1/70) NACP).

\(^{64}\) Notes regarding Jewish cemetery issues, undated, but likely 1974, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/514, AAN. In April 1974, there was another memo regarding the cemeteries that stressed the need to take action to stop the anti-Polish campaign and eliminate the economic repression against Poland, especially in the U.S (Notatka w sprawie cmentarzy wyznania mojżeszowego [Notes regarding Jewish cemetery issues], April 1974, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/516, AAN).

\(^{65}\) Embassy Warsaw to Secretary of State re: Demolition of Jewish Cemetery, August 3, 1972, General Records of the Department of State/Social, 1970-1973, Box 3091, SOC 12-1 POL (1/1/70), NACP.
was, however, a clear restatement based on the thawing of relations initiated by the Polish leadership.

**Ready for Rapprochement: the American Jewish Committee Enters the Scene**

According to a memo sent from the American Jewish Committee (AJC) to the Joint, a Polish government official expressed to some of the AJC’s leadership the belief that the government was ready for “some kind of rapprochement with Jews.” Unlike the B’nai B’rith leadership, which went into Poland without communicating with the Joint leadership prior to going, the AJC leadership consulted with Kohane as they prepared for their own visit to Poland in order to find out the best, most strategic ways for them to negotiate with the Polish authorities. Kohane, whose work with the Joint likely made him one of the few experts when it came to Polish Jewish matters, suggested that the highest priority would be pension rights, welfare problems (i.e., that there should be better exchange rates), and repairs to Jewish cemeteries and synagogues. He was adamant that these must be seen as Polish responsibilities, not Jewish responsibilities. This is especially true since the state had confiscated or frozen Jewish assets, which is not the case with the church. He also believed that it would be important to discuss a kosher kitchen for the Old Age Home. Recognizing the long-standing relationship between the Joint and Lewin, Abraham Karlikow, the AJC representative who would be the representative dealing closest with the Polish authorities, informed the Joint that Lewin had expressed an

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66 Meeting with a member of the Polish Sejm from David Geller to Karlikow, October 4, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA. The sentence was underlined for emphasis in the original text.
interest in building better relations with the AJC as well. Perhaps Lewin believed that he could be as helpful to the AJC as he believed himself to be for the Joint/SSE.

In August Karlikow traveled to Poland to meet with the Polish authorities and Polish Jewish leaders. In his report on his visit, the latest by an American Jewish official, he offered the most up-to-date picture of Jewish life in Poland. He wrote that the Jewish theater was, “certainly” the “liveliest manifestation of Jewish activity in Poland today.”68 Traveling abroad and between the branches in Poland, the theater provided a glimpse into the Jewish world that no longer existed in Poland. The clubs typically had libraries and organized “cultural soirees,” which might include a public reading, lecture, or socialist commemoration. Many non-Jews attended the clubs, because, as was explained to Karlikow, they could not discriminate. The Jewish co-ops, too, were mostly employing non-Jews. He estimated that only 15-20% of the workers were Jewish. Regarding the Congregation, Karlikow noted that there was no rabbi, but he wrote that, “Not so much religion as welfare is the main business of the Union,” seemingly supporting the Joint’s doubt that investing in a rabbi was necessary. 70,000 meals were served in the dozen or so canteens in 1973, he wrote, funded by a “Swiss-based welfare agency but which – it is an open secret in Poland – originate with the Joint Distribution Committee.” He noted that it was financially beneficial for the Polish government to allow the funds to come in, even at a favorable rate. Nevertheless, the government wished to reduce the rate. In other areas of Jewishness, Karlikow wrote, there seemed to be more positive signs. He mentioned Isaac Lewin who has been invited numerous times to speak with the Polish authorities in Poland. Both Lewin

67 Karlikow to Morris Fine, September 4, 1974, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 5, Poland 71-74), YIVO.

68 Karlikow’s report on his visit to Poland “The Jews in Poland,” 1974, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO.
and Rabbi Arthur Schneier, a New York based activist who worked on issues of intercultural
dialogue and religious freedom, had decent relationships with the authorities, and believed that if
foreign Jews brought in some funds for the cemeteries, the Polish government would be willing
to negotiate on this issue.\textsuperscript{69} Thus, there was potential, from Karlikow’s perspective, for greater
cooperation between the Poles and Jews.

Karlikow noted that there were two other main figures trying to bridge the gap between
the Polish authorities and Jewish organizations abroad. The first was Ambassador Davies, who
suggested that the Polish authorities might be ready to meet with “a reasonable Jewish
organization like the American Jewish Committee.” The other main figure he claimed was
instrumental was the \textit{Folks Szytme} editor, Tenenblatt. Though Karlikow did not think that the
Joint would be welcome yet, he believed that others, such as the Memorial Foundation, might be.
Karlikow wrote that the Joint’s previous aid to Poland, which had been instrumental in helping to
rebuild Poland’s post-war economy, would not have nearly the weight as it did in the past, given
Poland’s debt. Furthermore, Karlikow wrote, the Joint had had far too much trouble with the
authorities in the past, and they seemed more focused on giving to individuals than the dwindling
community. From Karlikow’s perspective, suggesting that the authorities meet with the Joint at
this time likely would not be successful.\textsuperscript{70}

But there were, he insisted, clear signs that the Polish government viewed increased
cooperation with American Jews to be a priority. Karlikow’s explanation for why the Polish
government was paying more attention to Jewish issues was clear:

\begin{multicols}{2}
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
\end{multicols}
The Poles may well have concluded that it would be stupid to tarnish their outside image for what, after all, is now quite a minor matter in the Polish scheme of things. The Poles doubtless are well aware of Jewish protests in the United States on Soviet treatment of its Jews and the impact this had on Soviet efforts to improve trade with the U.S., and surely want none of this.\footnote{Karlikow’s report on his visit to Poland “The Jews in Poland,” 1974, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO. This seems a likely reference to the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which I will discuss more in depth in Chapter 5.}

Indeed, the American Jewish Committee worked to solidify its relationship with the Polish government following Karlikow’s visit in the early fall. The Polish authorities seemed to concur. During an early October meeting with the American Jewish Committee at their New York office, a member of the Polish Parliament, Stanisław Stomma, said that the government seemed to be indicating that the current situation was ripe for policy changes. When he was informed that the prominent American Rabbi Schneier was part of a delegation that had met with Polish Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Stomma was even more encouraged that things were changing. He claimed that it was typically difficult to arrange such a meeting, and that the Cardinal’s willingness to meet with Rabbi Schneier, with the government’s permission, was promising.\footnote{Meeting with a member of the Polish Sejm from David Geller to Karlikow, October 4, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.}

When the group brought up the contemporary Jewish community, Stomma reportedly took detailed notes. He then told the group that he understood how difficult Polish-Jewish relations were, given the history, and that he hoped that an increase in Jewish tourism to Poland could help improve the situation, not only in terms of changing attitudes towards Poland, but also perhaps that the increased interaction could help to prevent cemetery desecration and change attitudes towards the particular Jewish suffering during the Holocaust.\footnote{Ibid.}
According to David Geller’s report of the meeting:

While it is difficult to assess how much ‘clout’ Mr. Stomma has, we feel nevertheless, it was a useful contact to make and that his concern for and interest in Jews is sincere. At one point he said that in the not too distant future, Poles would learn in schools about the contribution of Jews to their culture. We couldn’t help however, also thinking that Mr. Stomma’s visit was part of an orchestrated effort to create a favorable climate of opinion amongst the Jews in the U.S., who are perceived to be very powerful, during the visit of Eduard [sic] Gierek.74

Thus, while the AJC leadership was wary the Polish government’s motives, they still believed that their organization should play an integral role in the effort to improve Polish-Jewish relations, both in Poland and in the United States. Asserting their commitment, they informed Stomma and his interpreter about their work in the U.S. promoting Polish Jewish dialogue. Podowski asked to be kept informed about the programs and asked Geller whether they were doing anything to stop Polish jokes.75

Upon his return to Poland, Stomma met with the Krakow TSKŻ branch and told them about his meeting with the Jewish organizations in the U.S., including the American Jewish Committee, but also the American Jewish Congress and the Association of American Congregations. He informed them that all three organizations had a good grasp on the political situation in Poland, and particularly of the Jews in Poland. He explained that they showed no

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74 Ibid. Gierek’s 1974 visit was instrumental in strengthening Polish-American trade and economic relations, as well as Polish-American relations as a whole. President Ford reciprocated the following year.

75 Ibid. There were allegations that Jews were responsible for spreading Polish jokes at the time. In 1980, Wolf Blitzer wrote an article for The Jewish Exponent called “Who’s Behind Polish Jokes? Zionists, of course.” In the article he wrote that circles within the regime believed that Jews were spreading Polish jokes as part of a larger anti-Polish campaign (Blitzer, “Who’s Behind Polish Jokes? Zionists, of course,” The Jewish Exponent, February 29, 1980, accessed through ProQuest Historical Newspapers). Others blamed the West Germans for using Polish jokes to discredit Poland in the U.S. In February 1967 the former press attaché of the Polish Embassy in London discussed the “Polish joke” phenomenon on his Warsaw television show. He called on Polish-Americans to “conduct a vigorous counter-offensive against this propaganda and that America’s Ambassador to Warsaw should also have an interest in doing so (Embassy Warsaw to State Department re: “Polish Jokes” Aired on Warsaw TV,” February 27, 1967, General Records of the Department of State/Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, Box 2431, Political and Defensive (1/1/67), NACP).
hatred for the Polish authorities, but rather an interest in the country, the fate of the Jews in Poland, and in remaining Jewish material culture. They also wanted to be able to visit Poland. He then spoke about the “enormous political power” of Jewish capital in the U.S., and stressed that it was important for Poland to keep that in mind. Thus, this was not something that was merely whispered about behind closed doors. This was likely the motivation behind the invitation he issued to the American Jewish leaders to visit Poland. It is unclear exactly why he chose to discuss this with the TSKŻ at their meeting, but it may have been a hint to the TSKŻ that they, too, should be more active in developing these relationships with their co-religionists.

Just as all of these developments were occurring, two SSE representatives were finally allowed to visit Poland to assess the situation. Finkelstein, Jakubowicz, and Jerzy Kornacki, a Congregation official, told them that they needed: 30 talitot, 10 pairs of tefillin, 20 Ashkenazi prayer books, 30 sephardi prayer books, and 30 mezuzot. When the visitors asked for assurances that they could send these items with a duty exemption, they were told that they could not guarantee it and that it would be much better if tourists could bring the objects, which the visitors wrote in their report would be impossible. They also asked that wine be sent for the holidays from Israel. In their report, the visitors recommended substantial aid for the renovation of the kosher canteens because they were in such bad shape. The SSE officials realized that there could be a need for assistance for another twenty to twenty-five years, not just the immediate future. Thus, they were taking into account long term investments, not just what

76 “Notatka służbowa,” June 5, 1975, BU_1585_7186, IPN.
77 These are various ritual objects needed for prayer and for the home.
78 Translated from French – Trip to Poland by Miss W. Lehmann and Dr. I. Smidof, November 18-22, 1974 AR65/74-0318, JDCA.
79 Ibid.
was needed at the moment. According to Kohane, there were 179 new cases of welfare aid in 1974, with only ninety-six cases closing because of death or emigration.  

Despite these positive changes, at the end of 1974 the Congregation received news that the exchange rate for 1975 was decreasing and it was clear that this would negatively impact the SSE’s work in Poland. Taking advantage of the current favorable rate, the SSE sent in $25,500 before the end of the year, which would ensure the congregation’s work for about six months. Finkelstein wrote a letter to Lewin, perhaps because he knew that he would gain more sympathy from Lewin than from the SSE, asking for more assistance. Finkelstein wrote:

Consequently, conditions were created that after June 30, 1975 the existence of our organization and its activity are very questionable. We received at the end of this month the check from the SSE in Geneva and therefore the baking of matzoth for Pessach 1975 will be possible. We have, however, to take into consideration notifying our employees by March 31, 1975, that on June 30 1975 they will be discharged. The kosher kitchens will have to be closed on June 30, the ritual slaughter will cease and all our activities will come to an end. In other words, the latest on March 30 we will be in a state of liquidation unless some other circumstances will arise.

The needs of our organization at the new rate of exchange amount to $7,000, restricting all expenses to an absolute minimum, without any cost for cemeteries or synagogues.

We are very sorry that we have to give you such a sad picture of the situation and we will be very grateful to you for your informing us whether there are any prospects to subsidize us in the dimensions described here.

Undoubtedly, this was the kind of news that would upset Lewin. Kohane’s more level-headed response to the letter after Lewin shared it with him was that the situation was worrisome, and that they could only hope that the government would return to the previous rate.

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80 Kohane to Haber, December 6, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.
81 Excerpts from a letter of December 30, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.
82 Kohane to Haber, January 17, 1975, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.
But the situation would only get more dire. In mid-January the Congregation in Krakow was informed that they would no longer be able to use the municipal slaughter house for ritual slaughter, as it was about to be renovated. According to the memo Kohane sent Haber, the community was sending an S.O.S. Though the JDC was limited in its response since they could not work in Poland, Kohane suggested that Lewin’s connections with the Polish Embassy might prove helpful. Furthermore, he suggested that that Jewish press in the U.S. could take up the matter. Kohane, once again, believed that Poland would not want the bad press in the U.S., and he was prepared to use the media to prevent the authorities from cutting off the kosher meat supply.  

By the time the memo reached New York, Lewin was already aware of the problem and was preparing to take action at the embassy. When Haber followed up with him, he was told that Jakubowicz had called and that everything was ok. According to Haber, “you see that he does have a little bit of power and influence in places where it does seem to count.”

Yet another sign of good luck (though only after much panic), was that due to changes regarding foreign transfers to Polish citizens, the individuals receiving Joint aid were no longer receiving cash, but rather “Dollar Purchase Vouchers,” which allowed them to buy items at special foreign currency shops. If they bought goods, they got a much better rate than they had with the cash transfers. If they chose to sell the vouchers, they were able to get a much higher rate as well. So actually, according to Kohane, they were getting a much better rate than previously, despite the change and the ensuing panic that the change in the exchange rate had caused. And although Western Jews had already been assured of this, the Congregation received

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83 Kohane to Haber, January 23, 1975, AR65/74-0329, JDCA.

84 Haber to Kohane, January 27, 1975, AR65/74-0329, JDCA.
final assurances that the government would renovate and maintain the Nożyk synagogue, provide
office space for the Congregation, as well as space for matzah baking and a mikvah. ⁸⁵ That the
Congregation was the last to know indicates where the government’s priorities were.

While this was good news for the community and the Warsaw Congregation would
finally be able to pray in the only remaining synagogue in the city, the reality of the situation was
also sinking in. In a meeting in Geneva in 1974, Jakubowicz gave an exaggerated figure of “up
to 7,000” Jews living in Poland, while Finkelstein said that the TSKŻ estimated over 15,000,
including the ‘marranos.’ Kohane noted in his memo that “obviously if you include marranos,
whose number is unknown to anybody (otherwise they would not be marranos), then you can
give free reign to fantasy.” ⁸⁶ Indeed, the figures covered a broad range. According to Kazimierz
Urban, the Congregation had 1,319 members, almost 90% of whom lived in the Wrocław,
Krakow, Łódź, Katowice, and Warsaw areas. There were sixteen congregations, with twenty-
four synagogues and houses of prayer, and eleven employees who worked in ritualistic areas,
such as cantors, ritual slaughters, and beadles. ⁸⁷ Those were the figures on paper, at least. A year
later, Finkelstein told Kohane during a visit to Geneva that there were thirty Jews at the
synagogue in Wrocław for Shavuot, and that their cumulative age was 2,000 years. One family
of three in Krakow, according to Jakubowicz, had a cumulative age of 275. Jakubowicz said that
the average age of Jews in Krakow was 75, slightly older than the average age of Jews in Poland,
which was 65. When it came to events like the commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising,

⁸⁵ Kohane to Haber, May 30, 1975, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

⁸⁶ Kohane to Haber, May 22, 1974, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

which sometimes was attended by non-Jews as well, the attendance could be low if the non-Jews did not attend, as was the case the previous month in Krakow when only six people attended.\(^{88}\) Another major challenge the Congregation faced was the situation with the exchange rate, which had not improved. Thus, they required a substantially higher amount than previously. The JDC was able to raise the funds to $7,000 a month for the second half of 1975, but that meant that they would not be able to make any commitments for 1976.\(^{89}\) By the end of December 1975, however, it was clear that despite fears from earlier in the year, the JDC/SSE would be able to continue supporting Polish Jewry. They provided the same amount of funds as before for the canteens, the matzah machine was fixed (the JDC assisted with those costs), and finally they were going to be able to continue assisting individuals, perhaps even more than they had the previous year.\(^{90}\)

While the JDC and SSE representatives were working to raise funds abroad to help the Polish Jewish community (as well as other Jewish communities in the world) and the B’nai B’rith and American Jewish Committee leaders were working to improve Polish-Jewish relations, reports about the Jewish community were appearing in the Western Jewish press that threatened to undermine this work. On September 5, 1975, the *Jerusalem Post* ran an article entitled, “Polish Jews suffer from gov’t-picked community heads.” In the article, David Korn, the chair of the German-Russian Department at Howard University in Washington, D.C., told a group in Tel Aviv about the terrible situation in Poland. According to *Jerusalem Post* reporter,

\(^{88}\) Kohane to Haber, May 30, 1975, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

\(^{89}\) Ibid.

\(^{90}\) Kohane to Lewin, December 30, 1975, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.
Joshua Brilliant, Korn said that there was little evidence that the thousands of dollars that American Jewish organizations were sending to Poland were making much of a difference. He accused the Jewish leadership of “milking” Western Jewish organizations, and that the leaders were driving around in Mercedes. Haber sent a copy to Lewin and Kohane, asking for their impressions, since both were far more knowledgeable about the situation in Poland than he was. Kohane wrote back that there is always some exaggeration and truth mixed together when it came to reports from Poland. He admitted that the Jewish leadership “pleases the authorities.” But, he wrote, “What is not stated is that the Congregation is doing a good job in maintaining a little Yiddishkeit which still exists, the canteens, etc.” As for the charge of the leadership milking the Western organizations, Kohane wrote that the $7,000 they were sending to the Congregation was not really substantial in a country like Poland. Jakubowicz, he wrote, drives a Mercedes, but he is also a factory owner – rich by Polish standards - who bought the car with his own money. From Kohane’s perspective the real issue was that either the professor did not accurately assess the situation and see that the most important thing that the American Jewish organizations were doing was sending in thousands of dollars of much needed assistance to the Jewish families in Poland, or the reporter, Brilliant, “didn’t make a very brilliant report of what he said.” Such attacks were precisely what the Polish authorities wished to end, and perhaps in an ironic twist, these reports helped promote even more dialogue.

Indeed, in the seven years since the JDC had been forced to leave Poland and the waves of emigration as a result of the March ’68 campaigns had begun and ended, a significant amount

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91 Clipping attached to letter from Haber to Lewin, September 10, 1975, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.

92 Kohane to Haber, September 16, 1975, AR65/74-0318, JDCA.
had been accomplished, particularly in the period between roughly 1973 to 1975. Once again, the absence narrative skews the picture. For if we focus only on the darkness and loss of the period, or only on the emigration story for that matter, we exclude a larger story of Polish Jewishness after 1968. The Polish government publically sponsored the exile of so much of its local Jewish population. But the government was Janus-faced, quietly enabling the survival of Jewishness in Poland out of necessity. Needing political approval from its neighbors to the east, while wishing to develop better relations with the United States, the Polish state balanced tenuously between east and west for the remainder of the Communist period. One of the hinges upon which the government performed this balancing act was its relationship with the small population of Polish Jews and their co-religionists in the West. Western Jews paid careful attention to the Polish government’s treatment of its remaining Jewish population, and the Polish government paid close attention to what western Jewish leaders said about the government. By 1973, when B’nai B’rith was invited to Poland, it was clear that the Polish government was ready to move to the next level in improving relations with the Jewish community abroad, particularly through dialogue with the more politically active Jewish community leaders, such as those of the B’nai B’rith and the American Jewish Committee.

The Polish government understood that their relationship to the Jewish community in America would have an impact on Polish-American relations. Of particular importance from the perspective of American Jewish leaders and the U.S. government was the issue of Jewish cemeteries in Poland. An undated memo on the cemetery issue noted that Jewish organizations, Congressmen, and the U.S. embassy (under order from the Department of State) had become increasingly concerned with the state of the cemeteries, and the Department of Commerce was also getting involved. The memo listed some of the more important interventions, including
Congressmen Thomas Rees, who was on the foreign trade subcommittee, and Bella Abzug, both of whom had written letters about the Warsaw cemetery. William Perry, the president of the AFL-CIO longshoreman organizations wrote about the Łódź cemetery. The Rabbinical Council of America/Rabbinical Council of USA and Canada visited the embassy asking for historical monuments in several cemeteries. This concern paved the way for world Jewish leaders to begin issuing a series of demands for the Polish government, which I discuss in Chapter 5. The government discussed the demands with the Jewish leaders, indicating that they were, in fact, serious about improving relations with world Jewry.

Gierek’s regime viewed the Jewish issue in a pragmatic way, and within a few years after he came to power, Polish-Jewish relations were gradually improving, as were Polish-American relations. Given these developments, Polish Jewishness in the post-1968 period should be seen through the wider lens of Cold War politics. Just as the Poles and Americans were entering into a period of détente, so, too, were the Poles and American Jews.

93 “Cmentarze Żydowskie,” undated, PZPR LXXVI/525, AAN.
CHAPTER 5
PERCEPTION BECOMING REALITY

If the period before 1976 was one of cautious optimism when it came to improved Polish-Jewish relations, the years after 1976 can be characterized as one of a more determined and confident optimism. Poland’s internal economic and political situation was getting worse, as Edward Gierek was unable to fix the growing economic problems plaguing the economy.\(^1\) Poland’s debt spiraled out of control, and the country became increasingly dependent on Western support. At the same time, Polish society was undergoing significant changes as a burgeoning opposition led to the emergence of a new civil society, and in 1980, to the creation of the Solidarity trade union. This trend toward the liberalization of society also opened the doors for Poland’s “dark spots” or topics that had previously been taboo to discuss in the public sphere. As Michael Steinlauf has written, there was an increasing openness to the discussion of Jewish matters by the late 1970s, which had not been discussed publically since the anti-Zionist campaign.\(^2\) While Steinlauf focuses on this openness within certain segments of the population, namely amongst intellectuals, I argue that this openness was part of a larger shift in attitude towards Jewish issues at the time, not only amongst intellectuals, but also amongst government officials.

The authorities, most notably the Ministry of Religious Affairs, understood that Western, and particularly the American, governments were heavily invested in the Jewish issue, and that this was not something that the Polish government could simply ignore. The passage of the

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\(^2\) Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 93-106.
Jackson-Vanik amendment in 1974 likely further influenced the Polish government. The amendment, which gave favorable trading rights to countries that facilitated emigration, was passed with the Soviet Union in mind, and Jewish leaders who pushed for its passage hoped that the Soviets would be encouraged to allow more Jews to emigrate. While the amendment did not have the success the Jewish leaders hoped it would, Mark Talisman, Representative Charles Vanik’s chief of staff, stated that:

Jackson-Vanik is one of the best examples in legislative history of perception becoming reality. It became a benchmark against which other countries had to measure themselves. The Czechs, the Hungarians, the Romanians – they all looked at Jackson-Vanik and realized they’d better improve their behavior. They all met with us over the next decade.³

While the Poles were missing from this list, their recent attempts to improve Polish-Jewish relations likely meant that they, too, were paying attention. J.J. Goldberg argues that Jackson-Vanik demonstrated to the American Jewish leaders that they wielded “enormous bargaining power across the globe,” and it seems as though they kept this in mind after 1974, when their demands on the Polish government increased.⁴

Jewish leaders across the world also realized that the issues within Poland could work in their favor. If the Poles wanted to gain legitimacy in the West, they would be more willing to make concessions regarding Jewish issues. Furthermore, as the panic and challenges presented by the post-1968 changes had begun to subside and Poland had entered a period of “normalization,” Jewish leaders were confident that the time was ripe to raise a number of issues, ranging from the extremely difficult one of reparations to the relatively simple one of redoing the

⁴ Ibid.
Jewish pavilion at Auschwitz. The World Federation of Polish Jews (WFPJ) drafted a list of demands that a number of other Jewish organizations used during their own negotiations with the Poles. The demands included matters related to cemeteries and other sites of Jewish interest, archival access, requests for pensions for those who were forced to leave Poland, and restitution of Jewish property. All of this depended on the assumption that this shift in attitude and détente from the earlier period would continue.

One indication of the shift in attitude appeared when the head of the Krakow Jewish community’s mid-1976 report to Akiva Kohane at the Joint indicated that the authorities were suddenly expressing concern for the state of the synagogues and Jewish cemeteries. Maciej Jakubowicz, the community’s leader, believed that the shift was a response to the negative press abroad, particularly in the U.S., concerning the state of synagogues and cemeteries in Poland, as well as the perceived general lack of interest that the state had in Poland’s rich Jewish history and heritage. Jakubowicz had recently met with high ranking Party members and government officials to discuss the problems with synagogues in Krakow and its surroundings. After taking them around to the synagogues and cemeteries in the region, he was promised financial assistance to resume the repairs on the synagogues and cemeteries that had stopped since the JDC left at the end of 1967. The new attitude was evident, as well, in the latest Folks Sztyme, which printed front page articles in both Yiddish and Polish about the Jewish heritage sites.

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5 Each country whose citizens had been sent to Auschwitz had a barrack at Auschwitz in which they could prepare an exhibit telling the experiences of their citizens. Although not a national barrack, there was a Jewish exhibition, Block 27, which was opened in April 1968 (the timing was not a coincidence). The exhibition was heavily criticized for focusing on the shared victimization between Poles and Jews, rather than the Jewish experience. For more on the Jewish exhibition, see Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945-1979* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2003), 176-183, 195-200.

Another promising sign came in September when the Minister of Religious Affairs, Kazimierz Kąkol, wrote a letter to the Rabbinical Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries, stating that he had the “honor” of informing them that the authorities were committed to preserving all existing Jewish cemeteries in Poland, some of which would be recognized as historical monuments. The organization, formed a year prior in order to raise that issue with the Polish government, represented all major Orthodox rabbinical and Hasidic organizations in the U.S. and Canada. The committee had been invited to Warsaw, with assistance from the U.S. government, to discuss the issue, and a second committee was to return to Poland in order to work out the specifics. But perhaps the most convincing evidence of the shift was that work began on the Nożyk Synagogue renovation in Warsaw.

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8 Jewish Telegraphic Agency, “Rabbi Says Polish Government Committed in Principle to Restore, Preserve Some 1000 Jewish Cemeteries, October 8, 1976, http://www.jta.org/1976/10/08/archive/rabbi-says-polish-government-committed-in-principle-to-restore-preserve-some-1000-jewish-cemeteries. The Committee represented the Central Rabbinical Congress of the United States and Canada, the former Hasidic Grand Rabbis of Bluzsov, Bobov and Novominsk, the Rabbinical Alliance of America, the Rabbinical Council of America and the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada. Absent from this list was the Agudath Israel group, which Lewin represented.

9 Kohane to Goldman, May 11, 1976, “Poland – General, 1976-1980,” JDCA. According to a memo from early 1981, the government had allocated 56 million złoty for the renovation (Memo re: Meeting with Mr. Finkelstein and Mr. Kornacki, January 19, 1981, Poland. General. 1976-1980, JDCA). The Nożyk renovation project would prove to be far more difficult than anyone expected once the promise was issued. Jewish organizations seemed to be getting the run around from the Polish government regarding the Nożyk Synagogue. Reports claimed that there was work being done as early as 1976, and perhaps there was. In 1975 the Jewish Historical Institute Executive Board charged the Congregation with preventing any work from being done (Sol Flapan article in Jewish Affairs “Poland’s Jewish Historical Institute,” Jan-Feb. 1975, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO). Yet, the repairs really took off in the early 1980s, when a clear end date was set. With the goal of the fortieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Commemoration, the government, the government seemed to understand that there was a lot at stake here. According to Fox, there were noticeable changes by mid-1981. Furthermore, they had begun construction on the Congregation’s new offices (Fox to the Foreign Affairs Department, June 24, 1981, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO). Meng also writes about the renovations, although he writes that the PZPR did not approve the reconstruction until 1982 when plans were already underway for the 1983 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Commemoration (see Chapter 6) (Meng, Shattered Spaces, 178-9). Yet, it appears that there had been some progress even before that as part of earlier efforts to appease world Jewry.
The new interest in Polish Jewish material culture and heritage sites was also reflected in a new openness to global Jewish issues. While the Joint provided the necessary funds to sustain life and B’nai B’rith and the American Jewish Committee worked to improve Polish-Jewish relations, the Polish government realized that it was also essential to begin building relations with the World Jewish Congress, or WJC. The WJC, which was an umbrella organization representing global Jewry, had strong political connections throughout the world. Although American Jews remained at the center of Polish attention, there were issues occurring outside of America for which the Polish government sought assistance. For example, 1968 Polish Jewish émigrés in Sweden had, according to the Polish government, recently embarked on a vicious anti-Polish campaign, and the Polish government needed help from the WJC to stop the campaign. Thus, it would be important for Poland to establish some ties with the WJC, given that its sphere of influence went beyond America. When the opportunity for such ties arose in the fall of 1976, the government seized the chance to affiliate.

Another major relationship that the Polish government developed at the time was with Alexander Schindler, a prominent and well-connected American rabbi. The AJC also continued to strengthen its ties with the Polish government, and much of their work focused on building Polish-Jewish relations in the U.S. Thus, in many ways, the late 1970s were an extension of the earlier period when Poland was trying to make connections with foreign Jews, but with increasing levels of sophistication both at home and abroad. The latter part of the 1970s in Poland was far more open, and this was reflected both in more liberal policies regarding Jews living in Poland as well as foreign Jews visiting. This openness also extended to relations between the Polish government and foreign Jewish organizations, which often coordinated with
each other before speaking with the Polish authorities. There were also initial conversations between Israel and Poland for the first time since June 1967.

Yet, the openness would be short-lived. By 1981, the Polish administration was losing control, and while there would be a number of great advances in Polish-Jewish relations, an outbreak of antisemitism and then the declaration of martial law in December 1981 would undermine some of these advancements. As we will see, official Jewish life in Poland was even brought to a halt for a number of weeks, due to the humanitarian crisis. While not directed at Jews in particular, the Jewish community acutely felt the impact of the events of 1981, and it certainly affected the earlier progress that had been made on the Polish-Jewish relations front. Thus, while the early 1970s was a period of foundation laying, during the second half of the 1970s the Polish authorities and Jewish leaders abroad began to solidify their connections and build upwards. 1981 introduced a hurdle, but the accomplishments made before then, and to some extent even after, were still significant.

The Beginning of the Demands

One of the first prominent visitors to Poland to issue the list of demands drawn up by the WFPJ was Alexander Schindler. In February 1976, Schindler, who was the leader of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the organization for Reform Congregations in North America, went to Poland. Through the U.S. embassy, he made a number of important contacts, which would prove crucial for future Jewish efforts in Poland.10 During his meeting with the Folks Sztyme editor, Shmuel Tenenblatt, he was advised that the Polish government was interested in American Jewish demands, and Tenenblatt suggested that they address this in one

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10 The UAHC was the predecessor organization of the Union for Reform Judaism.
of two ways. The first was through the U.S. State Department, “with which our government is anxious to establish better relations especially on [issues] relating to trade. The second way to work this out is through an appropriate Jewish body like the World Jewish Congress.” Given that there was no formal relationship between the Polish Jewish bodies and the WJC, this was a hint to Schindler. When he followed up with Tenenblatt about whether there might be relations between Polish Jewry and the WJC in the future, Tenenblatt responded that they could potentially have informal – and perhaps even formal – contacts with the WJC. Schindler alerted the WJC authorities, suggesting that they look into the loosening of restrictions which they could “conceivably exploit.”

Schindler’s visit was important for a number of reasons. He was a prominent American Jew and his appearance in Poland gave the Poles some sense that they were being taken seriously. Thanks to Schindler’s involvement in Poland, the UAHC would play a major role just a few years later by helping scholars to access important archival material in Poland. The meetings also demonstrated that concerns about Jews and Jewish heritage in Poland were an issue that united Jews across the religious spectrum, from secular to Orthodox. From Isaac Lewin’s orthodox group, Agudath Israel, to the UAHC, Polish Jewish issues were increasingly on the radars of Jewish organizations by the second half of the 1970s. Although this would eventually lead to some competition over who deserved the right to make decisions and be the official representatives of world Jewry, initially there were clear attempts to coordinate their work in Poland.

Schindler may have had prominence behind him, but whether he could actually make serious headway on any of the demands was another question. The WFPJ, which had drafted the

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11 Letter from Schindler to Goldman, February 25, 1976, Alexander M. Schindler Papers, Box 22, folder 9, AJA.
original list of demands, understood that there was a good chance that the Polish government would not be willing to budge on some of the more complicated issues, like restitution. In a letter to Alexander Schindler, Anselm Reiss, the WUPJ president wrote:

We did not begin this campaign with the view that there are good chances we should receive positive replies to all our demands. Of course, that is our aim. However, we did it primarily because we feel it as a historic, national obligation. It cannot be that history should one day claim that we did not even demand this.  

If this was the approach, then any concessions that the Poles were willing to make would be a substantial victory. Reiss correctly assumed that one of the major issues the Polish authorities would raise was, of course, the amount of money that this would cost. But the WFPJ pointed out that Poland was receiving reparations from Germany, and that money could be redirected to Israel.  

Thus, Reiss was ready to give the demands a shot. They had nothing to lose, but a tremendous amount to gain. Reiss’ statement reinforced the idea that the Jewish organizations felt a moral obligation to push the Polish government as much as possible on Jewish matters. Reiss did not want to let this opportunity go by, and was thus willing to do whatever he could lest he be judged later for not trying.

With a better understanding of Reiss’ intentions, Schindler was ready to move quickly. Responding to Reiss, he said that there would soon be a new administration in Washington, and since they currently had friends in the U.S. embassy in Warsaw and in the State Department, Schindler firmly believed that they could not wait. Schindler’s substantial political experience convinced him that connections were key, and it was therefore important to use the connections

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12 Letter from Anselm Reiss (World Federation of Polish Jews) to Schindler, March 16, 1976, Alexander M. Schindler Papers, Box 22, folder 9, AJA.

13 Ibid.
when he had them. In addition to his position at the UAHC, Schindler was also the Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, and he had a substantial network to which he could reach out to increase the pressure on the Polish government.\footnote{The Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations was founded in 1956 at the request of the Eisenhower Administration in order for the government to have one representative organization with whom they could consult to gauge the Jewish community’s views on political issues. According to their website, “the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations Fund advances the interests of the American Jewish community, sustains broad-based support for Israel and addresses the critical concerns facing world Jewry” (“About the Conference,” \url{http://www.conferenceofpresidents.org/about}, accessed June 6, 2015).} Thus, he asked to include the demands in the Presidents’ Conference agenda because they could be far more effective with combined resources. The recent passage of Jackson-Vanik may also have convinced him of the importance of working together as a united front.

Schindler understood that issuing a list of demands would only be effective if there was a clear strategy. Thus, he decided to first meet with the State Department to speak with them about the problems in Poland. He would use that connection to request an audience with the Polish Ambassador because he believed that a meeting with the Polish Embassy would be more effective if scheduled through the State Department. Once introduced, he alone, or perhaps along with a small delegation, would go to the Ambassador to gain his cooperation. To do that most effectively, he wrote, he would appoint a commission of leading Jewish scholars who could go to Poland to study the situation and ensure that their requests were reasonable and accurate. He felt that the best way to raise the issues of Poland providing pensions for Jews who had been forced to leave Poland was to do so at the diplomatic level. For this, they could use the government’s strong desire to increase trade with the U.S. The most important thing he stressed was that all of this must be done quickly.\footnote{Schindler to Reiss, February 26, 1976, Alexander M. Schindler Papers, Box 22, folder 9, AJA.}
According to Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs documents from February 1976, the Jewish demands were already causing ripples throughout the Polish diplomatic world. The Ministry alerted the consular departments that local Jewish organizations had been sending a series of demands for the PRL, coordinated by the WFPJ. To prepare the consulates and embassies to respond effectively, they provided a series of points to discuss with Jewish representatives. In one note to Vienna, Brussels, the Hague, Oslo, Rome, Paris, and Bern, they stressed that the staff should emphasize that the Congregation and TSKŻ operated in all big cities and that the theater and Jewish Historical Institute were still active. Furthermore, they wanted the diplomats to stress that synagogues, archives, and museum exhibitions, including the Jewish barrack at Auschwitz, were all under the State’s protection. Consular officers were also reminded to discuss the Nazi occupation’s impact on the whole nation, and thus some of the issues that the Jews were raising were really nationwide problems that could not be fixed overnight. They warned the consular officers that some of the demands were “provocative,” because they did not line up with the facts. The relevant authorities were preparing a comprehensive plan to counter the demands, which they would send under separate cover. They then asked that the Ministry be alerted of any conversations or urgent memos, and that the consular officers all be informed of the issue.  

Thus, they were clearly preparing for a potentially serious onslaught of letters and visits.

Months after his visit to Poland, it was clear that Schindler had left a substantial impression on the authorities. On November 22, 1976, for the first time since the Joint left Poland in December 1967, Jakubowicz called Kohane at the Joint office, clearly on the

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16 Wg rozdzielnika [Based on Distribution] Letter from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 9, 1976 Urząd do Spraw Wyznań, 131-514, AAN.
instructions of the authorities. Jakubowicz asked Kohane whether Rabbi Schindler or the Chief
Rabbi of Romania, Rabbi Moses Rosen, would be attending the 100th anniversary celebration of
the Yiddish Theater, to which they had been invited. Kohane noted that Rabbi Schindler’s
presence would be monumental for the Polish government, seeing as he had connections that
could help Poland solve its economic troubles. Immediately, Kohane realized that the
Congregation was being used to facilitate contact because the theater and Congregation had no
ties whatsoever, and the TSKŻ which was affiliated with the theater, “could not call us for
obvious reasons.” The government was becoming more interested in Polish Jewish issues and in
facilitating connections with prominent Jews abroad. Despite his suspicions, Kohane told
Jakubowicz that he would see what he could find out.  

When Kohane reached Schindler, Schindler told him that he had met Szymon Szurmiej,
the Director of the Yiddish theater in Warsaw, while in Bucharest at the 100th anniversary
celebration of Yiddish theater in Romania and that Szurmiej had invited him to the celebrations
in Warsaw. But since then, he said, he had not heard anything and there was no formal invitation.
Schindler asked Kohane what he should do. Kohane responded that his visit would be highly
significant for Poland at that time, but that he did not wish for Schindler to “add to the prestige of
the Kulturverband [TSKŻ] and maybe the needs of the Polish government by attending a
celebration for which he received a last-minute invitation.” Schindler agreed and asked for
Haymann to tell Jakubowicz that he could not come at that time because it was such a last minute
invitation, but that he “would be happy to go to Poland on another occasion if officially invited
via the U.S. State Department.” Schindler was ready to negotiate with the Poles, but he would

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18 Ibid.
only do so from a position of strength: tying Polish Jewish affairs to U.S.-Polish diplomacy. And while Schindler clearly wished to have a good relationship with the authorities, he was unwilling to do so at any price.

**Connecting with the World Jewish Congress**

In the meantime, the Polish government was still interested in creating connections with the WJC. Although Schindler had informed the WJC after his conversation with Tenenblatt that the Poles might be interested in discussing possibilities for future cooperation, the push to bring Poland into the WJC fold surprisingly came from within the Soviet bloc. In the fall of 1976, the Polish Jewish leadership traveled to Bucharest for a celebration for the 20th anniversary of a Yiddish-Hebrew-Romanian cultural journal. Romanian Rabbi Moses Rosen, the prime example of a Jewish leader who successfully straddled the socialist and capitalist Jewish worlds, invited the Jewish representatives from other socialist countries, along with representatives from capitalist countries. During the celebration, the representatives of the socialist countries unanimously decided to strengthen their ties to world Jewry, which essentially meant some involvement with the WJC since it was an apolitical umbrella organization based on country affiliation. The Jewish communities in Yugoslavia and Romania were already members of the World Jewish Congress, but the other communist countries were not. Furthermore, Rosen was a

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20 In January 1976, at the TSKŻ Executive Board Plenary Meeting, the representative from Wroclaw announced that the TSKŻ was isolated from the world, particularly in terms of cultural exchange. He was not alone in believing this, and there was an ensuing discussion about this isolation. One suggestion was to have more exchanges with the Jewish theaters in Romania and Yugoslavia. While the Polish theatre had been traveling abroad, based on the representative’s comment, it seems as though foreign companies had not been coming to Poland, and they believed that this should change. While this was an attempt to connect with other Communist bloc countries, the desire to feel less isolated from the rest of world Jewry was growing, and the Polish government was becoming increasingly supportive of such interaction (“Notatka z przebiegu posiedzenia plenarnego Zarządu Głównego TSKŻ, February 2, 1976, MSW BU_1585_7159, IPN).
prominent member of the organization. If anyone could bring Poland into the organization, it would be him.\textsuperscript{21}

At the WJC Executive Meeting in November 1976, Rosen told the participants about the recent meeting in Bucharest and informed the board that because world Jewry lived under a vast array of political regimes, organizations like the WJC needed to be able to work with Jews regardless of where they lived. He announced that the representatives from Moscow and Poland had asked to attend the next WJC meeting as observers. Rosen’s suggestion to allow this was met with mixed reactions. One of the meeting attendees agreed that Polish Jewry should not be “punished” for their government’s policies, though he was less sure about the sudden Russian interest. Two other attendees, however, believed that the Polish government had to demonstrate that it took Jewish issues that were being raised with the authorities, such as compensation for former Jewish properties, seriously. Furthermore, they were reluctant to claim that the leaders remaining in Poland were “representative,” of Polish Jewry, suggesting, of course, that they were actually extensions of the state.\textsuperscript{22} The ultimate push to go ahead with extending an arm to the Poles came when WJC President Nahum Goldmann spoke about the uniqueness of this opportunity. It was the first time that the Soviets initiated any contact with the organization, and he informed the board that he might have to resign if this meeting was not approved.\textsuperscript{23}

Furthermore, he stated that he thought it was absurd to hold a Jewish community responsible for

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\item \textsuperscript{21} Minutes of the meeting of the WJC Executive – Geneva, November 1976, World Jewish Congress Collection C10/1957, Central Zionist Archive (hereafter CZA).
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid. The Jewish leaders were appointed by the Polish government so this was not necessarily a stretch. Their degree of loyalty to the Jewish community vs. the Polish government varied from leader to leader, however.
\end{itemize}
its government’s antisemitic policies, and that he believed both the Soviets and Poles should be invited as observers to the upcoming WJC European section meeting in Madrid.24

Goldmann’s threat had the desired effect, as observers from the Soviet Union, Poland, East Germany, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia were invited to attend the World Jewish Congress European Executive meeting in Spain in December. All but the Soviets accepted the invitation.25 Despite the Soviet Union’s absence, the Jewish world celebrated the fact that the remaining four would be sending observers. In fact, this was seen as such a big deal that it appeared in a number of reports of the meeting, even when their presence was unrelated to the topic of the discussion. For example, when reporting that the Spanish government cancelled their official greeting to the opening session of the meeting and it appeared as though the King of Spain, Juan Carlos I, would also cancel his meeting with the group at the Royal Palace, the JTA added on the news that this was the first time these countries would be represented.26 Their presence had nothing to do with the cancellation, but it was so significant in the divided Cold War world that it was repeated in all reports on the congress.

The meeting was also significant from the Polish Jewish perspective. The Poles sent a four person delegation, evenly split between the Congregation (Jakubowicz and Finkelstein) and the TSKŻ (Tenenblatt and Szurmiej), thus affirming that both were official representatives, even

24 Minutes of the meeting of the WJC Executive – Geneva, November 1976, World Jewish Congress Collection C10/1957, CZA.


though the government was really only supporting one of them. In their report to the authorities upon their return, they included a number of observations, including the fact that the “so-called ‘problem of Soviet Jews’” was raised at every meeting. They noted that for Goldmann, this was not so much an issue of Soviet Jews being able to emigrate, as much as it was about them having the possibility to be religious or to have a secular national identity. Goldmann insisted that the organization pay attention to the actual realities of Jews in the socialist countries and ensure that they have full and equal constitutional equal rights. Furthermore, it was important to have diplomatic talks with governments in each country, not simply to issue loud resolutions.27 This must have been a boost for the authorities, as the Polish government was doing most – if not all – of this already.

The representatives noted that there was an obvious interest in their group. The WJC leadership made it a point to meet exclusively with the observers during a lunch, and the Polish representatives got the impression that they wanted to meet and get to know the Jews living in Poland, given all of the changes taking place. While they admitted that they did not want to overestimate their impact, they believed that sending the representatives and having Tenenblatt and Jakubowicz speak (Tenenblatt about the Polish model of national minorities and the money funding the TSKŻ, Folks Sztyme, and Jewish Historical Institute, while Jakubowicz spoke about the state allowing religious events and activities, as well as efforts to reconstruct and preserve Jewish material culture) had a tremendous impact on some of the participants. They received positive feedback and believed that their presence contributed to a more objective view of the Polish realities.28 The government could not have asked for a better outcome, given their

27 Notatka o Udziale w madryckich obradach Europejskiej Sekcji Światowego Kongresu Żydowskiego, December 1976, PZPR LXXVI/545, AAN.

28 Ibid.
concerns for anti-Polish propaganda. Of course, their speeches were aimed at casting the Polish authorities in the best possible light, but here were Polish Jews, for the first time in a number of years, speaking about Jewish life in Poland at the very time when the plight of Soviet Jewry was so prominently on the international Jewish radar.

The four Polish representatives concluded that they were unable to fully evaluate the nature of the organization, but that some participants were, unquestionably, blindly pro-Israel. Furthermore, they got the sense that the WJC was trying to be a sort of “United Nations” of Jews living in different countries. While these two things may have raised red flags within the socialist apparatus, the Jewish leaders sought to assuage their fears. The Jewish leaders also believed that there were some current WJC leaders who were more realistic and wanted to contribute to the work of détente and cooperation between states. One thing was clear though. The WJC leaders had connections with heads of government and diplomats worldwide, and thus a high potential for impacting the opinions and attitudes in these countries.²⁹ It was clear that the Polish Jewish leaders wanted the interaction. Although ultimately the Party would decide whether they could continue to affiliate with the WJC, the fact that they allowed the Polish Jews to continue attending meetings indicates that they believed there was some benefit.

**The World Jewish Congress Goes to Warsaw**

About a year later, after continued involvement with the WJC, the Polish Jewish leadership approached the WJC, asking that someone go to Poland to look into reestablishing contact with the government, which had been broken off in April 1968.³⁰ Not only would this be

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²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ This was part of a much larger attempt to end the Polish Jewish isolation. This fulfilled multiple Polish Jewish leaders were ready to end their isolation. January 1976, at the TSKŻ Executive Board Plenary Meeting, the representative from Wroclaw announced that the TSKŻ was isolated from the world, particularly in terms of cultural exchange. He was not alone in believing this, and there was an ensuing discussion about this isolation. One suggestion was to have more exchanges with the Jewish theaters in Romania and Yugoslavia. The Polish theatre
beneficial for the Polish Jewish organizations, but it would also allow the WJC to raise post-Holocaust and post-1967/8 issues with the authorities directly. A month later, the WJC board approved the decision and sent Armand Kaplan to Poland to meet with the authorities. Given that the Jewish leaders had invited him, he was a bit concerned that the authorities might not be willing to meet with him, but when he visited Poland in January/February 1978 he was received positively.

With the list of demands in hand, Kaplan went from Ministry to Ministry, trying to gain support for the WJC’s demands.31 These demands included resolutions on post-Holocaust Jewish institutional and organizational property, access to Jewish materials in Polish archives, liturgical and religious items, places of martyrdom and mass graves of Jewish Holocaust victims, a new exhibit in the Jewish pavilion at Auschwitz, and pensions for Jews who emigrated from Poland and no longer qualified to receive their pensions under Polish law. The issues were essentially the same issues that Schindler had presented to the authorities the previous year, which meant that the Ministers and authorities Kaplan met with had already had substantial time to think and even act upon them. At the very least, they had had plenty of time to start working on their responses.

31 The demands were really a reiteration of the demands that the American Federation of Polish Jews (speaking on behalf of the World Federation of Polish Jews) had presented to the Polish authorities in December 1977 (Memo, World Jewish Congress Digitized Collection (Z6/2573-83), CZA).
Kaplan knew that the pension problem was a significant and costly one, given how many Jews had been forced to leave Poland in the aftermath of the March campaign. In Kąkol’s office at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Kaplan explained the difference between a legal and humanitarian interest when it came to the pensions for those who left after 1968. From the WJC’s perspective, the pension problem was a humanitarian issue, as those people who were forced to leave Poland needed the sources of income that they would have received had they been allowed to stay. Though Kąkol said that there were already laws in place regarding the pensions, he was willing to look into the issue to see whether they could come up with a humanitarian solution. Kaplan made it abundantly clear that the WJC’s future relationship with Poland would depend on how the government dealt with this issue. Kaplan remarked that “this statement provoked an improvement in Kąkol’s attitude,” suggesting that he was taking the visit seriously. Knowing that this was a potential game changer, Kąkol might work harder to solve this problem. Though obviously he could not make decisions entirely on his own, Kąkol proposed the creation of a special commission to review cases individually.

32 Kohane believed that the pension issue was a tremendous one, as there were roughly 300,000 Polish Jews around the world, and the costs would be astronomical to cover even those who would be eligible (not all of the 300,000 would qualify for pensions even in Poland). Furthermore, he said that this would have to be applied retroactively, which would go back some thirty years (Conversation with Kohane, July 12, 1979, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO). Thus, he did not see the government ever really coming to an agreement on this.

33 Letter from Kaplan to Kąkol, March 8, 1978, World Jewish Congress Digitized collection (Z6/2573-53), CZA.

34 U.S. State Department records indicate that the U.S. government believed they would have to get involved in this matter, likely in Washington. About 15-20 of the Jews who lost their pensions were U.S. citizens, and the U.S. State Department and the Social Security Administration had been speaking about the matter (Rabbi Schindler’s Visit (from State to Warsaw) [Electronic Record], November 30, 1977, Central Foreign Policy Files (Created 7/1/1973 - 12/31/1978 documenting the period 1973 - 12/31/1978 - Record Group 59) NARAAAD).
Kaplan then raised the issue of émigrés whose visa applications to visit Poland had been rejected. The WJC had received a number of reports from Sweden and the U.S. whereby people who wished to visit family still living in Poland were having their visa applications rejected. Once again, Kaplan raised it as a humanitarian issue, and claimed that this violated the Universal Charter of Human Rights. Whether he was wary of violating the Charter or he was moved to action for other reasons, Kąkol agreed to “settle this matter according to our request.”\footnote{Report on My Visit to Poland, January 30-February 5, 1978, A. Kaplan, February 1978, World Jewish Congress Digitized collection (Z6/2573-70-72), CZA. The issue with visa denials was also a problem in the U.S. Following President Carter’s visit to Poland, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Luers, spoke with a representative from the Polish Embassy to express their frustration over freedom of movement issues. According to the State Department telegram, Luers told the Embassy official that they believed that this issue would be solved following the Presidential visit, but that this continued to be a problem. It was particularly problematic, he said, because they were often Poles with Jewish roots. Luers then reminded him that there are a number of important things to “accomplish” in the bilateral relations, but this is a tremendous problem that makes it difficult to overcome. He then reiterated that the new trend of visa denials involving a number of Jews is disturbing, especially at a time when the GOP – and Ambassador Spasowski himself – has been showing an interest in bettering Polish relations with the Jewish community” (Freedom of Movement: Divided Families/Visa (from State to Warsaw) [Electronic Record], April 7, 1978, Central Foreign Policy Files (Created 7/1/1973 - 12/31/1978 documenting the period 1973 - 12/31/1978 - Record Group 59) NARAAAD). Of course, as Minister of Religious Affairs he likely had little control over the issue, but again he said that he would look into the matter. Just as the Jewish leaders were trying to figure out which issues the Poles were willing to compromise on, the Poles were also likely trying to figure out which issues the Jews were most concerned about. By informing Kąkol that pensions were a high priority, Kaplan may have helped to clarify this.

Regarding archival material and ritual objects, Kąkol was prepared to instruct all Polish institutions to take an inventory of their materials and to make them accessible to scholars who wanted copies. According to Kaplan, Kąkol was in favor of close cooperation between Polish and Jewish institutions both within Poland and abroad and he also mentioned the possibility of hosting seminars. Additionally, Kąkol said that he would speak with his superior to see whether they could approve the request for taking Jewish ritual objects abroad where they could actually
be used. Once again, he appeared to be making an effort to address the issues, rather than simply brushing them off, which was typically the case in the official meetings of this kind. The one issue that Kąkol did not seem willing to discuss in depth, or even pretend to be willing to help solve, was the matter regarding property restitution. He was completely upfront regarding the matter, saying that this would be a long, complex process with several actors involved.36

The other major issue that Kąkol admitted would be complicated was the question of how best to care for the numerous Polish Jewish cemeteries throughout Poland, although he was willing to discuss the matter. He said that the government needed to bring foreign Jews in to discuss this matter because the deterioration was progressing and the municipalities could not do anything with the land because of pressure from abroad.37 He said that the Polish authorities would try to respect the wishes from abroad, but that they were facing their own domestic pressures as well. There was no clear answer here on how best to please both sides. Before leaving Kąkol’s office, Kaplan requested a letter from him to pass along to the WJC leadership.38 Though this was yet another chance for Kąkol to back out of what he had told Kaplan, Kąkol sent the letter to Kaplan, noting that he believed that the meeting was an important step forward for future relations.39 Kąkol’s meeting was highly significant if only because a high ranking minister met directly with Kaplan. According to Kaplan’s notes, Kąkol was attentive and willing


37 Groups had already been going to Poland to discuss such matters, so it is a bit unclear whether this is meant as a continuation of a policy already in place or if he is envisioning something new.


to discuss the issues at hand, rather than just repeating rehearsed lines. He seemed to be
genuinely interested in discussing and keeping the dialogue open even after Kaplan left.

Kaplan also met with the Jewish officials. According to his notes:

They are still living under the trauma of the 68-70 events. They showed an earnest
desire to have relations with world Jewry. They also emphasized the need for
additional help, be it in the cultural or in the social fields, from the specialized
agencies of world Jewry. I assured them of our willingness to improve relations in
various fields, and added that this depends less on us than on their own authorities.
It was a very moving encounter.40

Undoubtedly, this was yet another incentive for Kaplan to do what he could to ensure that the
relationship between the WJC and Poland improved.

Given the amount of written documents that were generated in negotiations with the
Polish authorities, it is often difficult to get a genuine sense of how these meetings really went,
so Kaplan’s positive description should be taken with a grain of salt. Yet, Kaplan received word
from Szymon Szurmiej, the director of the Jewish Theater, that Kąkol had been deeply impressed
by Kaplan’s visit, and he had already passed along to his superiors the recommendation to give
proper consideration to the problems Kaplan raised. This rave review was further confirmed
when Kaplan spoke with a representative from the Polish embassy in Paris, Minister Konarski,
who heard from the Foreign Ministry that Kaplan had made a good impression during his visit.41
According to Konarski, the newspapers in Poland reported on the visit and all of the embassies
received details about the topics discussed, as did the Central Committee. Reporting back to the
WJC leadership, Kaplan wrote:

Digitized collection (Z6/2573-70-72), CZA.

41 Ibid. Kaplan spells his name “Konarski” and “Konarsky” throughout his correspondence. For purposes of
consistency, I use “Konarski.”
He [Konarski] considers I have achieved my main objective, namely opened up a door for the WJC to the renewal of relationship with the Polish government. However, he invited me to be cautious and not to expect immediate positive results...He told me confidently that there is some reserve in Poland to open a dialogue with the Jewish world and that the spirit of 1968 is still alive in some ‘cadres’ of the Party.42

Although there was no new anti-Zionist campaign in the works, it was still alarming that there would be some factions of the Party were still unabashedly antisemitic. Nevertheless, Konarski reassured him that the amount of publicity surrounding his visit was promising and that he should consider a follow up visit, possibly in the summer, in order to convince those who are still on the fence about renewing relations with the WJC.43

About a month later, almost ten years to the day of the launch of the 1968 anti-Zionist campaign, Kaplan and Konarski met in Paris upon Konarski’s request, since he was eager to share some news about Kaplan’s recent visit to Poland. They mostly discussed the upcoming Warsaw Ghetto commemoration (which Kaplan was planning to attend as part of a small WJC delegation), the opening of the Auschwitz pavilion in September, and future opportunities for meetings between Kaplan and the Polish authorities in Warsaw. Kaplan insisted that the next meetings needed to include concrete plans for implementing solutions to some of the issues that he raised with Kąkol. Most notably, he believed that they needed to continue discussing the pension issue. Kaplan said that he understood that it was complicated, but that they still needed to come to some kind of resolution. He was clearly not going to lose sight of his main goal.

42 Memo from Kaplan to Klutznick, Goldmann, and Riegner, February 9, 1978, World Jewish Congress Digitized collection (Z6/2573-57), CZA.

43 Ibid.
Towards the end of the conversation, Konarski asked Kaplan for a favor. He requested that the WJC and other Jewish organizations counter the anti-Polish propaganda that was so prevalent in the media. He told Kaplan that “the propaganda branding Poland as an antisemitic country could be detrimental to our common efforts.”\footnote{Memo from Kaplan to Klutznick, Goldmann, and Riegner, March 10, 1978, Central Zionist Archive, World Jewish Congress Digitized collection (Z6/2573-48), CZA.} Kaplan replied quite bluntly that although things were moving in the right direction with their improved relations, nothing had really been accomplished yet. Kaplan wrote of his response:

> If a number of issues are taken into consideration and their implementation properly started…then we will be in a position to express ourselves favorably on Poland. In one word, the ball is in the hands of Poland. We are not in a position to sign a blank cheque, we would expose ourselves to severe (and justified) criticism from Jewish world opinion if we act otherwise.\footnote{Ibid.}

Thus, Kaplan was acting with intense caution and reminding the government that they wanted action, not just promises. But it was clear during this meeting exactly what each side wanted. Kaplan understood the emotions involved from the Jewish side. There had to be evidence of action and good will, not merely promises. History had left too many scars to demand otherwise. Obviously, he knew that he would never get the government to agree to all of the proposed points, but he also knew that even small victories could go a long way in helping to improve Jewish perceptions of Poland.

While Kaplan was reluctant to praise the Poles too much until he witnessed some substantial action, Goldmann did not wait to take an active role in promoting Poland. His commitment to improving relations with Poland was clear when he spoke to PAP, the Polish news agency, blasting the NBC mini-series “Holocaust” for comparing Polish acts to those of the Nazis. According to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Goldmann said:

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44 Memo from Kaplan to Klutznick, Goldmann, and Riegner, March 10, 1978, Central Zionist Archive, World Jewish Congress Digitized collection (Z6/2573-48), CZA.

45 Ibid.
It is sheer nonsense to compare Poles with Nazis. Poles suffered no less than we did. We suffered greater proportion-wise, but the Poles also suffered enormously. The Polish nation was the only nation which never had any Quisling into the bargain as all the others had: Rumania, France, Hungary, Slovakia, Norway. There was never a Quisling in Poland. I think that the behavior of U.S. television is very unfair and I am not going to conceal that.46

This interview was significant in that it showed the Polish government – and citizens – that the World Jewish Congress was going to remain true to its word to improve relations. It was also significant in that the Jewish Telegraphic Agency printed the excerpt from the interview for Jewish audiences to read as well. This message was important for both sides to hear: for one side it was a confirmation that the Jews recognized their suffering; for the other side, it was a reminder that Poles suffered tremendously as well.

Perhaps the most open and honest (and lengthy – 3 hours!) conversation about the Polish government’s expectations of world Jewry, and vice versa, occurred in September 1978 when Kaplan and Minister Konarski met again in Paris. Konarski once again brought up the anti-Polish campaign abroad, this time giving Kaplan more specifics. There was a strong anti-Polish sentiment coming from the Polish Jewish émigrés living in Sweden. They believed that they were on some kind of blacklist that prevented them from entering Poland, where they wished to visit. Konarski told Kaplan that the Polish authorities believed that the WJC, “being interested in a constructive dialogue with Poland, would intervene actively to bring to a halt those anti-Polish manifestations.”47 The Polish leadership clearly believed that the WJC was an influential opinion maker, and that it might be able to keep dissent under control.


47 Memo to Philip M. Klutznick and G.M. Riegner from Kaplan: re Poland, September 20, 1978, World Jewish Congress Digitized collection (Z6/2573-25), CZA.
In this case, Kaplan made it clear that he did not believe that the Swedish frustration was misplaced. They had been told that the government would make arrangements to allow them into Poland, and when it did not happen quickly, they were upset. Polish officials hoped that the WJC would stand against anti-Polish sentiment since they were, after all, committed to improving relations. Thus, Konarski told Kaplan that there were some:

Doubts in the minds of some of the Polish authorities about the real desire of the WJC to have improved relations with them. The Polish authorities wonder who the Congress really is, how far he is really representative in World Jewry, and how far the machinery really controls its constituencies.\(^{48}\)

This statement reveals the totally different expectations that each side had for one another. From the Polish side, it was about control and feeling like they had the support of Jewish organizations. From the Jewish side, it was about letting go of ideology or preconceived notions and having an open, honest dialogue. Kaplan wrote in his notes that they were speaking from two totally different perspectives. The real issue here, according to Kaplan, was not being able to understand each other. In many ways, it encapsulated the fundamental East/West divide. Kaplan believed that the Polish Jews living in Sweden had a right to be angry and he did not think that he - or anyone - should stop them from expressing their frustrations. They were free to feel and think as they desired. From the Polish perspective, what worked were orders, decisions, and instructions handed down from the leadership. This would not work for the WJC which was representative and took public opinion into account when making decisions. Indeed, it was ironic that Polish leaders, who sought to change public opinion, could not fathom that such opinions were expressed by individuals without official backing or direction. And while the WJC certainly

\(^{48}\) Ibid. In the original text, “controls its constituencies” is underlined for emphasis.
wanted to improve relations, they were not going to advocate the suppression of the opinions of their members.

Perhaps believing that a reminder of the not so distant past would push the WJC into action, Konarski expressed some concern that the “spirit of 1968-70 was not dead in Poland…So the Jewish-Polish dialogue started by some of the Polish leaders, including Gierek, is not so ensured yet and needs to be cultivated instead of hurt.”

This was a candid moment: Konarski was essentially confessing that the anti-Zionist campaign was an orchestrated event by certain factions in the Party, some of whom were still in prominent positions. At the same time, he was trying to use this information to force closer contact.

When Kaplan mentioned possibly writing a letter to the authorities to find out what the decision was on the Swedish passport issue, Konarski advised that doing so would only stir up negative sentiment. If the WJC did not show support for Poland, the circles who were not pro-dialogue might capitalize on this as an example of weak support for Poland. Instead of sending a letter, Konarski suggested that the WJC could send a representative who could ensure that dialogue continued. Kaplan responded that this would not really be a “fruitful dialogue,” if the Poles are calling all of the shots. He then indicated in the report that the WJC wished for:

[A] dialogue, a good normal relationship, but it is Poland who has more to gain from it than we do. We were, and still are, in some way denigrated and not the other way round. How come your people make us responsible for things they are to be blamed for? Your people have their public opinion reaction to consider – as I quote from you that the anti-Jewish feelings in some circles are still vivid!!! - , we too have our public opinion, which is not anti-Polish, but remains reserved or doubtful about the sincerity of the Polish authorities to favor in concept terms the Polish-Jewish renewed dialogue in light of some recent events such as the Swedish case and others which have occurred recently. We as the WJC have to take note of

49 Kaplan to Philip M. Klutznick and G.M. Riegner re: Poland, September 20, 1978, World Jewish Congress Digitized collection (Z6/2573-25), CZA.
these situations and try to act with a sense of responsibility, taking all aspects into consideration.\footnote{Ibid.}

While Kaplan may have been generalizing when he wrote that Jewish public opinion was not anti-Polish, for surely there were Jews who were, he was correct that there was a lot of reservation regarding Poland’s sincerity.

The conversation also revealed that the Polish government feared having to enter into long, complicated negotiations with Jewish representatives, similar to the negotiations taking place between West Germany and the Jews. While Kaplan did not deny that there would be some serious and, at times, difficult negotiations, he wanted some signs from the Polish government that things were moving in a positive direction. Some things would be relatively easy to solve (a list of Polish Jews who would like to return to Poland) while others would be very complicated (compensation for communal and individual property), but as long as things were going in the right direction, they would be patient. Kaplan concluded with comments at the end of his report of the meeting, stressing that the Poles were not going to make negotiations with them easy, and that the WJC was going to have to come up with concrete proposals and a timeline, not simply open-ended demands. He also believed that there needed to be some coordination amongst the WJC members working on issues related to Poland. This would be the only way to continue moving forward.\footnote{Ibid.}

Despite Kaplan’s response that the WJC leadership was sympathetic to those impacted by the Swedish issue, the Polish government continued to believe that the WJC should be doing more to improve Poland’s image amongst their co-religionists. Konarski and Kaplan met at the
Polish Embassy in Paris on December 6, 1978, once more at Minister Konarski’s request. Yet again, it lasted almost three hours. Konarski raised a number of issues and asked for the WJC’s assistance with them. For example, he asked Kaplan to advise one of the WJC affiliates to be careful when speaking poorly about Poland, lest his visa applications continue to be rejected. It was clear from the notes that the WJC had already successfully intervened once to ensure that the man received his visa. Konarski also informed Kaplan that a Polish émigré’s missing diploma was on its way to the embassy. Kaplan wrote in his notes that the “missing diploma” was suddenly found due to the WJC’s demand. Konarski also asked Kaplan for help with the upcoming screening of “Holocaust” in Paris. Konarski asked that Kaplan intervene to see if it was possible to delete the two scenes that blamed Polish collaborators for assisting with the ghetto deportation. Kaplan said that he would see what he could do, and that he would be willing to help particularly if those two scenes were proven to be inaccurate.\textsuperscript{52} Their discussion of these issues indicates that there had been at least small attempts by both sides to bridge the understanding gap, though it was far from being totally closed.

Finally, Konarski asked Kaplan once again to help calm tensions amongst Polish émigrés living in Sweden who continued to be engaged in a heated anti-Polish campaign. Thus, they returned to the very topic that was so contentious just months before. Konarski still hoped that Kaplan would be willing to help them by telling everyone to be patient and reassure them that the visas would come through in time. Konarski told Kaplan that:

This is not good for our own cooperation Poland-WJC, or the direction taken towards it. Much is at stake here, and we need, he said, a serene climate to work out

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
patiently our goals… The new relationship of Poland with world Jewry is not well taken by some of his colleagues, in the country as well.53

Yet again, Kaplan was adamant in saying that the promises had been made, but until that point, they remained unfulfilled and that he would not intervene. If anything, he said, this was a diplomatic issue between Sweden and Poland. Kaplan did not seem to be moved by the threat that this could undermine Polish-Jewish relations, which he likely viewed simply as bait. Instead, he wrote that he told Konarski:

We know their anti-Semitic tendencies, they don’t bother us as long as on their high level such tendencies are on the way to be changed in a positive way, but we must have facts to prove that they go in that direction. Until yet, despite some very minor aspects, they don’t look quite convincing. So why are you surprised that there are outraged public statements on the matter he raised? Solve them, they will stop. We can’t do the job for you.54

According to Kaplan’s report, Konarski was very embarrassed. Kaplan insisted that if the Polish government reached a successful agreement with the Swedish authorities, the campaign would stop and that in the free world, people could express themselves however they wished. Still, Konarski believed that the WJC, as a representative organization, could prove useful in helping end the campaign.55 Konarski still could not understand why the WJC refused to get involved, believing they could impact public opinion and help Poland in the fight for its reputation in Sweden. The cultural differences were far too great, since no organization could ever accomplish such a feat, though the Polish government might attempt to.

Only at the end of the December conversation did they finally get to the core “long-standing” problems between the WJC and the Polish government. Konarski told Kaplan that the

53 Meeting with Minister Konarski at the Polish Embassy in Paris, December 5, 1978, World Jewish Congress Digitized collection (Z6/2573-11), CZA.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
Polish authorities were waiting for Kaplan to return to Poland. Kaplan told him that he was under the impression that things were moving in the right direction following a meeting with the Polish embassy in Washington D.C. He left there, Kaplan said, with some hope, particularly regarding the pension issue. Konarski told him that “I would have liked to give you such hope, but it wouldn’t be decent. ‘They’ have not moved yet from their ‘inert’ position. You must press forcefully but based on concrete facts. Don’t go to Warsaw without such documents.” He did not specify which documents Kaplan needed to take, but it seemed as though Kaplan knew to which documents he was referring. Furthermore, Konarski seemed to be suggesting that the Poles were simply unwilling to budge even though the embassy officials had suggested otherwise. Konarski asked again for patience and persistence.

Kaplan wrote in his notes that although he did not raise the point that they would take the issue to the press and that this would become an “international crisis,” it was clear that he was not opposed to doing so if necessary. If Konarski’s assessment of the Polish state was correct, they may not have had any other choice. Kaplan understood that the Polish government needed the WJC’s support just as much as the WJC needed Polish cooperation on their issues. Otherwise, Konarski would not have been so persistent on the Swedish issue. But since they seemed to have reached a stalemate, the WJC felt that they needed to take some kind of action to exert pressure on the Polish authorities. It had been ten months since his first visit to Poland. If they did not do anything he wrote, “We will lose the whole impact in the eyes of the Poles. They will certainly not move an inch to further the problems in our interest. They will just wait

56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
patiently and look at us ‘smiling.’ And we sit and discuss and pass on resolutions without real meaning and follow up.”

The most important thing, as Kaplan pointed out, was to ensure that the Jewish organizations were applying enough pressure so that things were accomplished. There needed to be some accountability. But how? How could the leaders of Jewish organizations put just the right amount of pressure on the Polish authorities? One tactic was to threaten the Polish government with a new campaign to lobby the U.S. Congress against Poland. During a 1976 rabbinical delegation visit, a non-Rabbinic member of the delegation, William Perry, a representative of the Longshoreman Union, believed that the Ministry of Religious Affairs was acting fraudulently and threatened that if he did not get a written confirmation of the Polish commitment for caring for the cemeteries, he would block Polish imports into the U.S. However, it was unlikely that this would accomplish anything.

A far more moderate and effective way was to continue to speak with Warsaw through diplomatic channels. In late April 1977 Isaac Lewin, once again, went to the Polish embassy after a group returned from Poland and reported that the cemeteries in Łańcut and Rzeszów were still in disarray, despite assurances that these cemeteries were being cared for. He asked the embassy to intervene and asked for a copy of the memo that the Ministry of Religious Affairs sent to the local municipalities regarding the conservation. Though Lewin was informed that they could not share internal documents with him, they promised to intervene. They must have, for

58 Ibid.

59 Notatka o przebiegu wizyty grupy rabinów z USA w Polsce [A note about the visit of a group of US rabbis in Poland], September 9, 1976, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131-511, AAN. Not only did it seem ineffective, but there is no way that he had that kind of power, and thus it was an emotionally driven, empty threat.

60 Notatka służbowa dot. rozmowy z dr. J. Lewinem [Notes from the Conversation with Lewin at the Embassy], April 27, 1977, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131-511, AAN.
shortly after, Kąkol personally wrote a note to Lewin reiterating the government's commitment regarding the cemetery issue. He reassured Kohane that letters had been sent to the regional authorities informing them of this. He also assured Lewin that the government looked favorably upon a rabbi coming to serve temporarily in Poland, though they wished to express their thoughts on the candidates.61 This nod towards Lewin’s stated preferences for having a rabbi serving in Poland indicates that Kąkol was concerned about Lewin’s frustration, and it appears that he was trying to appease Lewin (and perhaps also distract him by raising another issue near and dear to his heart).

Lewin continued to use the embassy representatives to get through to the Polish authorities when necessary. He told the embassy staff that he had a religious imperative and that he would not give up. He knew, however, that his religious imperative would be meaningless to the authorities. Thus, he was prepared to lay all of the cards on the table. He reminded them that if the PRL followed through, it would “create a more favorable atmosphere in the U.S. and global Jewish community and in Congress and the US administration.”62 Lewin understood that such words could potentially go a long way, given that Poland’s economic situation was becoming increasingly dire in this period. To indicate how important the matter was, Congressman Stephen Solarz went with Lewin to the embassy. A member of the Foreign Affairs Committee in Congress, Solarz commented in a follow-up letter to the Ambassador that the positive attitude he observed at the embassy will “result in better relations between our two great


62, Notatka ze spotkania z grupą rabinów ortodonsjnych [sic] w sprawie cmentarzy żydowskich w PRL [Notes from a meeting with a group of Orthodox rabbis on Jewish cemeteries in PRL], May 19, 1980, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131-511, AAN.
nations.”\(^{63}\) Solarz sought assistance from the U.S. government even before the meeting, writing to the Polish Desk Officer at the State Department that “Needless to say, this is a very important problem that deserves the immediate attention of both the U.S. and Polish governments.”\(^{64}\) The embassy staff warned the authorities in Warsaw that the religious groups were not accepting the lack of action by the Polish authorities and that the negative attitude in the PRL may ultimately be detrimental to Polish interests.\(^{65}\) The Jews were approaching the authorities, then, from both Washington, D.C. and from Warsaw.

It was clear that despite the coordination amongst the various Jewish organizations working with the Polish authorities, there was still much uncertainty. Some problems were being solved, though not everyone knew precisely what the status was on any of them. According to Nives Fox of the American Jewish Committee Paris office, the Auschwitz pavilion was to be redone with half of the costs coming from Poland and the other half from world Jewry. There was also some progress on the pension issue, as a French-Polish reciprocal agreement enabled Poland to pay pensions for the Jews living in France. But the costs of extending the pensions to other countries were still too great for Poland to make much headway beyond France. Another major victory according to Fox’s notes was the opening to Israeli scholars of archival collections housed in the Polish archives, including the Jewish Historical Institute archive. In a memo written before Kaplan’s visit, Fox indicated that there were still major disagreements regarding restitution.\(^{66}\) It is possible, of course, that the government’s approach changed as more and more

\(^{63}\) Solarz to Ambassador Romuald Spasowski, May 16, 1980, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131-511, AAN.

\(^{64}\) Solarz to Victor Gray, May 14, 1980, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131-511, AAN.

\(^{65}\)Notatka ze spotkania z grupą rabinów ortodonsyjnych [sic] w sprawie cmentarzy żydowskich w PRL [Notes from a meeting with a group of Orthodox rabbis on Jewish cemeteries in PRL], May 19, 1980, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131-511, AAN.

\(^{66}\) Fox to Geller, January 13, 1977, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO.
demands streamed in. A year later, in October 1978, Fox sent another memo to the Foreign Affairs Department stating that a delegation had met with the Polish Ambassador to France to discuss, among other things, the matter of pensions for Jews outside of Poland. It is not clear whether this was to advocate on behalf of Polish Jews living outside of France or if there were still issues within France. But the response that the Ambassador’s aide gave was “the law is the law,” thereby indicating that this was not negotiable.\textsuperscript{67}

There were still other signs of progress. According to an undated document from sometime after mid-1978, the government sent a memo to the WJC, informing them that they had already put over 600 million zloty into preserving Judaica and maintaining Jewish life in Poland. It is not clear what time period these expenses were from.\textsuperscript{68} The author(s) went point by point through the WJC’s demands, addressing what they had done and why they could not do some of the things, such as the preservation of all of the cemeteries. They wrote that in Poland families and churches cared for cemeteries, and the government really only took care of plots of special historical significance or when families were dead. Obviously this was the case in most Jewish cemeteries, but given the sheer number of cemeteries throughout Poland requiring care, the costs would be exorbitant. They were working on other issues though. For example, they were currently cataloguing Judaica and would consider sending some of it abroad.\textsuperscript{69} Thus, Kaplan’s (and WUPJ’s) demands seemed to be accomplishing something, albeit at a snail’s pace,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{67} Fox to the Foreign Affairs Department, October 20, 1978, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO.

\textsuperscript{68} Stanowisko Rządu PRL wobec żądań zgłoszonych przez Światowy Kongres Żydów w styczniu 1976 r. [The position of the Polish Government to the demands raised by the World Jewish Congress in January 1976], undated, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131-511, AAN.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
assuming that this report was correct. Even if the Poles were overstating their support, the fact that they felt compelled to draft the memo is telling.

A major success regarding archival material came in November 1977 when the Polish government returned the Sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Joseph Isaac Schneerson’s, writings and library collection to the Philadelphia Friends of Lubavitch group after three years of negotiations. In exchange for over half a million dollars in medical equipment, the government returned the material from the Jewish Historical Institute’s collection. The negotiations, which took place, “in an atmosphere of friendship and good will,” included the Lubavitch group, the Polish government, as well as the U.S. State Department and former White House advisor on Jewish issues, David Lissy. The Consul General of Israel in Philadelphia, who was at the ceremonies at Independence Hall to celebrate the transfer of the materials, noted that the Polish government had been reluctant in the past to return materials when other Jewish groups had asked. He stated that it was a “good beginning,” but he was unsure whether this was a “one time gesture or a change in attitude that will bring the return of the large collection of sacred writing still in Poland.” Though not in direct response to the Consul General’s remark, a Polish embassy Counselor who attended the event explained that Jewish materials were “part of the long history of Polish-Jewish relations,” and as such, they viewed Jewish artifacts as belonging to a common Polish culture.  

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Another major victory based on the demands, as Fox noted, was the new Jewish pavilion at Auschwitz. In fall 1977, Stefan Grayek, the chairman of the World Organization of Jewish Partisans, Fighters, and Foreign Concentration Camp Inmates, was instructed by the Polish authorities to invite Israeli organizations to help plan a new exhibit for the Jewish pavilion at Auschwitz, since the old one was so heavily criticized. Yitzhak Arad, the chairman of Yad Vashem, and Tzvi Schner, director of the Ghetto Fighters Kibbutz Museum, were invited to Poland in December, where they felt “warmly welcomed,” in order to begin discussing the new pavilion. A few weeks later invitations went out to Jewish community leaders and organization heads worldwide, including Israel, inviting them to the opening scheduled for April 17, 1978. The timing seemed far too rushed, but the goal was to open it as part of the 35th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising commemorations. The WJC intervened, however, and pushed the opening until the fall, though there was an unofficial opening of the Jewish Pavilion in conjunction with the Ghetto Uprising commemoration. According to the news reports, this was the “first official acknowledgement by the Polish authorities in 33 years…that the principal victims at Auschwitz were Jews.” Yet, according to the JTA article covering the event, some Jewish circles were still expressing “a degree of cynicism,” over what they saw as a “belated gesture by the Polish government which, not too many years ago, during the Gomulka regime,


74 Kaplan to Klutznick, Goldmann, and Riegner, March 22, 1978, World Jewish Congress Digitized collection (Z6/2573-47), CZA.
conducted an anti-Jewish campaign of its own.” They viewed this as an attempt to improve Poland’s image, but they nevertheless were grateful for the pavilion. Thus, for some, anything the Poles did was in pursuit of some gain or public relations reason, rather than for altruistic purposes. Again, emotions ran high within Jewish circles when it came to Poland.

As expected, the visitors to Poland used the chance to meet with leading government officials. According to Kol Israel Radio, the Polish President met with those who attended the opening at Auschwitz, telling them that it was important to establish new relations with Jews “wherever they may be.” This less than subtle hint indicated that the government might be moving toward reestablishing relations with Israel. According to a telegraph from the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv to the State Department regarding the opening of the Auschwitz pavilion, the WJC’s Goldmann made it clear that the reopening of the exhibit, the granting of Righteous Among the Nation awards, and the Israeli delegation’s presence in Warsaw for the events all indicated “the beginning of a new Polish policy towards the Jews (which heretofore had disavowed any obligation toward the Jewish people) and demonstrated a new friendliness towards Israel.” The telegram also stated that the Chief Editor of Poland’s News Agency, Interpress, told a Jerusalem Post reporter that “Poland is interested in getting a good press and hopes for speedy improvement in relations between the countries.” At the bottom of the telegram was a comment on the situation from the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv which noted that many Israelis are excited to resume relations with Poland and that they are:


76 Ibid.

77 Israeli Delegation in Poland (from Tel Aviv to State), April 20, 1978, [Electronic Record], Central Foreign Policy Files (Created 7/1/1973 - 12/31/1978 documenting the period 1973 - 12/31/1978 - Record Group 59), NARAAAD.

78 Ibid.
Willing to reserve judgement on commonly expressed caveats that Poland’s true motive may be to gain Jewish tourist revenue and Jewish support in the US Congress for MFN status. Recent events in Poland are considered to be a step in the right direction.\textsuperscript{79}

For others, then, the less than altruistic measures were fine as long as things improved. After all, both sides had something to gain.

Yet more proof that some things were being accomplished at the government level came in November 1979 when a letter from Australia arrived, thanking Finkelstein for the shipment of the Torah scroll, which the Congregation had sold to The South Brisbane Hebrew Congregation.

The President of the Synagogue noted that such:

\begin{quote}
Religious treasures are unobtainable in this part of the world, where the Jewish Religion is practiced with devotion by young and old. Some of our congregants are of Polish origin and some of us are survivors of Auschwitz. This is the reason why your Sefer Torah [Torah Scroll], the only one we possess at the present has such a great significance to us.\textsuperscript{80}
\end{quote}

He ended the letter with a promise to treasure the Torah and to “keep it safe for future generations to use.” The document did not indicate what the terms of the purchase were, nor the role that the Polish government played in the transaction, but according to the conversation between Kąkol and Kaplan, the government must have played a key role, in just allowing it to leave. Undoubtedly, Judaica could provide a tremendous source of revenue, while at the same time fulfilling the desire for world Jewry to obtain these objects. Such transactions could benefit both sides.

By 1980, less than a decade after serious discussions between the Polish authorities and Jewish leaders began, some substantial progress had been made in Poland, though there was still

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{80} Moshe Stein to Finkelstein, November 21, 1979, “Poland Synagogues, 1977-1998,” JDCA.
a tremendous amount more on the initial list of demands to achieve. Another WJC Jewish
delegation was planning to go to Warsaw to continue pressuring the government. Before the trip,
however, Kaplan was asked for a pre-negotiation document that would inform the authorities on
the newest, most up-to-date demands, particularly since there was a new Minister for Religious
Affairs. Kaplan was reluctant to send such a document, which he saw as a chance to avoid the
otherwise “unavoidable confrontation on our issues once the two parties will be facing each
other.”81 By not sending the document ahead of time, Kaplan felt that they would have more of a
dialogue than they would if the Minister had time to prepare remarks ahead of time.

Around the same time, the president of the WJC and U.S. Secretary of Commerce, Philip
Klutznick, who had been in Poland on an official U.S. government mission, reported that during
his trip he had not brought up the Jewish issues with any of the Polish authorities, but that they
had brought them up with him.82 Polish officials emphasized what they had accomplished vis-à-
vis the previous demands: the restoration of the Warsaw cemetery, the restoration of synagogues
in Warsaw and Krakow, concentration of Jewish art and religious items, the creation of a Jewish
museum in Krakow, improvements to the Jewish pavilion at Auschwitz, a readiness to establish
academic connections with scholars working on Polish Jewish history in the West, etc. Klutznick
did not believe that the Polish government would be able to provide much financially to meet the
demands, given how devastated their own economy was at the moment.83 Nevertheless, the fact
that members of the government raised these Jewish issues with him showed that they were

81 Kaplan to Klutznick, Goldmann, Bronfman, Riegner, Reiss, Lack, and Grayek, June 5, 1980, World Jewish
Congress Digitized collection (Z6/2671-45), CZA.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
proud and ready to draw attention to what they had done. Klutznick’s role as U.S. Secretary of Commerce undoubtedly played a tremendous role in the government’s desire to highlight their actions.

The Impact on the Polish Jewish Community

The newfound openness had a substantial impact on the Polish Jewish community as well and it served as yet another avenue through which the government could obtain some support abroad. It also gave Lewin, who was still working tirelessly to promote Jewish life in Poland, opportunities to gain more support for his cause. At the World Jewish Congress meeting in July 1978 in Bucharest, the representatives from Poland attended a reception at the Israeli Embassy. 84

At the reception, Lewin convinced the Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Goron, to convey his belief to the Joint’s Theodore Feder that Poland needed a rabbi and a ritual slaughterer in order to serve the needs of the community. Both Finkelstein and Tenenblatt were present for what Feder described as almost an ambush. When Rabbi Goron said that he would raise $24,000 in the U.S. to arrange their visits, Feder responded that it would cost closer to $100,000, which Rabbi Goron then agreed to raise. Feder said that sending both would be out of the question and Rabbi Goron agreed that really he would be happy with just a rabbi. To Feder’s great surprise, even Tenenblatt supported the idea of sending in a rabbi. According to Feder, “East and West were combined in the need for a rabbi in Poland.” 85 Lewin had triumphed.

84 Memo from Feder to Goldman, July 7, 1978, “Poland – General, 1976-1980,” JDCA. The Poles attended along with representatives from East Berlin, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia. The Hungarians, according to the report, were “cowards,” and thus it was believed that they arranged a morning train in order to avoid attending the reception.

85 Ibid.
While Feder believed that Tenenblatt’s support for the rabbi may have been the result of too much celebration at Rabbi Rosen’s festivities, Kohane provided a much more logical explanation. He drew attention to a new trend in Eastern Europe, writing that the authorities in these countries wanted rabbis for

Alibi purposes to cover their anti-Jewish or, as they call them, anti-Zionist activities. That doesn’t mean that we should make it easier for them. If they want to have rabbis, they should finance it as, for instance, Hungary and East Germany do. However, there is surely no justification for us to do it.86

To further drive home the point, Kohane wrote, “We are approaching the days of the Messiah if a ranking officer of the Polish Security, Mr. Tenenblatt, who officially is the Chief Editor of the Folksstimme, joins the rabbis in supporting the request to send a rabbi to Poland.”87 Thus, he advised, the Joint should not spend $24,000 to send a rabbi when they reject requests for $4,600 for more important and pressing matters, at least based on his professional and factual evaluation of the existing situation. Once again, Kohane found it difficult to look beyond the finances. But he also understood that there might be a public relations reason to grant the money, and he told Ralph Goldman that if that was the motivation, so be it.88

Goldman sent Kohane’s memo, along with his own notes, to Herbert Katzki in the New York office, requesting a meeting to discuss the issues that Kohane had laid out in his memo. Goldman wrote that while Kohane’s, “facts and logic are generally impeccable,” there were moments in Jewish history when Communists and anti-religious people, including Kohane’s own namesake, Rabbi Akiva, returned to the fold, so he did not want to discount Tenenblatt entirely.89

87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Prior to becoming one of the most prominent scholars of his age, Rabbi Akiva (50–135 C.E) was “a bitter enemy of scholars.” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, “Akiva,” by Harry Freedman and Stephen G. Wald, accessed July 10, 2015,
He also argued that rejecting requests for $4,600 for other programs should not justify refusing $24,000 for something else. The increased support from other sources exposed the clear divisions within the Joint. Of course, there was a chance that increased exposure to Jewish communities abroad, which in most cases did have a rabbi, had convinced the Polish Jewish leaders that they should also have one. It may also have been, as Kohane claimed, about gaining legitimacy by having what many perceived to be an essential component of a Jewish community. Whatever the reason, the authorities were clearly increasingly interested in the Jewish community and in what outsiders believed they needed.

A benefit of the increased interaction was that the Polish Jewish leadership had more opportunities to speak openly with organizations like the SSE or Joint when they traveled abroad. Jakubowicz confirmed Kohane’s suspicions about the sudden desire for a rabbi in October when he spoke with Kohane openly from Brussels where he was attending the World Jewish Congress meeting. He said that the fact that Finkelstein, Tenenblatt, and the Polish Ministry of Religious Affairs all wanted the rabbi indicated that their intentions were far from altruistic. Jakubowicz, however, was not totally against having a rabbi for the High Holidays, particularly if the rabbi agreed to serve four different communities, one for each of the holidays. According to Kohane, that was the plan. Of course, whether the Polish leadership would actually allow that to happen was another question. With competing sources of support for religious matters, the Joint might have been losing its say.

http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CCX2587500632&v=2.1&u=gain40375&it=r&p=GVRL&sw=w&sid=7d5605ca8fd3f2c1ab20742b76b8f582.


It was painfully clear even to outsiders what was going on vis-à-vis the newfound interest in sustaining Jewish life in Poland. In 1980 twenty-one Jewish men and women who had spent the previous year studying and reading about Polish Jewry met with each of the Jewish institutions in Krakow and Warsaw. After a couple of meeting with officials and hearing about the present day Jewish community Raymond Jayson, one of the group members, wrote in his report about of the trip:

In view of the very small number of Jews now in Poland it is difficult to understand why the Polish Authorities permit or even encourage these Jewish institutions when they appear to have suppressed any real recognition of Jewish culture in Poland or the Jewish contribution to Poland. I can only suggest that this is to enable them to maintain to the world and especially to the U.S.A. that they are doing their duty to the Jews. Poland seems to be actively seeking trade with and technology from the West and we were told that Poland has one of the largest external debts per capita in the World; but I may be wrong.  

Jayson had spent time learning about the rich heritage of Polish Jewry before his visit, and thus he was able to view this heritage beyond the lens of the Holocaust, which often distorted the view of so many Jewish visitors. As such, he was perhaps able to analyze the situation with a more critical, and less emotional, eye. Furthermore, he was a prominent Jew in his home

92 Report of Visit to Warsaw and Krakow – Friday April 25th - Tuesday 29th 1980, Poland. General. 1976-1980, JDCA. The author of the text, Raymond Jayson, sent a copy of this report to the Israeli Ambassador in London. The return address on the cover letter was from Elstree, Herts., in England and he was a prominent member of the Elstree Jewish community at the time, having been honored as a chatan Torah in 1976 (The chatan Torah is the person given the honor of finishing the Torah reading on Simchat Torah, which is the last reading of the Five Books of Moses and it is immediately followed by a reader who is honored to begin reading from the beginning of the Five Books. This was the highest honor at his synagogue, given to those who dedicated themselves to the community (“Chatanim,” Borhamwood Shul, accessed May 27, 2015, http://www.borehamwoodshul.org/aboutus/chatanim.asp). A prominent British Jew, he notes the Polish government’s desire to please the West, and the U.S. in particular.

93 Emotional responses by visitors to Poland were not uncommon. An article in the April 24-30, 1980 Tribue Juive in Paris included an article by Elisabeth Soskin who wrote about her visit to Auschwitz, during which she saw a “deliberate desire of the Polish authorities to mask the Jewish martyr with an essentially Polish martyr.” She later continued her attack on the Polish government, writing, “Shame on the Polish people who cultivates a base anti-Semitism although there are only 4,000 Jews left! Shame finally on the Polish directors who, if we are not vigilant, will little by little erase what was the Jewish martyr” (Translation of the Soskin article, April 24-30, 1980, Poland. General. 1976-1980, JDCA).
community in England, and he may have been familiar with attempts to “impress” foreign Jews perceived to be wealthy. 94 Jayson was also well-traveled and remarked in this report that throughout his stay in Poland, he found himself comparing Poland to the Soviet Union. Generally, he noted, there seemed to be more freedom, though the Jews seemed more frightened than the general population (he did not compare them to the Soviet Jews). He also noted that in Krakow, there were two regular minyanim, and that, “they make sure that there is a minyan in each Synagogue so as to not give the authorities the excuse to close one down.” 95 While their concern that this could happen suggests some insecurity, the authorities could have come up with reasons to shut one of the synagogues down regardless. Given the attention that the foreign Jews paid to the Jewish community, particularly in Krakow where more and more Jews were visiting before or after trips to Auschwitz, this seems unlikely. It would have been counterproductive to the apparent goals of creating better Polish-Jewish relations.

Despite the fact that some were worried that the authorities would close down one of the synagogues, the substantial changes occurring in the country were evident in the Jewish community as well. An indication that the situation was changing quickly appeared in the November 15, 1980 Folks Sztyme, which included a very detailed report – more detailed than Kohane had ever remembered seeing – of the TSKŻ Board’s Plenary Session. According to Kohane:

Most importantly, you find in the report of the General Secretary, in the discussion, and in the resolution, strong indications of the need to contact Jews and Jewish organizations abroad for welfare purposes, for renovation of the recreation center in


95 Ibid. A minyan, or plural minyanim, is the ten men (and in some communities, though not in Poland at the time) required for prayers.
Srodborow near Warsaw, and assistance to the aged for medicaments. Obviously, if they speak about ‘our brothers abroad,’ they mean only JDC, although the word is not mentioned now as it has never been mentioned in the last twenty years.96

There was a clear sense of desperation, that they needed assistance and it would not be received in Poland unless they turned to Jews abroad. From Kohane’s perspective, they meant the Joint, but given the involvement of other organizations since 1973 and meetings with more and more foreign Jews, it seems like this may no longer have been the case. Although the Joint and SSE were really the two main financial players after 1968, other organizations were becoming increasingly active in Polish-Jewish affairs. Yet another major change was that the TSKŻ leaders, who had just recently been so scared about speaking negatively about the Party, seemed to be ready to criticize certain elements in Poland. The new TSKŻ General Secretary, Adam Kwaterko, who had replaced the staunchly Stalinist Gutkowska, referred to the great, new developments in Poland that were “destroying the old, dead methods of leadership.”97 The representative from Katowice, Aleksander Sapir, said that he believed the government would eventually “evaluate the events which took place in March 1968.” Mendel Tanenzapf took this a step further, condemning the TSKŻ’s leadership for not reacting to the antisemitic publications in the late 1960s.98 Thus, even the Jews who were generally supportive of the Party were

97 Ibid. Kwaterko’s name is sometimes spelled with a “v,” which is not a Polish letter. Other times, such as in the WJC minutes I refer to in Chapter 5, it is spelled “Kwaterka.”
98 Ibid. According to the World Jewish Congress’ Institute of Jewish Affairs Research Report from August 1981, demands from within the academic world emerged in late 1980, calling for a rehabilitation of those who were most strongly impacted by the March 1968 events. Solidarity leaders, including the new rector of Warsaw University, Henryk Samsonowicz, gathered on the anniversary in March for a commemorative meeting. This meeting was but one opening of the discussion about the March events at this time (L. Hirszowicz, “Jewish Themes in the Polish Crisis,” Nos. 10 & 11, (London: Institute of Jewish Affairs, August 1981), 2-3).
beginning to challenge what had happened in the late 1960s. This indicates that the major changes occurring in Poland at the time were also impacting the Jewish community.

Mr. Sapir also spoke about the need for Katowice’s Jews, many of whom he said were religious, sick and needy, to have a kosher canteen. He acknowledged that this was not a TSKŻ matter, but he said that he had not gotten very far with the Congregation when he approached Finkelstein. His decision to raise this with the TSKŻ is noteworthy. A decade ago, this would not have happened. Any reference to the Congregation at a plenary session likely would have been negative, though in Katowice there was some degree of cooperation between the local organizations. However, this was consistent with the discussion at the Plenary Session. In addition to increased cooperation with Jews abroad, the TSKŻ leadership also saw a need for closer cooperation with the Congregation regarding the sites of Jewish heritage in Poland. The call for cooperation represents a significant shift in TSKŻ’s approach, for they had previously called for a merger of the two organizations. Whether this was a “desperate times call for desperate measures” plea or a symbol of sincere intentions for increased cooperation remained to be seen. Regardless, Kohane summed up the report of the plenary session by confirming that “Obviously, not one of those lines would ever have been voiced – not to speak about printing – before October 31st, before Lech Walesa.” The changes in Poland were so substantial that even the Jewish community was adapting to them.


100 Ibid. He did point out, however, that Mieczysław Moczar, who was behind the March ’68 campaign, was a key figure in the new Kania regime. It is possible that Kohane meant to write August 31, 1980, not October 31. August 31, 1980 was the day that the Gdansk Agreement, which gave workers the right to strike and organize a union in Poland, was signed.
Confirming the TSKŻ’s commitment to finding assistance abroad, Tenenblatt visited the Joint office during his trip to New York (on unofficial business) and while there, he expressed their desire for more assistance in Poland. According to a memo from Katzki, Tenenblatt said that the Polish government “would not have anything against JDC assistance and that he would like JDC to come back.” Katzki said that the JDC would first need a written invitation, and furthermore, they would need to go to Poland to assess the situation since it had been more than ten years since they had worked in the country. Tenenblatt said that he would take the message back to the government.  

101 First the discussions with Israel and now discussions with the Joint; whether driven by economic necessity or a reflection of the liberalization (or both), Poland’s approach to the Jewish issues was changing rapidly.

Or so it seemed. In January 1981, The Central Committee’s Foreign and Administrative Departments issued a joint “Notes on the Theme of Jewish Problems.” The ten-page document laid out the Jewish problems succinctly with eight major points. International Jewish organizations figured prominently in the report, indicating that they, not the local population, were the actual “problem.” The first point began:

For several years now, among Western Jewish communities and organizations there has been an increased interest in influencing Poland. We are dealing with a precise and coordinated plan. This is proven by various initiatives and proposals derived from various sources, and, although phrased differently, they all convey the same intentions.  

102 The interest, according to the report, was rooted in historical considerations, given that Poland had been the center of Jewish religious, educational, and cultural life in the past. It was a


102 “Notatka na temat problematyki żydowskiej,” January 8, 1981, PZPR LXXVI-597, AAN.
fact, this report stated, that there were more than 4.5 million Jews outside of Poland with Polish roots.\textsuperscript{103} Many young Jews abroad were probing for their roots, looking for insight into their own identities by looking to the Polish Jewish experiences. This was, from the Polish government’s perspective, part of the larger Western tendency towards exploration of roots that was occurring at the time.\textsuperscript{104}  This interest in roots, the report claimed, was leading the international Jewish organizations to want to restore and preserve Poland’s Jewish heritage and also to rejuvenate the present day Jewish community up to the standards set by the international Jewish community. The report stressed that Poland must take these wishes seriously because of their “significant” political and economic influence and the propaganda of international Jewish organizations. The PRL must have relations with them, the report claimed, because it was essential for the PRL’s international interests. Yet, the government believed that most of their organizations were linked with Israel, other capitalist states and dissident centers. As a result, the situation was complicated. Ultimately, they believed that they would have to secretly oppose the organizations’ requests and activities, but only in such a way that preserved the PRL’s ultimate goals for international relations (i.e., improving their image abroad). They would not compromise their own national policies, and would do only what was in line with the socialist policies regarding national groups.\textsuperscript{105} While none of this was particularly new or surprising, it

\textsuperscript{103} According to the \textit{American Jewish Yearbook} in 1981, the estimated Jewish population in 1980 was 14,396,000. The figure given by the Polish government seems low in comparison. Leon Shapiro, “World Jewish Population,” accessed July 24, 2015, \url{http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/1980_14_WJP.pdf}.

\textsuperscript{104} For more on this exploration, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, \textit{Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

\textsuperscript{105} “Notatka na temat problematyki żydowskiej,” January 8, 1981, PZPR LXXVI-597, AAN.
was one of the few clear expressions of the Polish government’s official policy since this was an internal document, not meant for public consumption.

As a result, the Central Committee reactivated a working group for Jewish affairs, which had representatives from various departments, such as the Foreign Affairs, Administrative, Interior Ministry, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The main issue was the 1975/76 list of demands from the WFPJ and the WJC. The issues had been discussed from 1976-1980, and thus far some of the issues had been resolved (such as the Auschwitz pavilion). There were other issues, however, that had not yet been resolved. For example, the issue of cemetery maintenance remained a major one for religious and national considerations. Jews abroad were concerned about this and had been referring to it in their “reactionary anti-Polish campaign.” This was, indeed, an important issue, but there was a total disagreement on how best to handle it. One suggestion was to create an international commission that would discuss the issue, but there was concern that this could set a dangerous precedent since there were similar concerns coming from Germany regarding the former German territory that was now part of Poland. This is fascinating, for it raises the question of just how similarly the Party viewed these two issues – the German issue and the Jewish issue. While the historical circumstances were certainly different, both groups wanted some kind of restitution. Also, it reveals that the Polish government viewed both as outsiders. The Germans had not been Polish citizens, but the Jews had been.

Also important was the archival access issue. Scholars had been accessing documents in Poland since 1979, but they were still demanding more access. The Ministry of Religious Affairs believed that there would be great political significance in creating a joint team of Polish and Jewish historians to oversee research in Jewish history in Poland. The Foreign and Administrative Departments were wary, however, of extending the privileges beyond what was
already given to other foreign researchers, since, after all, access to and control of information was an important signal of power in communist countries. In these contexts, the government believed that it would not be possible to create joint committees for either the cemetery or archival access. They also took on the issue of Judaica, which they argued was part of the native Polish culture, and thus should remain in their “natural” place in Poland. 106 Yet, they decided to begin to evaluate some of the objects and selecting some which “in the legitimate interest of Poland” could possibly be used in exhibits of Polish Judaica abroad.107

Regarding the more difficult issues, such as property restitution and pensions, they stuck with their attitudes that there was little they could do since the laws prohibited them from paying out pensions unless there were agreements with the country, as was the case in France, for example. The restitution issue was complicated, just as it was with German restitution. The Ministry of Religious Affairs pushed for a loosening of visa restrictions, but the decision was to do whatever they could to plan for more tourism without giving “preference or discrimination” to Jewish tourists over non-Jewish tourists.108 These discussions reveal the split within the bureaucracy. Laws could, of course, be changed had the authorities really wanted to do something. Yet, the laws also provided them with a convenient “out.”

The report then gave what was probably the most reliable picture of what Jewish life in the country looked like at the time. The TSKŻ had about 1,500 members with clubs in fifteen

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106 The fear seemed to be that there were valuable pieces of Judaica in Poland, but they were not being displayed to the public. Furthermore, foreign Jewish organizations believed that the objects should be “transferred to their rightful heirs.” In 1976 Kąkol suggested to the Warsaw authorities that they could open a Central Museum of Judaica in Warsaw at Plac Grzybowski, but the reaction was negative. There would also be another negative response in 1981 when the Ministry raised the idea again and again in 1983 when the TSKŻ Board suggested it (“Notatka w sprawie utworzenia w Warszawie Państwowego Muzeum Judaików, January 17, 1985, PZPR LXXVI-642, AAN).

107 “Notatka na temat problematyki żydowskiej,” January 8, 1981, PZPR LXXVI-597, AAN.

108 Ibid.
cities. They fell under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior, but according to the report, there was not a lot of activity. The Congregation “engaged” about 2,500 people, most of whom were elderly. They had twenty-four synagogues and prayer houses, seven kosher kitchens where 65,000 free and cheap meals were distributed, and they looked after cemeteries. Also active were the Jewish Historical Institute (a unit the Polish Academy of Sciences), the State Jewish Theater, which “was considered a rarity in the world” and was well-respected abroad, and the *Folks Sztyme*, which was sent to readers in thirty-two countries. Thus, they concluded, Jewish life was fully supported and the community was given the opportunity to cultivate national life in accordance with their policies regarding national minorities. Generally, the Jews in Poland and abroad worked together to achieve some of the demands, and there has been an increase in foreign contact between the communities. They had been observers at the World Jewish Congress, they had developed tourism, etc. The local Jewish community did not raise any concerns for a long time, though recently there had been a call to address 1968 in a fair and proper way and to do more to care for the Jewish heritage sites. Currently, the report claimed, the TSKŻ was trying to get the authorities to allow the Joint back into Poland. Again, there was no need for propaganda, as this was an internal document. Given the Security Services’ presence and awareness of what was going on, one can conclude that this was likely a relatively fair assessment of the situation. Once again, this report reveals that the post-1968 absence narrative distorts the picture.

In terms of improving the general climate for the Polish Jewish community, the authorities proposed to actively take a stance on a few issues of particular relevance. The first

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109 It is not clear what “engaged” met, but it could be anything from welfare payments to free meals to attending religious services.

110 “Notatka na temat problematyki żydowskiej,” January 8, 1981, PZPR LXXVI-597, AAN.
was the renovation of the Nożyk Synagogue in Warsaw, which was stuck at a standstill, despite attempts by the Ministry of Religious Affairs to intervene. The Ministry was determined to work with the other Ministries to come up with a real plan that would fit with the previous policy decisions. The second issue that the Ministry was ready to address was related to a rabbi for Poland, which should exist according to the Congregation’s statutes (ironically in this case the government was unconcerned about this technical break in the law). Thus, the Ministry would work towards securing a candidate from Hungary. This seems to support Kohane’s argument that the state had a vested interest in bringing in a rabbi. The government would also commit to supporting the Jewish Theater and increasing subsidies to the TSKŻ. The Ministry of Religious Affairs would make a list of more proposals, keeping open the possibility of the eventual return of the Joint, under the conditions acceptable to the Polish government.\footnote{Ibid.} Given the conditions under which the Joint left, this was a notable shift in attitude.

**New Era, New Challenges**

The liberalization in Poland, which allowed for so many positive changes, also brought about new challenges from those who were opposed to these changes. In the spring of 1981 news of a new wave of antisemitism spread quickly in Poland. The *New York Times* ran an article in March with the headline “Anti-Semitism without Jews: A Polish Riddle.” The article discussed a 500 person gathering, organized by the Grunwald Patriotic Union, to commemorate the Polish patriots “who were tortured, sentenced, and executed [by] the Zionist clique,” which the journalist, John Darnton, pointed out was a clear reference to Jews in high positions during the
Stalinist period. Darnton referred to 1968, but drew a distinction between the present and previous situations. He wrote that presently there were only a few Jews left in the country, claiming:

> There is nothing that could be called a Jewish community. For reasons of guilt and public relations, the government finances a Jewish theater and a party-controlled Yiddish language weekly. But there is not a single bakery to produce unleavened bread or a single rabbi to hold services.

Thus, he claimed, there was a major question – could there be antisemitism without Jews? While this was a clearly hyperbolic, it was true that there were far fewer Jews during this newest outburst of antisemitism, and that the Party was supporting a great deal of Jewish life in Poland. Nevertheless, even Darnton had to confront the fact that there was some semblance of Jewishness in Poland.

As was to be expected, American Jews responded to the newest wave of antisemitism, just as they had done before. The American Jewish Committee met informally with a member of the Polish government in March 1981, and in a telegram to Jaruzelski, the President of the AJC, Maynard Wishner, wrote that he was dismayed to hear reports of antisemitism in Poland again. He requested that Jaruzelski himself issue a statement condemning antisemitism. Doing so, Wishner argued, would be a “demonstration of your government’s policy and equally serve your nation’s reputation as it is perceived by people of good will around the world.”

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114 Mailgram from Maynard Wishner to Prime Minister Wojciech Jaruzelski, March 10, 1981, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO.
might be a good push for Jaruzelski to issue such a statement. A week later he sent a thank you to the Polish Ambassador, Romuald Spasowski, for his own renunciation of antisemitism in Poland. In closing, he acknowledged that the Polish government may not be able to prevent antisemitism, but he felt “assured” that they would at least respond quickly to it.115 While the events of 1968 had come from the top down, the Jewish leaders abroad viewed this as something that the authorities could put down.

Also, unlike March 1968, there was clear opposition to this newest outbreak of antisemitism, and there were public debates thanks to the greater freedom and relaxation of censorship in the country. The opposition included intellectuals, members of the Home Army, Solidarity groups, circles within the Catholic Church, and Polish Jews. In this instance, the Polish Jews did not seem to experience the same degree of shock as last time, and they appeared to feel at least slightly more secure this time around, as this was mainly rhetoric, not action. This rhetoric was more about the idea of the Jew than the Polish Jews themselves. Once again, internal politics were at the center of these outbursts. But this time there was a large group of people opposing the attacks and marginalizing those who adopted these conservative, xenophobic ideas.116 Nevertheless, the World Jewish Congress’ research institute summed up its report by warning that “many of the issues discussed go beyond the present-day political struggle and may shape the future ideological make-up of the party and the mood prevalent in the country in a way that may affect Polish-Jewish relations.”117

115 Letter to Ambassador Spasowski, March 18, 1981, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland, YIVO.


117 Ibid., 4-6, 19.
For the time being, however, this did not seem to be the case. 1981 may have exposed the persistence of antisemitism in Poland, but it was also a historic year from the Polish Jewish perspective. There seemed to be enough of a change in the environment that more people felt comfortable attending synagogue. According to one report from Fox, there were more people at the Warsaw services than in the past, and most interestingly, there was “a sprinkling of new youngish faces.” Also far more indicative of the serious food shortages than a sharp rise in the population of those genuinely wishing to eat matzah on Passover, the Congregation sold more matzah this year than it previously had. Fox noted that there was a definite thaw in the air, and while it was “small stuff,” the “few bright glimmers of pro-Jewish efforts…are better than steady reports of anti-Semitism in a land with virtually no Jews.”¹¹⁸ For everyone, including the Jews, she wrote:

For the time being it sounds very much as if everyone is simply enjoying re-learning the abcs of at least relative freedom, trying to savour this to the utmost, without worrying too much about the future. To the extent that this affects all Poles it certainly affects Poland’s Jews – perhaps not so much the older group of war-broken survivors, somehow marking time before dying out; but definitely those still involved in active life and careers, and the few youth.¹¹⁹

Even with the Grunwald Patriotic Union, Fox viewed the changes in the early 1980s to be positive for the Jewish community.

There were two additional major events that revealed how much things had evolved since June 1967. Both involved agreements between major Jewish institutions and the Polish government. The first was the historic agreement between the Union of Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) and Warsaw University, which Israel’s Prime Minister Menachem Begin called “one of

¹¹⁸ Fox to the Foreign Affairs Department, June 24, 1981 American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.
the most sacred ventures of the Jewish people."¹²⁰ This agreement, which was mostly focused on access to scholarly materials, was part of their larger Polish Judaica Project that also included a project with the Polish Ministry of Religious Affairs to help restore almost 400 Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

In late April, Philip Hiat, representing the UAHC and, unofficially, the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) and Rector Henryk Samsonowicz of Warsaw University met to sign the historic agreement between their respective institutions, making a substantial leap forward with the long-standing archival access issue. Believing that it was important to have an academic institution representing the UAHC, Hiat suggested that the HUC-JIR be the main academic institution involved, though others, including Harvard, Michigan, Columbia, and Tel Aviv University all expressed interest. According to the agreement, the UAHC and HUC-JIR would form a joint committee to make decisions about the Project.¹²¹ The agreement was with Warsaw University, though de facto this would grant access to other Polish institutions such as the National Museum, National Library, Jewish Historical Institute, the Jewish Museum in Krakow, and other universities throughout Poland. The goals of the agreement were to cooperate in Semitic studies ventures, including joint research initiatives, catalogue the Judaica materials (literature, archival materials, art, etc.) throughout the country and to ensure that scholars had access to these materials. Furthermore, they wished to translate some of the significant works into English. Some of the material, the agreement stated, would be reproduced, and that would be up to the discretion of the American side. There would also be

¹²⁰ Menachem Begin to the Chairman of the Board, Armand Hammer, August 23, 1982, Alexander M. Schindler Papers, Box 12, folder 5, AJA.

¹²¹ Theodore K. Broido to Alfred Gottschalk (HUC), October 6, 1982, Alexander M. Schindler Papers, Box 12, folder 5, AJA.
academic exchanges, with the American side funding annual fellowships, which two scholars from Warsaw University applied for soon after the signing. The cooperation would also lead to a number of events, including academic conferences every five years and a museum exhibit.\footnote{Explanation of the articles of the agreement, Alexander M. Schindler Papers, Box 12, folder 5, AJA.}

In terms of priorities, the highest would be the microfilming of materials in libraries and museums (especially Jewish newspapers from the interwar period, documents from the Lublin Ghetto archives, Żegota’s papers, and Jewish Historical Institute manuscripts). After that was complete, they would then identify and eventually catalogue books, reproductions of illuminated manuscripts, and hold conferences.\footnote{Żegota, the Council for Aid to the Jews, was a Holocaust era organization through which Polish citizens provided aid to Jews in Poland.} The American side would finance much of the project, though both sides would share in the profits from sales.\footnote{The Agreement, Alexander M. Schindler Papers, Box 12, folder 5, AJA.} To help finance the project, the UAHC decided to reproduce 300 exact facsimiles of the Kalonymus Codex, which it sold for $5,000 a copy.\footnote{The Kalonymus Codex was the fourth oldest Jewish Bible (completed in Poland in 1238) known to still be in existence (Letter from Mark Cohen at UAHC to Mr. E.I. Lieber, May 9, 1983, Alexander M. Schindler Papers, Box 12, folder 5, AJA).}

The second major agreement signed in 1981 was the agreement allowing the Joint to return to Poland, effective January 1, 1982.\footnote{For more on the lead up to the agreement and the Joint’s subsequent involvement in Poland, see Schneider, Sze’erit hapleta.} Though there had been rumors for years that the Joint might be invited back to Poland, the government’s January 1981 meeting indicates that this was, in fact, a real possibility. A few days after the meeting, while en-route to Jerusalem for the World Jewish Congress meetings, Finkelstein, along with another Congregation representative, met with Goldman in Vienna. Finkelstein informed Goldman that the Minister of Religious
Affairs would be in Jerusalem the following week, and “is interested in meeting with a representative of JDC.” Goldman told Finkelstein that they would be happy to visit the Minister in Poland, but that they would not be able to meet with him in Jerusalem.\footnote{Memo re: Meeting with Mr. Finkelstein and Mr. Kornacki, January 19, 1981, Poland. General, 1976-1980, JDCA.} This was the first explicit request to meet with the Joint, as previous discussions had all seemed hypothetical. Furthermore, it was noteworthy that the Minister was going to Jerusalem, since relations with Israel had ended after June 1967.

While Goldman would not give any indication whether the Joint was prepared to return, the Joint files suggest that they were busy preparing for a potential return. In January 1981 Kohane requested a copy of the agreement regarding the Old Age Home from the early 1960s. According to Kohane, “I believe that such a document could be of great value in connection with our future discussions in Poland.”\footnote{Kohane to Rose Klepfisz, January 27, 1981, Archive Poland. General. 1976-1980, JDCA.} As if on cue, a couple of weeks later Kohane reported that the TSKŻ representatives at the World Jewish Congress had asked Gerhard Riegner to act as their bridge to the Joint, and informing him that the Polish government was inviting Kohane to come to Poland “as soon as possible.” They also requested a one-time grant for the Old Age Home in Warsaw and Sródborów, the community’s retreat facility.\footnote{Kohane to Goldman, February 11, 1981, Archive Poland. General. 1976-1980, JDCA.} Kohane was not enthused that the invitation came from the TSKŻ. He viewed this as an attempt by the TSKŻ to take the reins, which, given their relationship with the Party and Government, would mean that the Congregation would be in a more vulnerable position.\footnote{Ibid.} In the meantime, however, Finkelstein sent Goldman an invitation, which he also extended to Kohane, to come to Poland later that year.
In addition to meeting with the authorities, the trip would enable him to see what had changed (or remained the same) since he had last been in Poland before the Joint’s departure at the end of 1967. His itinerary would include visits to Congregations and synagogues throughout the country, a visit to Auschwitz, meetings with the TSKŻ and Jewish Historical Institute, a show at the theater, and a meeting with the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Thus, the Congregation was also involved in the negotiations. Whether this would be an equal partnership between the Joint, the Congregation and the TSKŻ remained to be seen.

While the liberal atmosphere in Poland had been positive for Poland, tensions there came to a breaking point when Jaruzelski declared martial law on December 13, 1981. The Jewish community was impacted in several ways. First, martial law quashed the opposition’s voice in the debate, and thus the conservative-based antisemitism emerged and this time, the Jews were feeling it much more, though they were not the primary target per say. This was still an attack on the opposition – with charges that the leaders were Jewish - and a tactic for distraction from internal issues. One radio interview on December 15, which was recorded in Paris, charged Jews and Free Masons with “misleading” Poland, and claimed that the Jews had taken control over 80% of Poland’s industry. Furthermore, KOR members, he claimed, were former Stalinists and often Jews, “who wanted the death of Poland.” Just as in 1968, American Jews mobilized to protest. Wishner sent a telegram to Ambassador Spasowski, stating that:

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132 Solidarity leaders who were not Jewish were accused of “maintaining ‘contacts with émigré circles, with Zionist and Trotskyite centres as well as with centres of subversion in the West’” (L. Hirszowicz, “Poland’s Jewish Policies Under Martial Law,” No. 3 (London: Institute of Jewish Affairs, May 1982), 3-4).

133 AJC Press Release, December 17, 1981, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO.
The American Jewish Committee has received reports that a lengthy antisemitic broadcast was featured on Warsaw Radio December 15 at eleven PM following a similar antisemitic television interview earlier that day. We find it of the greatest concern that in these times of crisis your government should present programs charging that Jews and free masons misled the Polish people and that persons of Jewish origin have turned Solidarity into an antinational body. We strongly urge immediate public dissociation in Poland itself by the authorities from the December 15 radio broadcast and television program and their denunciation of irresponsible and dangerous antisemitic charges. We should appreciate hearing from you as to action taken.134

Not only did they want action, they wanted Spasowski, the man with whom so many Jewish leaders had had regular contact lately, to report on what he – or his government – planned to do about the new outbreak of antisemitism. No response came, however, likely because Spasowski resigned (or, perhaps more likely, was removed) from his post. With more issues arising, the AJC and B’nai B’rith teamed up to go to the embassy to give a message to Jaruzelski himself, urging an, “immediate public rejection of irresponsible and dangerous anti-Semitic actions.”135

Once again, foreign leaders turned to Holocaust rhetoric to describe the situation they saw unfolding. The martial law crackdown on Solidarity leaders meant that a number of Jewish Solidarity activists, including the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising leader Marek Edelman, were arrested. Schindler spoke out immediately, sending a telegram to Jaruzelski. He also protested the arrest of the rector of Warsaw University, Henryk Samsonowicz.136

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134 Telegram from Wishner to Spasowski, December 17, 1981, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO.

135 AJC Press Release, December 22, 1981, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO.

136 JCNS “Warsaw Ghetto Hero Pilloried in Poland,” December 29, 1981, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO.
These attacks did not last long, however. The Institute of Jewish Affairs, the WJC’s research arm, reported that one reason that it did not last long was because of fears for Poland’s image abroad. According to the report:

At the same time as using, or tolerating, antisemitic propaganda, it makes friendly noises towards the Jews. This policy is also evident in the context of Polish official pronouncements concerning the West: on the one hand, the military authorities endeavour to blame the West for Poland’s troubles; on the other hand, they keep the door open for possible Western assistance.137

While the author of the report viewed this as some kind of coherent government “policy,” it seems more accurate to say that this was a tactic of some factions within the government, not a government policy. The government, both in Poland and through the various embassies and consulates abroad, asserted that Poland would guarantee the Jews’ rights. Not to do so might jeopardize all that they had recently accomplished.

Yet, what was happening on the ground did not match up with what was being promised abroad. The TSKŻ, which had close relations with the government, was suspended for several weeks, along with other national minorities’ organizations.138 In some places, such as Wrocław, Katowice, Krakow, Bielsko-Biała, and Legnica, the clubs reopened. In other locations, such as Wałbrzych, Gliwice, and Żary, the clubs were closed and did not even reopen after other national minorities’ organizations were permitted to reconvene. No reason is given, so it may have been that activity in these places had already dwindled so much that there was really no need to reopen. Nevertheless, martial law appeared to bring a premature end to the clubs in these locations.


138 Other groups impacted included the Pen Club, the Journalists, and the Ukrainians. These were not religious groups however. Those were permitted to continue functioning (Report from Fox, January 4, 1982, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO). The Folks Sztyne reappeared January 23, 1981 (Issue nr. 44557, January 23, 1981, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO).
The *Folks Szytme* was also briefly suspended.\(^{139}\) When the paper reappeared in February 1982, it reassured its readers that the authorities were against any manifestations of antisemitism in Poland, and that the TSKŻ was committed to a “normalization” of Jewish life in Poland.\(^{140}\) The *Folks Sztyme* also reported that the government reaffirmed its commitment to supporting national minorities. The Polish Embassy then published the *Folks Szytme* reports to show that Poland was “normalizing” in the wake of martial law.\(^{141}\) This stood in stark contrast to the promise that the Ministry of Religious Affairs promised the Polish Jewish leaders, namely that:

> We are sincerely concerned that the activities of the Jewish organizations and institutions should take a normal course and proceed without impediments and that all of them should have the possibility of fully carrying out their plans and serving their members and sympathizers in the best way.\(^{142}\)

In contrast, the Congregation was permitted to function, perhaps because of its status as a non-government institution or because of the potential outcry had it, too, been closed.

On December 14, 1981, the day after martial law was declared, the Joint was officially back in Poland to sign an agreement with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Congregation, and the TSKŻ. According to the agreement beginning on January 1, 1982, the Joint would provide monetary and material aid to both the Congregation and the TSKŻ. Discussions would be held each year regarding exchange rates, and material aid would be exempt from import customs duty. Any aid that was going to be sent to individuals would not be considered as income. The JDC asserted its control over the use of money and laid out the condition that they

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\(^{140}\) Summary Survey of World Jewish Congress Action Since the 7th Plenary Assembly in Jerusalem, January 1981-December 1982, World Jewish Congress Collection C10/3313, CZA.

\(^{141}\) Karlikow Memo, February 8, 1982. American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 (Box 14, Poland), YIVO.

would delegate a representative who would control how the money was used. The Joint was officially back, ready to assist the Jews in Poland. Neither Goldman, nor any of other signatories, had any idea just how much things would change in Poland over the course of the next decade.

According to the Institute of Jewish Affairs report, the fact that the Joint was still able to meet with the Polish officials and sign the agreement, despite the national emergency that was taking place, demonstrates the Party’s commitment to appeasing world Jewry. The *Folks Sztyme* reported in March that the Ministry of Religious Affairs had reassured the Joint delegation that visited Poland in late February and early March 1982 that “Everything is being done to satisfy our foreign friends.”

The Party’s relationship with the UAHC also survived the imposition of martial law. Despite the significant changes in Poland since the agreement had been signed, the agreement proved fruitful. In July Schindler and Jaruzelski met, and other Polish officials, including the Foreign Minister, the current Minister of Religious Affairs (Adam Łopatka), the President of the Academy of Sciences, the Primate of Poland (Józef Glemp), were on board with the project. According to a fundraising letter, the project was viewed as being “key to East-West relations, and while it is a religious and academic endeavor, it has many ramifications.” One such ramification was a new relationship between Jews and Poles. The agreement had already

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145 Letter to Morris Cohen, September 13, 1982, Alexander M. Schindler Papers, Box 12, folder 5, AJA.

146 Letter to Donald Day, April 13, 1983, Alexander M. Schindler Papers, Box 12, folder 5, AJA.

147 Ibid.
achieved a great deal in just the short year and a half. For example, Marek Urbanski was named the first chair of Jewish History at Warsaw University, a post he would take after his post-doctoral fellowship at HUC-JIR in Cincinnati. A second student was to study bibliographic sciences at HUC-JIR. Plans were in the works for a conference on the theme “The Golden Age of Polish Jewry,” projected for some time in 1984, and there were also plans to reproduce a number of illuminated manuscripts. The traveling exhibit, “Fragments of Greatness Rediscovered,” had already had been to Harvard, the Knoedler Galleries in New York, the Jewish Museum, and over the course of the next year, it would go to Baltimore and Los Angeles. Furthermore, cantorial music from UAHC would be broadcasted over Polish radio for the High Holidays and funds were sent to Warsaw to begin a new major project, in cooperation with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, to help fund the restoration of cemeteries.\textsuperscript{148} In addition, Hiat and Philip Miller, a librarian at HUC in New York went to Poland through an IREX grant to review the manuscripts and begin planning for microfilming.\textsuperscript{149} Thus, the project was receiving substantial support, thereby highlighting its perceived importance even beyond Polish and Jewish circles.

On October 27, 1982, President Reagan decided to suspend Poland’s MFN status. The Polish authorities were, to be expected, angry with the decision. The Polish Press Agency (PAP) issued a statement the following day, claiming that:

\textsuperscript{148} Letter to Morris Cohen, September 13, 1982, Alexander M. Schindler Papers, Box 12, folder 5, AJA. The UAHC organized a pledge drive for its congregations to be involved in the UAHC Polish Cemeteries Project. The pledge said that each congregation would pledge to raise at least $2 per family by December 1982 to “aid in this great effort” (Pledge of Participation, UAHC Polish Cemeteries Project, Alexander M. Schindler Papers, Box 12, folder 5, AJA).

\textsuperscript{149} Letter from IREX (The International Research and Exchanges Board), May 21, 1982, Alexander M. Schindler Papers, Box 12, folder 5, AJA. The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) also contributed to the project (Minutes from 1/26-28/82 meeting, February 2, 1982, Alexander M. Schindler Papers, Box 12, folder 5, AJA).
The American decision cannot be assessed in any other way than a successive step in the policy of confrontation pursued by President Reagan who has been exploiting Polish affairs with a view to increasing international tension and limiting cooperation between East and West...Full responsibility for deterioration in Polish-American relations rests with the government of the United States.\textsuperscript{150}

Jewish issues had played a role in building better relations throughout the 1970s and, by the time martial law was declared, the international Jewish community had made substantial gains in their quest to preserve Polish Jewish heritage and support the dwindling but still present Jewish community. The list of demands issued by Jewish organizations had only been partially met by the Polish government, but the number of Jewish organizations building relations with the Polish authorities was increasing, and there seemed to be genuinely stronger connections between Polish and Jewish circles. Given that much of the government’s push to maintain such connections was in order to gain the legitimacy it so strongly desired amongst Western leaders, how would the shift in American policy towards Poland impact Polish-Jewish relations? Would they continue to develop, with the government continuing to view the Jewish leaders as a conduit through which they could improve their image abroad, or would they lose interest in the Jewish issues altogether?

Despite the rise in tensions between East and West, it appeared as though the gains achieved would remain in place. The Polish authorities continued to work with Jewish organizations and they would play a major role in sustaining Jewish life over the course of the 1980s, even during martial law. The Polish government continued to gain support from the Jewish leaders, and the upcoming 1983 fortieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising would provide the perfect opportunity to show the world just how committed the government was to sustaining Polish Jewishness.

\textsuperscript{150} PAP Statement of the Polish Government, October 28, 1982, Joseph Lichten Collection, Box 7 (folder 1), YIVO.
In December 1979 Minister of Religious Affairs, Kazimierz Kąkol drafted a lengthy memo entitled “A Note Concerning Jewish Issues,” in which he reflected upon the developments regarding Polish-Jewish issues since the mid-1970s. In the document, he indicated that there had been a growing interest in Jewish matters in the West in recent years, and that the interest had a generally negative character. It was, he wrote, occurring at the same time as an “intense” propaganda campaign directed against Poland and other socialist countries, and that the Jewish groups were using the “powerful means of mass communication at their disposal” to charge Poland with resorting to “traditional antisemitism,” while also trying to blame Poland for Jewish deaths during the Nazi period. Kąkol wrote that the problem “should be treated as important from a political, economic, and moral standpoint.”\(^1\) The Jewish organizations had a tremendous amount of influence in the political and economic spheres, especially in the United States, and it was creating “an unfavorable climate on the international stage, causing negative consequences for the political and economic interests of our country.”\(^2\)

Kąkol proceeded to write that in the second half of the 1970s, the Polish government introduced a number of successful initiatives to tackle the anti-Polish propaganda. He summarized the discussions that the government had had recently with Isaac Lewin, Armand Kaplan, and Alexander Schindler, for example, and stated that the increased contacts with foreign Jewish organizations had partially halted the anti-Polish campaign, although “one should

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\(^1\) “Notatka dotycząca problematyki żydowskiej.” December 1979, Sygn. 26/85 w.1/0-22-1-80, Archiwum Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych (hereafter AMSZ).

\(^2\) Ibid.
note that almost any constructive statement is countered by “violent voices of opponents.”\textsuperscript{3} Thus, the Polish authorities would need to do more, despite the modest gains that they had made with certain influential Jewish leaders in recent years. There were indications that increased contact helped to change opinions regarding Poland, and according to Kąkol, 1979 closed, “so to speak, first stage of mutual Polish Jewish contact which began in the middle of the decade.”\textsuperscript{4}

Moving forward, Kąkol listed a number of issues that he believed the authorities should pay more attention to, including the push from Jewish circles for Poland to have more contact with Israel and the rise of Polish Jewish dialogue in the United States, which often was centered around mutual anti-Communist sentiment. But he also indicated that there was a strong need for more coordination amongst the various ministries regarding Jewish issues. The next stage in developing relations with Jewish organizations abroad would require more than general declarations. Sure, he wrote, financial limitations sometimes prevented them from implementing everything they wished to implement, but there were also certain government representatives whose attitude and lack of desire to act impeded any significant progress. He pointed out that this was precisely the problem regarding the Nożyk Synagogue and the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw, where government promised repairs and renovation had been dragging on for years. Given that this was a matter of high importance for the diaspora Jewish community, the authorities would need to find a way to overcome their differences and attitudes and focus on concrete action.\textsuperscript{5}

The fortieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising offered the government a chance to demonstrate their commitment to this second phase through concrete action. While the

\textsuperscript{3} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.
government had long commemorated the Ghetto Uprising anniversaries, the fortieth anniversary in April 1983 enabled the government to showcase its recent commitment to Jewish issues, precisely at the moment when the world viewed the Polish government in a negative light. The government’s commitment was reflected in the elaborate program, which included a series of academic meetings, the opening of a Judaica exhibit at the National Museum, the rededication of the recently renovated Nożyk Synagogue, visits to Jewish sites of interest and martyrdom for the Jewish delegates, and the annual ceremony and wreath laying at the Ghetto Heroes Monument. This was more than a simple commemoration; it was to be a spectacle that, if carried out correctly, could help the government achieve its major goal of improving Polish-Jewish relations.

As I argued in the previous chapters, improving relations with world Jewry was not the end goal. It was the means to an end. The real focus was on using the Jews’ power and influence, however perceived, in order to achieve legitimacy and, ultimately, economic assistance. By 1983, the situation in Poland was dire. Before General Wojciech Jaruzelski declared martial law in Poland in December 1981, the foreign debt amounted to $27 billion, a sum greater than the USSR’s foreign debt. While Jaruzelski’s government attempted to introduce economic reforms, these reforms were unable to mitigate the damage previously done. Norman Davies writes of the period, “A full description of Poland’s economic deformities would require a small

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6 For more on the politicization of the Warsaw Ghetto Commemorations in Poland during the Communist period, see Renata Kobylarz, *Walka o pamięć: Polityczne aspekty obchodów rocznicy powstania w getcie warszawskim 1944-1989* (Warsaw, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2009). Kobylarz’s section on the 1983 commemoration offers an excellent detailed description of the events, though her sources are almost entirely limited to Party and Security Services’ documents.

7 Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland’s Present*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 368. This was the figure for 1980.
encyclopaedia.”

The situation had reached a crisis point before the imposition of martial law, and there was no improvement in sight.

According to Davies:

As a result of the December Coup, Poland’s standing on the international scene lost all semblance of respectability. The military regime was widely seen as a surrogate of the Soviet Union, and was treated as such. The USA pointedly introduced economic sanctions against the USSR as well as against Poland, demanding that the State of War be rescinded, that the internees be released, and that genuine dialogue be initiated.

Poland was isolated from the West and struggling economically; the situation had escalated so that the government, as well as the citizens, felt a sense of increasing desperation after martial law was declared in December 1981.

The Jews offered, or at least appeared to offer, a possible avenue through which the Polish government could regain its good graces with Western governments if only they could convince the Jews, through the Warsaw Ghetto commemoration, that they were not as bad as they were believed to be. Internal Party documents reveal the ultimate goal: “It is expected that the right propaganda exploiting these celebrations can create a favorable atmosphere for breaking the Polish blockade by the West.”

This propaganda element was taken seriously with press packets created specifically for the event. Special attention was paid to those Polish diplomatic

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9 Davies, God’s Playground, 494.

10 According to an internal Party document from the Department of Non-Catholic Confessions, humanitarian and political concerns dictated that this anniversary should be given high priority. Jewish organizations were aware that the events were politically motivated as well. While the true motivations were domestically driven, the Party stressed that given the current international tensions, this would be an opportunity to warn mankind about the dangers of war. “Notatka: dotycząca programu uroczystości związanych z obchodami 40-jej rocznicy powstania w Getcie Warszawskim,” undated, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/524, AAN.
missions in countries with large concentrations of Jews. If the expected 5,000 visitors attended the commemoration, the government would not only potentially benefit from an immediate influx of cash from the tourists, but they would also have amongst that crowd some people who might have the necessary connections to help Poland with its larger economic crisis. While 5,000 people was quite a large audience, the government had reason to believe that they could attract that many people.

The Party recognized its chance, on the world stage, to:

Give due homage to the Jews – victims of Nazi genocide and heroes of the armed struggle, to popularize the comradeship and cooperation of Jewish and Polish resistance. It should reveal the historical truth about the harmonious coexistence of Poles and Jews over centuries, respect for their composition in the 1000-year old history and culture of Poland, as well as the ongoing attention of Poles and the Polish state to preserve the surviving relics of Jewish culture and the admirable protection of cultural and religious Jewish life in Poland.

Though politically motivated, the government’s decision to organize an elaborate commemoration was influenced by talks with American Jewish leaders from abroad. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising constituted one of the most powerful events in Jewish collective memory, offering an alternative to the “like sheep to the slaughter” narrative of the Holocaust. The Party leaders understood that allowing Jews from abroad into Poland for the commemoration would be a highly symbolic and meaningful gesture to world Jewish leaders, and therefore, could be mutually beneficial for both the Polish government and for world Jewish leaders. It seemed like a win-win situation for both sides.

11 “Sprawy Organizacyjne,” undated, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/524, AAN

12 In addition to prominent Jewish leaders, the government also hoped to invite prominent Americans such as Senator Edward Kennedy and Coretta Scott King (Kobylarz, Walka, 333).

13 „Notatka: dotycząca programu uroczystości związanych z obchodami 40-tej rocznicy powstania w Getcie Warszawskim,” undated, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/524, AAN.
In Chapter 6 I explore the plans leading up to the commemoration, the commemoration itself, and the aftermath of the commemoration. The commemoration offered a great example of the hopes that the Polish authorities placed on international Jewry, believing that if only they could impress the world Jewish leaders by demonstrating a real commitment to improving Polish-Jewish relations, the Jewish leaders would then vouch for the Polish authorities with their governments. At the very least, the Polish authorities believed that better relations with the Jews would curb the anti-Polish campaign in the West, perhaps best seen in the widespread use of Polish jokes. The commemoration also offers a great example of how complicated world Jewish opinions of Poland were, particularly after December 1981 when martial law was declared. Further complicating matters was the end of détente. While Ronald Reagan’s administration took a hardline stance against the Eastern bloc at the time, Jewish leaders did not necessarily follow the government’s lead when it came to relations with the East. Jewish connections to Poland remained strong, and many were excited to have the opportunity to travel to the country.

Yet, the timing was far from perfect. Martial law was an attack on all of Polish society, not just the Jews, and Jewish leaders had to determine whether going was a sign of support for the regime, or whether not going would be an appropriate response, given the widespread humanitarian concerns in the country. Thus, the very decision to attend the commemoration was a difficult one to make, and Jewish groups were split over whether to go. The debates within Jewish circles continued even after they arrived, as the Poles succeeded in organizing an elaborate commemoration, but were unable to overcome the country’s serious internal issues. The commemoration turned into a battle between the authorities and the Polish opposition when the latter organized a counter-commemoration to claim that they were the rightful heirs of the Ghetto Fighter’s legacy. Furthermore, Poland demonstrated its inability to act independently
when the PLO, which was part of a strong Arab lobby in Poland at the time, insisted on laying a wreath at the commemoration, despite the public Jewish outcry preceding the commemoration. Poland’s desires and Poland’s political reality conflicted at the very moment when the doors to the country had been held wide open for the West to see through. While it is impossible to predict what the commemoration might have accomplished had the government been willing and able to compromise, the government’s inability to do so, particularly at the moment when Poland had shone a spotlight on itself with the intention of improving its image abroad, impeded its ability to achieve their desired goals.

Preparing the Event

In order to organize a commemoration as grand as the one the government envisioned, planning began a year in advance. A number of concerns arose, such as who would be responsible for the events, who would attend, etc. The government placed the responsibility for organizing the commemoration on the veteran’s organization, Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację (ZBoWiD), not on one of the Jewish organizations in Poland, thus reminding the Jewish community that this was a Polish government sponsored event, not a Jewish one. Until right before the event, one of the leaders of the ZBoWiD was Mieczysław Moczar, the mastermind of the anti-Zionist campaign. While ZBoWiD had long been involved in the Warsaw Ghetto commemorations, Moczar’s connection to the organization was problematic from the Jewish perspective, and he had to be replaced.  

While the Jewish organizations would be involved, they would be accompanied by a number of Polish organizations and state institutions including the League of Freedom Fighters,

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the Office for Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of the Interior, the Committee of Polish Radio and Television, the “Orbis” travel agency, local governments of Łódź, Warsaw, and Białystok, and the director of the Auschwitz museum. Furthermore, a number of Polish Communist Party departments, including the departments of ideology, information, press, foreign affairs, and culture, were to participate. Kąkol’s call for more coordination and cooperation had been heard and heeded. Noticeably absent, however, were Jewish representatives. Although there were representatives from the major Jewish organizations, including the Jewish Historical Institute, the Jewish Theater, TSKŻ, and the religious congregation, the Party was fully in control of the committee. Szymon Szurmiej, the director of the Jewish theater and board member of TSKŻ, was the leading Jewish figure on the committee, and he spoke at press conferences on behalf of the Jewish community.

Before planning could really begin, a number of issues had to be resolved. In an undated document, the government listed a number of issues requiring political decisions, and the first was the establishment of a committee for the celebrations. Deciding who should serve on the committee was a difficult decision, although it is unclear how the decisions were made or even who was making them. A list drawn up sometime in 1982 shows forty-two potential committee members, including Warsaw Ghetto Uprising hero, Marek Edelman, cultural figures, veteran representatives, politicians, and Jewish community leaders. Edelman, a vocal opponent of the regime refused to participate, reportedly telling the person who asked him to be on the committee...

15 “Sprawy Organizacyjne,” undated, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/524, AAN.

16 “Projekt składu osobowego komitetu obchodów 40-tej rocznicy powstania w Getcie Warszawskim,” undated, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/524, AAN.
committee, “Don’t use me to cover your shame.” Edelman would have played an important role in legitimizing the event, not only as a ghetto hero, but also as a Polish Jew. Out of the forty-two potential committee members on the list, only four represented Polish-Jewish institutions. The committee makeup made it painfully clear that although this was the ghetto commemoration, the event would not be particularly Jewish (i.e., there would not be much religious liturgy except, perhaps in the synagogue).

In addition to the committee, another major political decision to be made was how to budget for the ceremony and, more importantly, how to cover those costs. How much should come from the Polish-Jewish institutions? How much from the government? How much from revenue from foreign participants? That the government did not believe that it should cover the costs, suggests that the government was less interested in the actual commemoration, and was more focused on the potential benefits of the commemoration. This appeared to be a matter of utility, and less a matter of national remembrance. Furthermore, aside from documents which show how much the guests were charged for attending various events and ceremonies, few addressed where the money ultimately came from.

A third issue was the granting of veteran’s rights to the former Jewish ghetto and resistance fighters. This is a particularly fascinating example of how engrained the concept of separate Jewish and Polish wartime experiences had become in Poland. That a decision had to be made to grant these rights, particularly with such an active veteran’s association, ZBoWiD, in

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18 “Projekt składu osobowego komitetu obchodów 40-tej rocznicy powstania w Getcie Warszawskim,” undated, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/524, AAN.

19 “Sprawy Organizacyjne,” undated, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/524, AAN.
Poland means that since 1943, those who fought in the Ghetto Uprising and resistance were not viewed as Polish heroes. Similarly, a fourth political decision was the approval of the Committee’s proposals regarding state awards for Jewish activists and veterans from Poland and abroad. The fact that the government recognized that it had to discuss the inclusion of the Jewish wartime experience, one could ask whether this was just another insincere attempt to gain Jewish support.20

The final major political question was the policy regarding the granting of visas to individuals and groups who would want to participate in the celebrations. The government expected that about 5,000 people would be interested in coming to Poland from capitalist countries, including Israel.21 The opening of Poland’s doors was an opportunity many did not want to miss. For example, Isak Arbus, a Holocaust survivor from Poland, wrote in the October 1983 Jewish Currents, that having been denied visas on two previous occasions, he used the commemoration as an opportunity to finally visit the place of his birth.22 For many, the commemoration opened Poland’s gates, making Poland accessible for the first time in decades. Thus, this was just as important an issue for those hoping to visit Poland as it was for the Polish government.

Once a committee was in place, planning could begin. In an effort to truly impress the leaders of world Jewish organizations, the Polish government, together with leaders of the Polish Jewish community, planned a series of events, starting on April 15 and lasting until April 23. In a culture where commemorations and memorials were elaborately orchestrated events, this would

20 “Sprawy Organizacyjne,” undated, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/524, AAN.
21 Ibid.
not be an exception, particularly given how determined the government was to impress the visitors. Highlights of the jam-packed schedule included the rededication of the newly renovated Nożyk synagogue and multiple performances at the State Jewish theater. A tentative list of lectures included talks by historians from the National Academy of Sciences and the Jewish Historical Institute, which cosponsored a symposium, as well as talks by prominent foreign scholars such as Yitzchak Arad, Israel Guttman, and Jan Karski. Thus there was wide appeal for both foreign visitors as well as local participants.

The planning committee also addressed additional concerns. For example, they were so determined that influential members of Jewish communities abroad would be comfortable in Poland that in addition to helping with the usual logistics of traveling to Poland, the state-sponsored Orbis travel agency ensured that there would be kosher food available in Krakow and Warsaw. In addition to accommodating these needs, arrangements were also made for special security at Jewish places of interest, including Treblinka, Jewish cemeteries, ghetto areas, etc. This was particularly important as reports of a possible terrorist attack spread before the commemoration. Thus, it seems as though the government was determined to ensure that the commemoration was well-attended.

23 Program for Warsaw Ghetto Commemoration,” undated, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 Box 14, “Poland,” YIVO.

24 “W programie sesji przewidujemy następujące referaty i komunikaty,” undated, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/524, AAN. Arad and Guttman, both Holocaust survivors who moved to Israel, are prominent historians of the Holocaust. Karski was a member of the Polish resistance and is best known for his wartime reports to the Polish government-in-exile and allies. Karski is considered to be a national hero and was recently awarded the American government’s Presidential Medal of Freedom.

25 “Zagadnienia wymagające rozwiązania,” undated, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/524, AAN.

26 “Sprawy Organizacyjne,” undated, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/524, AAN.
Recognizing the importance of public relations in obtaining the long-sought after support of American Jewish leaders, the Party emphasized the global aspect of the commemoration while minimizing the financial benefits Poland hoped to gain. At an Interpress press conference Włodzimierz Sokorski, the ZBoWiD chair, said that although the anniversary was commemorated each year, it should be stressed that this year was a big anniversary. Of particular importance, he argued, was the fact that “the international situation” encouraged a more global commemoration given the revival of fascism, anti-Semitism, and terrorism in the world. These threats, he suggested, could only be fought together. Thus, for Sokorski, the most important aspect of the commemoration was the international Jewish participation, not only through their attendance, but also through joint efforts to eliminate fascism, anti-Semitism, and terrorism.\footnote{Radio Warszawa I Broadcast, February 18, 1983, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) Collection, Box 24, Folder 1, Open Society Archive (hereafter OSA).}

The commemoration, then, was politicized on multiple levels. Attending the commemoration would be taking a public stance against these major world problems.

The anticipation within Poland was palpable. The commemoration offered the perfect opportunity to highlight the Party’s goodwill towards the local and international Jewish communities. March 9th’s\textit{ Zycie Warszawy} included an article with the Secretary General of TSKŻ about the organization in general, as well as about the commemoration.\footnote{“Przed 40 rocznicą powstania w getcie warszawskim Rozmowa PAP z sekretarzem generalnym Towarzystwa Społeczno-Kulturalnego Żydów w Polsce - Adamem Kwaterko,” March 9, 1983, RFE/RL Collection Box 24, Folder 1, OSA.} The commemoration made additional headlines in numerous Polish periodicals, both legal and underground. The two most prominent Catholic monthlies,\textit{ Znak} and\textit{ Więź}, together with the catholic weekly,\textit{ Tygodnik Powszechny}, devoted substantial space to discussions of Jewish
issues. Based on the preparations, it appeared as though the commemoration would be a tremendous success.

**To Go or not to Go: American Jewish Leaders Debate**

American and world Jewish leaders recognized the opportunity provided by the reopening of the synagogue and the fortieth anniversary commemoration. Poland’s doors were being held, essentially, wide open for them for the first time in recent history. Yet, American Jewish leaders also understood that by accepting the invitation, it might appear as though they were legitimizing Jaruzelski’s government. For some, the invitation was enticing, while for others, including the Jewish Labor Committee, which led the opposition to going within the U.S., Poland’s politics tainted the offer and they refused to attend. At least initially, however, the debate over whether or not to go did not appear to be too heated.

The decision to participate was particularly significant for organizations such as the AJC, which had been working in the region, yet had limited access to the country due to visa restrictions. The opening of the Polish border provided previously unattainable access to Poland, which, given the significance of Poland in Jewish history, was a tremendous opportunity, and one that in 1983 could have been viewed as a once in a lifetime chance.29 According to a memo written almost a year before the events, the AJC’s Abraham Karlikow wrote to Bertram Gold in New York “I would suggest that it is time, in any event, that we had an AJC mission to Eastern European countries and that we ought to plan one to be there for this commemoration, regardless of whether the synagogue is finished or not.”30 Missions, which Jewish organizations viewed as

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29 Poland was home to the largest Jewish population in the world before World War II. With a rich history spanning over a thousand years, the Jewish presence in Poland is highly significant. Furthermore, about 80% of American Jews can trace some of their family roots to the lands that at one time were Polish. Thus there is a strong personal connection, which can be seen through the increasing popularity of Jewish heritage travel to Poland.

30 Karlikow to Gold, June 16, 1982, American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.7.41 Box 14 “Poland,” YIVO. Missions are trips to foreign countries, often times including a few days in Israel, for supporters of American Jewish
ways to introduce their donors to their work in the field are a crucial component of Jewish organization fundraising efforts. Thus, the AJC’s decision to plan a mission trip to coincide with the commemoration demonstrated a stronger commitment on the part of the AJC’s leadership to sustaining Jewishness in Poland, either in terms of sustaining Jewish life or in terms of maintaining Jewish heritage in the region. The ghetto commemoration provided the perfect opportunity for the AJC to bring its supporters to Eastern Europe, and Poland specifically.

The UAHC, which had recently signed a monumental agreement with the Polish government regarding access to archival materials, was also planning to participate in the commemoration. A UAHC memorandum from late November 1982 discussed, among a number of other items on the committee’s agenda, the upcoming commemoration. According to the memo, the UAHC delegation would include representatives from England, France, Holland, Belgium, and Israel. Alexander Schindler, the head of the UAHC delegation, according to the memo, was scheduled to speak at the major observance at the Opera House. The delegation wished to also arrange meetings with the U.S. Ambassador in Warsaw and with Adam Łopatka, the Minister of Religious Affairs, as well as some other ministers. Finally, the memo stated that “the committee/board to be formed for the delegation should include orthodox member(s) and someone from the college.”

Given the strong connections that the UAHC had built with the Polish government, the fact that they intended to use the trip as a chance to meet with their contacts is to be expected. It is odd, however, that they intended to include “orthodox members,”

organizations. These trips introduce the participants to the work that the organization is doing in that location with the hopes that upon their return to the U.S., they will send in a donation.

31 “Memorandum,” Minutes of 11/17/82 meeting (dated 11/29/82), Alexander M. Schindler Papers, Box 12, folder 12/5, AJA.
for this was an organization that represented Reform and Progressive Jewry, not Orthodox Jewry. There was no explanation given, though perhaps there were no Orthodox groups going, and they wished to be inclusive.

By February 1983, however, confusion arose over the events. A little less than two months before the event, world Jewish leaders were almost completely uninformed as to the plans for the commemoration. Nobody had received invitations or drafts of programs. Regarding the confusion, AJC employee Nives Fox wrote to the AJC Foreign Affairs Department, “Is it because any gathering of this size is always complex? Or that anything Jewish always becomes exceedingly involved/ or, more specifically, the present Polish government situation? Probably all three.”32 In fact, according to the memo, the Polish government had drafted a program six months before, although things had changed and foreign groups had not seen that program. Yet, Fox believed that there would be a set program by the end of the month. One thing was clear, however. The renovated Nożyk synagogue, after years of repair and much anticipation, would open the week of the commemoration. According to the memo “It is fixed, painted, cleaned, and sparkling; and new Torah covers, tallises, and other needed prayer items are being ordered by the JDC from Israel so that they will be ready and in place for the grand opening.”33 While the Polish Jews, with the exception of Szurmiej, really seemed to take a back seat when it came to planning, the Joint played a major role in organizing the synagogue rededication since it required some type of religious knowledge as well as sensitivity. For example, when ordering the new parochet, or curtain for the Torah ark from Jerusalem, a Joint official vetoed the original design

32 Memo to Foreign Affairs Department from Fox re: Warsaw Ghetto Commemoration, February 3, 1983, American Jewish Committee Collection 347.7.41 Box 14, “Poland,” YIVO.

33 Ibid.
because it included flames, writing that it would be “anti-climactic” in Poland. Instead, he said that the design should be simple and somber with just a short inscription.\textsuperscript{34}

The Congregation informed the Joint that the dedication was scheduled for April 15 at 10:30 am with Rabbi Lewin officiating the dedication.\textsuperscript{35} Although it was considered a mitzvah to dedicate the synagogue, Ralph Goldman, the Joint Chief Executive, checked with religious authorities to find out whether there were any specific customs or laws concerning the dedication, since there was no authority to ask in Poland. When Goldman was informed that no, in fact, there were no specific prayers or customs, the dedication became speech heavy, with two hours of speeches from local and international Jewish representatives, as well as government officials, including Minister of Religious Affairs, Adam Łopatka.\textsuperscript{36} Either before or after the speeches, they would affix the mezuzot on the doors.\textsuperscript{37} The government seemed to understand that this was one area of the commemoration that they could not orchestrate, given the religious nature.

The synagogue had been officially closed for repairs for years, as Kąkol wrote in his memo. Foreign Jews had been waiting years for the government’s promise to renovate and reopen the synagogue, and it was often raised in meetings between Polish and Jewish representatives. So the decision to open it at this moment, during the fortieth anniversary commemoration, was symbolic as well as strategic.\textsuperscript{38} This was the first time since at least 1968

\textsuperscript{34} Kohane to Goldman, January 27, 1983, JDC NY “Poland Synagogues, 1977-1998, JDCA.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{36} Goldman to Kohane, January 4, 1983, “Poland Synagogues, 1977-1998,” JDCA.

\textsuperscript{37} Kohane to Goldman, January 27, 1983, JDC NY “Poland Synagogues, 1977-1998, JDCA. A mezuzah, or mezuzot (plural), are pieces of parchment with verses from Deuteronomy that Jews put into a case and affix to their doorposts.

\textsuperscript{38} Meng writes, “When the issue of Warsaw’s synagogue crossed his desk, Jaruzelski probably lunged for a pen to sign it. He ordered the building’s reconstruction because its ‘devastated condition’ was souring ‘relations with
that foreign Jews would gather in significant numbers in the Polish capital. Had the city’s only remaining synagogue not been accessible, undoubtedly the Polish government would have heard complaints. By going a step further and revealing the synagogue in its former glory, the government could not only avoid cries of neglect or accusations of anti-Semitism, but it would receive praises instead.39

The same held true for the Jewish pavilion at Auschwitz, which under normal circumstances was closed. As communal leaders all mentioned wanting to visit the pavilion, Fox wrote that:

One can be fairly certain therefore that it will be open and a set of polyglot guides provided throughout…While there have been no recent complaints about the Jewish pavilion being closed, it could be assumed that unless warned in advance about the arrival of a group or an important individual, this could well be the case most of the time.40

The commemoration was a literal opening up of Poland to broader segments of world Jewry.

More important than the logistics, however, was the question of who was invited. According to Fox’s memo: “A list of important Jewish organizations throughout the world is being drawn up, and invitations will be sent out, probably in March. According to the more informed, this will give enough advance notice and prevent ‘forgetting.’”41 Of course, the

39 Praise at least for the most part. While Jews from abroad celebrated the long-awaited renovation, at least one member of the Warsaw Jewish community was concerned that “it will be a museum, I’m afraid, since there is no one young to keep it going.” This concern was voiced not by an elderly community member, interestingly enough, but rather by a sixteen-year-old, who, according to the article in which he is quoted, is one of a handful of young Jews who attends services frequently. (Victoria Pope, “Jews Shun Uprising Commemoration” April 6, 1983, Wall Street Journal, http://search.proquest.com/docview/134878007?accountid=10920).

40 Memo to Foreign Affairs Department from Fox re: Warsaw Ghetto Commemoration, February 3, 1983, American Jewish Committee Collection 347.7.41 Box 14, “Poland,” YIVO.

41 Ibid.
'forgetting’ was likely not literally forgetting, but it suggests that the government wanted to prevent Jews from backing out at the last minute. The success of the commemoration depended on their presence.

A file from 1982 in the Party records reveals that a list, created by the commemoration committee, had already been drawn up. This list included the World Jewish Congress, the World Federation of Polish Jews, B’nai B’rith, the Council of Presidents of Jewish Organizations in the U.S., “prominent representatives of the diaspora,” and others. With respect to officials operating in Israel, the government was unwilling to make any decisions without taking into account the overall political situation in the region.42 Discussions on whether or not to attend did not always wait until invitations were received. French organizations, for example, began planning their trips, as was the case of the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France, well ahead of the invitation mailing. Others, including the group Sons and Daughters of Deportees negotiated with the Polish Embassy in France to obtain permission for a private ceremony at the Memorial to the Ghetto Fighters and private visits to Auschwitz and Majdanek before committing. The British Board of Deputies also laid out conditions for their participation. They demanded that there be a religious commemoration and a shorter itinerary. The Polish Ambassador in Great Britain replied that the intention from the beginning had always been a religious commemoration. They also provided four alternative itineraries for groups traveling from abroad.43

42 “Notatka: dotycząca programu uroczystości związanych z obchodami 40-tej rocznicy powstania w Getcie Warszawskim,” undated, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/524, AAN. The government had a large Arab lobby to answer to, and given that the commemoration occurred relatively soon after the June 1982 Lebanon War.

43 Memo to Foreign Affairs Department from Fox re: Warsaw Ghetto Commemoration, February 3, 1983, American Jewish Committee Collection 347.7.41 Box 14, “Poland,” YIVO.
On top of the lack of invitations, there was another reason to question whether attending the commemoration was appropriate or not. On February 2, Marek Edelman, the only remaining survivor who fought in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, wrote an open letter rejecting the government’s invitation to be on the planning committee.\footnote{Sprawy Organizacyjne, undated, Urząd do Spraw Wyznań 131/524, AAN. Edelman’s name appears on a list of projected members for the committee. Though undated, the document is in a file dated 1982.} He wrote:

Forty years ago we fought not only for our lives. We fought for life in dignity and freedom. To celebrate our anniversary here where social life is dominated throughout by humiliation and coercion would be to deny our fight. It would mean participating in something contrary to its ideals. It would be an act of cynicism and contempt. I shall not participate in such arrangements or accept the participation of others who do so, regardless of where they come from or whom they represent. Far from these manipulated celebrations, in the silence of the graves and in people’s hearts, there shall live the true memory of the victims and the heroes, the memory of the eternal human striving for freedom and truth.\footnote{Hanna Krall, Shielding the Flame: An Intimate Conversation with Dr. Marek Edelman, the Last Surviving Leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, trans. Joanna Stasinska and Lawrence Weschler (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 122.}

The message was loud and clear. Edelman did not approve of anyone participating and his reference to outside, and presumably Jewish, organizations was far from subtle. By creating a clear dichotomy between those being honored – the heroes of the ghetto – and those who are attempting to do the honoring – a government he claimed was suppressing the very values those heroes fought for, Edelman attempted to delegitimize the Polish government’s planned commemoration.

In the wake of Edelman’s outcry, Jewish leaders were forced to rethink their decision to go. Here was a man, hailed by Jews worldwide for his bravery. If he was not going to attend a commemoration honoring the uprising that he participated in, how could foreign Jewish organizations justify their participation? One way to get around the politicized nature was to justify participation as the British Board of Deputies did. According to the Fox memo, “The
Board’s affirmative decision was predicated on the principle of ‘going for a Jewish event and not to support the Polish government’ as well as because of the position taken by Israel, from where a rather large participation is expected.”

Even two months before the commemoration, perhaps because the Polish government still had not sent invitations, but more likely because of the complicated decision involved in attending, the situation was for the AJC, according to Fox, one of “wait and see.”

Indeed, there was a strong need to “claim” the event as a Jewish event, and many believed that there had to be a Jewish presence there regardless of the motives behind the commemoration. An unnamed Israeli delegate was quoted in the *International Herald Tribune* as saying:

> We respect Dr. Edelman's decision. But we feel that future generations would not understand our not being present in Warsaw. We are not fooling ourselves about the real motives behind the Polish authorities' sudden shift in attitude toward Jews. But that doesn't disturb us. It was in Poland, in 1968, that Europe saw its last anti-Semitic purge, and the military coup in 1981 was carried out to the rhythm of anti-Semitic slogans. And even now Jews have been deprived of any right to an ethnic or religious life in Poland. We know that, and we also know that it would be absurd for us not to take advantage of any opportunity to show that we still exist. We do not intend to turn our presence at the commemoration into a political event. But the voice of the Jews must be heard.

While some of the delegate’s statements were inaccurate, as, for example, his or her claim that Jews in Poland were “deprived” of ethnic or religious life, the overall message was that there had to be a Jewish presence. Just as Anselm Reiss, the WFPJ president, had argued years before that Jewish organizations had to negotiate with the Polish authorities regarding Jewish issues, lest

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46 Memo to Foreign Affairs Department from Fox re: Warsaw Ghetto Commemoration, February 3, 1983, American Jewish Committee Collection 347.7.41 Box 14, “Poland,” YIVO.

47 Ibid.

48 “The Warsaw Uprising, 40 Years Later,” April 19, 1983, OSA RFE/RL Box 24, folder 1, OSA.
history judge them for not speaking up, the delegate did not want to be judged for letting politics get in the way of doing what he believed was necessary.\textsuperscript{49}

Despite Edelman’s powerful letter, his plea to convince diaspora Jewry not to participate was not entirely successful. Abraham S. Karlikow wrote in an AJC memo to George Szabad, Dr. Donald Feldstein, and Irving Levine:

After some initial hesitation, it is obvious that Jewish groups receiving invitations to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, will, in the overwhelming majority, go. The turning point was probably the decision of the Israeli authorities to send a high-ranking representative. For many Jewish groups, it was the request of the Polish Jewish leadership that other groups participate that provided the impulse for the decision.\textsuperscript{50}

Thus it is clear that the Israeli government’s participation, even at a time when there were no formal diplomatic relations between Israel and Poland, had a significant impact upon the Jewish leadership worldwide. Furthermore, the Polish Jewish leadership’s request also had a tremendous impact. Thus, world Jewish leaders were far more influenced by their co-religionists, Marek Edelman aside, than they were by the Polish government’s attempts to lure them into coming.

News of the debates over whether or not to go to Poland amongst diaspora Jewry spread to Poland. According to an article in the Party newspaper, \textit{Trybuna Ludu}, on February 15, Szurmiej went on the Polish television show, “Fakty, Wydarzenia, Opinie,” to discuss the WJC resolution signed at the plenary session he attended. While the WJC would not send the WJC President in order to avoid politicizing the event any more than it already was, there would be an

\textsuperscript{49} Reiss justified his demands in a letter to Alexander Schindler in which he wrote, “we did not begin this campaign with the view that there are good chances we should receive positive replies to all our demands. Of course, that is our aim. However, we did it primarily because we feel it as a historic, national obligation. It cannot be that history should one day claim that we did not even demand this” (Letter from Anslem Reiss (World Federation of Polish Jews) to Schindler, March 16, 1976, Alexander M. Schindler Papers, Box 22, folder 9, AJA).

\textsuperscript{50} “Invitation to the 40th Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising,” February 18, 1983, American Jewish Committee Collection 347.7.41 Box 14 “Poland,” YIVO.
official delegation, despite reports that there would be no delegation.\textsuperscript{51} Szurmiej announced that all Jewish organizations would have a place in the commemoration. Furthermore, he discounted the information given by Voice of America which stated that the largest Jewish labor organization, which he did not mention by name, along with other Jewish organizations, would boycott the anniversary. He was obviously trying to save face. Regarding the WJC resolution, Szurmiej asked rhetorically on the show, “how can they boycott this anniversary, not come here, where there are tombs of six million people? And really, how can you call for a boycott? This is not only dangerous, but also unethical. It is insulting to those who were murdered here.”\textsuperscript{52}

Szurmiej’s statement would likely not have reached leaders of foreign Jewish organizations, thus it seems that his statement was made more in defense of the Polish Jewish community and to declare that he thought that it was ridiculous that Jews would chose not to attend simply to make a political statement. This commemoration should be about the ghetto heroes, not about politics.

Deciding to attend did not mean that Jewish leaders ignored the question of human rights in Poland; yet, as Karlikow noted in a memo, approaching the government about it as a condition for participation in the commemoration seemed to be a lost cause. He wrote:

\begin{quote}
Can one, under these conditions, reasonably hope to get the Poles to pay any attention to any more general human rights concerns, as part of the ‘price’ for attendance. It seems fairly obvious that the answer is no since attendance is already assured. I am informed, moreover, that Jews who are active in the Solidarity movement in Poland itself would not welcome any connection between the two
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{51} A Jewish Telegraphic Agency article from April 7, 1983 reports that if the WJC President, Edgar Bronfman, attended the commemoration, the rules of protocol would require that he meet with his counterpart or a representative of Poland. Thus, the organization decided that by Bronfman not attending, the emphasis on the commemoration would be placed on it being a “Jewish event,” not a “political event” (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, “WJC Denies Report that it Decided not to Attend Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Commemoration in Poland” April 7, 1983, \url{http://www.jta.org/1983/04/07/archive/wjc-denies-report-that-it-decided-not-to-attend-warsaw-ghetto-uprising-commemoration-in-poland}.

\textsuperscript{52} “Przed 40 rocznica powstania w Getcie Warszawskim Wypowiedź S. Szurmieja w TVP,” February 16, 1983, \textit{Trybuna Ludu}, RFE/RL Box 24, folder 1, OSA.
subjects. I believe it therefore would be futile to bring it into any discussion as part of AJC’s attendance.\textsuperscript{53}

Recognizing that by accepting the invitation without having laid out each of the requests, Jewish leaders had lost some bargaining power. Thus, Karlikow noted that any attempts to push the Polish government toward concession would fail. Furthermore, his contacts in Poland warned him that raising humanitarian issues would only make matters worse. Nevertheless, he did not give up hope that Jewish pressure could help steer the Polish government down a new course. He ended his letter with the assurance that appealing to the government to protect general human rights could be reassessed on the ground in Poland, once they have a better feel for the circumstances.\textsuperscript{54} For the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Poland’s recent human rights record was enough to deter them from going. Abraham Foxman, at the time the associate national director of the ADL, said that:

\begin{quote}
One cannot ignore the general atmosphere in Poland, where those who advocate human rights are subjected to harassment and intimidation...Repression is as evident now as when it was still in effect. It is regrettable that, given this reality, well-meaning Jews have agreed to take part in the Polish commemoration.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

For Foxman, humanitarian concerns far outweighed any of the reasons others had for going.

Yet, the decision was complicated in another way, for the government’s investment in the commemoration might mean retaliation against the local Jewish community should world Jewry not attend. Pointing out that the Polish government would notice if major Jewish organizations such as the AJC or WJC did not participate, the Joint’s Akiva Kohane, believed that there could

\textsuperscript{53} “Invitation to the 40th Anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising,” February 18, 1983, American Jewish Committee Collection 347.7.41 Box 14 “Poland,” YIVO.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.

be potential repercussions. The Polish government believed that it would fill the hotels and large Congress Hall, which had seating for “only” 3,200. Thus, he warned, these expectations had to be taken into account in order to avoid a potential blowout, which would not improve the situation for the Jews in Poland. Nor would it improve the situation for the Jewish organizations that had slowly been achieving many of their own goals.

The WJC was one such organization that had been building stronger relations with the Polish government. Regarding the commemoration, there were some leaders within the organization who believed that the government’s “pro-Jewish gesture” was better than antisemitism, and that they should focus on the positive elements of the commemoration. For example, after years of promises and active lobbying by WJC leaders, the Nożyk Synagogue was finally going to reopen. Informing the WJC’s decision to attend was a reminder in February 1983 at the WJC Governing Board meeting in Washington, D.C. that, the WJC had to be realistic and balanced. Gerhart Riegner, the WJC Secretary-General “warned that the impression that the WJC’s concern for Jewish universalism had been abandoned under the pressure of certain political events.” Although these events were not specified, the end of détente and the subsequent deepening East/West divide seem to be what he is referring to. Riegner’s statement was a powerful reminder of the WJC’s apolitical stance, and that they should not, as an organization, get involved in politics. Going could be seen as a sign of cooperation with the Polish government. But not going would also be expressing a political opinion. Ultimately, they

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56 Memo to Foreign Affairs Department from Fox re: Warsaw Ghetto Commemoration, February 3, 1983, American Jewish Committee Collection 347.7.41 Box 14, “Poland,” YIVO.

57 “Minutes of the European Branch Meeting, Stockholm, May 8 and 9, 1983, World Jewish Congress Collection C10-3310, CZA. While this document is from May 1983, the discussion about the commemoration included a reference to the pre-commemoration discussions.

decided to go, though according to the summary of the meeting, they did so with some reservation. According to the summary of the meeting:

The Governing Board…decided ‘in principle’ to participate in the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in Warsaw next April and called on member communities to take part in ‘this important event.’ The resolution noted that ‘in the details yet to be worked out, a proper role for the WJC should be assured.’

While ultimately they did decide to go, by saying that they decided “in principle” allowed them more time to discuss and wait to see whether there were any future developments. The WJC’s decision to participate was not taken lightly, as they were well aware that other organizations were not participating for “valid political, historical, and moral reasons.” Yet, as one leader summed it up, they “decided to participate for equally valid reasons.”

By late March, the AJC had waited long enough and they were prepared to make their decision. At the AJC Polish-Jewish Task Force meeting, the commemoration controversy was a major topic of conversation, and in the AJC’s Institute on Pluralism and Group Identity Commission’s March 21 meeting, the controversy was further discussed. Fully aware of the political repercussions, the AJC initially decided to send only a representative from the Paris office. According to a Washington Post article, the AJC and several other groups, believed that sending a single official from a European office was a way for these organizations to “walk a line between being used politically and being accused of overlooking the anniversary.” Yet, within the organization, sending a single representative was a far from a unanimous decision. Sholom Comay, the chair of the Institute on Pluralism and Group Identity Commission, also

59 Ibid.

60 “Minutes of the European Branch Meeting, Stockholm, May 8 and 9, 1983, World Jewish Congress Collection C10-3310, CZA.

61 Graham, "Jews Divided."
worried about what their lack of participation might mean for the local Jewish community. He argued that “all actions need to be evaluated as to their possible consequences for the indigenous Jewish community.” Furthermore, he suggested that a statement be drafted explaining the AJC’s limited participation, and in the letter, emphasize their concern for human rights.62

The Washington Post printed an article in early April about the debate over whether to go, revealing just how divisive the commemoration had become for American Jewish leaders. The article reported how even within organizations, there was a serious split amongst the leaders. For example, Jack Eisner, a founder of the Warsaw Ghetto Resistance Organization based in the U.S. planned to attend while his co-member, Ben Meed, said that, “morally, I don’t feel as this is my place. I don’t want to be part of a political event.”63 Meed’s opinion was the majority opinion amongst the group, as they voted overwhelmingly against sending an official representative to the commemoration. Eisner made it clear in the article that he was going as a private citizen.64

The Warsaw Ghetto Resistance Organization was not the only group divided over the question of whether to attend or not. The Warsaw government realized that there were serious debates going on, and they responded by accusing the Reagan administration of discouraging American Jews from participating. The Washington Post article quoted Szurmiej as saying that “the fight is between those promoting Jewish politics and those pushing American politics.”65 Those pushing American politics have warned that there could be potential Arab terrorist attacks during the event, he said. Thus, from the Polish government’s perspective, which Szurmiej conveyed, the

62 “Institute on Pluralism and Group Identity Commission,” March 21, 1983, American Jewish Committee Collection Box 347.7.41, Box 14, “Poland,” YIVO.

63 Graham "Jews Divided."

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.
decision not to attend was based on American pressures, not based on feelings about the current Polish regime.

While the American government may not have been eager for American Jewish leaders to attend, the Polish government’s actions were, undoubtedly, the strongest reason why American Jewish leaders chose not to attend. In fact, there was little to no discussion about the U.S. government’s position on Poland, despite Polish fears that Reagan was exerting pressure on American Jewish leaders not to attend. As the commemoration drew closer, rumors that the PLO would be participating spread throughout Jewish circles. The news angered many would-be participants, including the AJC, which decided at the last minute not to send their Paris representative. The AJC’s April 15 press release announcing that decision to not participate at all was rushed to press to ensure that it was published before the weekend and before the commemoration events were in full swing. The release read:

The American Jewish Committee announced today that it was canceling its plans to participate in the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial event which will be held shortly in Poland. ‘Our original decision to participate was a difficult one,’ said Maynard Wishner, President of the AJC, ‘but we felt that the memory of the victims and the sanctity of the site outweighed our problems with the auspices under which the event is to be held. However we have learned that the Polish government has chosen to politicize the event as manifested in a spate of vitriolic anti-Israel editorials, the presence in positions of prominence of people associated with the anti-Semitic campaign during the time of the Gomulka regime, and especially the recent news that a representative of the PLO will be present to lay a wreath at the Memorial to the martyred victims. Given this flagrant insult to the dead as well as to the living, we have recalled our representative and cancelled all plans to participate.66

Their decision made international headlines, and was broadcast on television, and even radio outlets. Though not easy, the decision seemed justified, particularly when the situation seemed to

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66 AJC Release, April 15, 1983, American Jewish Committee Collection 347.7.41 Box 14, “Poland,” YIVO.
worsen after the release was issued. In a memo to the Foreign Affairs Department, Nives Fox wrote:

The more is being reported about Poland in the last few days – arrests of Solidarity activists, only 1000 in Warsaw of the 5000 invited and hope for - - the more it seems to have been right to withdraw our participation. There may be some long-term flak - - such as possible visa refusals for AJC persons in the future - - but we shall cross that bridge when we get to it.67

By the time the commemoration began, only a fraction of the initial estimate of 5,000 attendees arrived in Warsaw. According to one WJC official, about 750 foreigners (not the above mentioned 1000) actually participated.68 Although the Israeli government did not send an official government delegation, several hundred Israelis attended as part of an unofficial delegation. Those who arrived were aware that the political situation in Poland was shaky. Yet they were unaware that the situation was about to become shakier. While the official commemoration events were perfectly orchestrated and everything was planned to the minute, a counter-commemoration organized by the democratic opposition was about to disturb the peace. Rather than allow the counter-commemoration to occur, however, and focus solely on the official commemoration, the government made the decision to quash the opposition. In doing so, the Polish government may have sacrificed the benefits that they had hoped to gain in favor of exercising its power against the opposition, as the foreign press reported on the matter extensively. Suppressing the opposition’s threat to the unstable and unpopular Jaruzelski regime ultimately proved to be far more of a priority than obtaining the coveted international legitimacy.

67 “AJC Not Going to Warsaw,” April 18, 1983, American Jewish Committee Collection 347.7.41 Box 14, “Poland,” YIVO.

Contested Historical Legacies: the Commemoration and the Counter-Commemoration

Ghetto Uprising hero Marek Edelman was not the only one to oppose the government’s politicization of the event, and his open letter was only the beginning of the public opposition in Poland. For both Jews and non-Jews involved in the opposition, the commemoration’s place on the world stage was the perfect opportunity to gain support for their own cause. Both Znak and Więź used the opportunity to publish volumes dedicated to Jewish topics. Znak’s over 400-page volume offered discussions of antisemitism, Catholic-Jewish relations, Jewish history and texts, and contemporary Jewish issues.69 Iwona Irwin-Zarecka writes that these and other publications:

All made for an unprecedented introduction to things Jewish. Such an introduction, though timed to coincide the official ceremonies, went well beyond a mere commemoration of the anniversary. It was as if the Church were again assuming its crucial role as a haven to voices countering the official propaganda.70

Thus, the government’s desire for recognition abroad provided unprecedented opportunities for Poles to discuss Jewishness in the public sphere. Such discussions, without a doubt, benefitted Jews living in Poland who sought to engage in dialogue about Jewish topics. Stanisław Krajewski, a young Jew living in Poland at the time recalled that “many people welcomed [the opportunity that the editors of Znak provided by] ‘building bridges between a new generation of Poles and the lost world of Polish Jews and contemporary Jewish thought.’”71 Actually, “many people” seems like an understatement, since the volume, according to Krajewski, went through an unprecedented 20,000 copy second printing.72 Thus, it was not just the government that was

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70 Irwin-Zarecka, Neutralizing Memory, 109.

71 Stanisław Krajewski, Poland and the Jews: Reflections of a Polish Polish Jew (Krakow: Austeria, 2005), 160.

72 Ibid., 160.
interested in discussing Jewish topics. Although for different reasons, the government and the intellectual circles within Poland were eager to discuss the previously taboo topic.

With the world, and in particular world Jewry looking towards Poland on this important and highly publicized anniversary, the opposition hoped to divert their attention from the officially planned pomp and instead shed light on the government’s failures. Thus, the commemoration became a highly politicized event internally as the government and opposition went head to head with each other, leaving the leaders of world Jewish organizations in the middle. The struggle between the government and opposition became an intense struggle over who “owned” this chapter of history, as demonstrated by a *New York Times* editorial from April 21 which read:

Who is the heir to the uprising of the Warsaw ghetto – General Jaruzelski’s jackbooted police or the hounded remnants of Solidarity? Who has the right to identify with the victims of anti-Semitism – a propaganda apparatus that still exploits code words like ‘Jewish origins’ and ‘Zionist connections’ or the victims of such propaganda?73

The struggle over the rightful heir to the history in this instance was just one strand of Solidarity’s greater understanding of its role in this capacity. Davies writes:

Solidarity took its role as guardian of the nation’s History very seriously. Its leading activists numbered several prominent historians – Geremek, Jedlicki, J.J. Lipski, Modzelewski, Juzwenko, Kłoczowski – and it sponsored a vast series of lectures and discussions on all the taboo subjects. Under Solidarity’s sponsorship, in factory yards and football stadiums, tens of thousands of Polish workers would gather with eager anticipation to hear for the first time in their lives an honest presentation of the facts of the Battle of Warsaw, the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the Katyń Massacre, or the fate of the Home Army. In this, Solidarity speakers were certainly expounding Polish History as they knew it; but they were making History as well.74

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74 Davies, *Heart of Europe*, 358.
The Ghetto Uprising commemoration was no exception. The opposition used this opportunity to once again demonstrate that they were the true guardians of Polish history. Despite having been weakened by the declaration of martial law only a year and a half before, they refused to give up this chance, knowing that the world’s eyes were on Poland.

The opposition’s counter-commemoration was not a surprise to the government, nor was it a surprise to the commemoration attendees. As early as April 8 the Washington Post reported that a “clandestine Polish group” was organizing its own commemoration. Furthermore, it announced that Marek Edelman planned to attend. The government thought otherwise, however. As the date of the planned counter-commemoration approached, Edelman was warned not to leave Łódź and, according to his friends, two undercover officers followed him to ensure his compliance. Ostensibly for “his own protection,” this surveillance made international headlines, further muddying Poland’s image. Lech Wałęsa, too, was prevented from attending the commemoration. En route to Warsaw to lay a wreath, Wałęsa was detained for nine hours, according to Jerzy Urban, a government spokesman, “in case he intended to do something illegal.”

Edelman and Wałęsa’s detentions, combined with the general atmosphere of dissent, provoked a strong response from the opposition. Leaflets announcing the unofficial, and thus unauthorized, demonstration were distributed throughout Warsaw. The plan was to meet and lay

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wreaths at the Umschlagplatz, the deportation point from which Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto were deported to Treblinka. From there the group would walk to 18 Mila Street, the site of the Jewish Combat Organization (Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa, or ŻOB) bunker. Yet the government intervened, deploying both uniformed police officers and, according to a New York Times article, at least four busloads of plain-clothed security forces to the area.79

Yet not even a strong police presence could prevent the group of more than 1,000 from gathering at the Umschlagplatz, albeit “nervously.”80 According to the New York Times, hundreds of Polish policemen blocked the “unofficial” march from the Umschlagplatz to the monument, though the crowd found alternate paths to the monument. Through loudspeakers, the police warned those present to disperse and that there would be serious repercussions for those who refused to leave. Random identity card checks began as the voice through the loudspeaker boomed, “Comrades of the militia, work energetically. Check the documents.”81

At the square, participants placed flowers at the foot of the monument and began singing a Polish hymn and raising their hands in the “V-sign,” as a symbol of defiance. The opposition group was led by Janusz Onyszkiewicz, who identified strongly with the ghetto fighters. He said:

They are close to us, they fought for the ideas that were the foundations for the emergency of Solidarity. If the heroes of the ghetto were alive today, we deeply believe they would join us in our struggle for freedom, truth, and dignity. May they rest in peace.82

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80 Michael Steinlauf includes a short section on the 1983 commemoration in his book (Steinlauf, Bondage, 106-109). He writes that there were a few hundred people there (Steinlauf, Bondage, 108).

81 Kifner, "Polish Police Bar."

82 “Letter to the Editor,” April 21, 1983, American Jewish Committee Collection 347.7.41 Box 14, “Poland,” YIVO.
A message from Edelman was also read: “It was my burning desire and duty to be with you today, but unfortunately the security forces made that impossible.” Though outlawed and surrounded by the militia, those who joined the opposition for this counter-commemoration did so because they believed that they had a moral obligation to speak out against the government’s attempt to manipulate the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising for their own goals. They were, undoubtedly, inspired by the Ghetto Heroes who rose up against their own tormentors.

According to Hanna Krall, who spent the day with Edelman, even in his absence Edelman’s involvement had a profound impact on Polish society. In a letter to the English translators of her interview with Marek Edelman, she wrote:

His decision not to participate in the official commemoration in 1983 seemed to me at first dubious; I felt that over those ashes there should be a moment of silence amidst all that political noise. But after everything that happened on April 17th, the rally and Onyszkiewicz’s speech and all – I understood for the first time that the Ghetto uprising had now become a Polish thing. Because the truth is there had always been a main road of the Polish resistance movement, and alongside it there had run this honored though seldom-used path (because who would ever want to travel it?) of the fight of the Jews. Thanks to the commemoration organized by Solidarity about which everybody soon knew, thanks to Edelman, and thanks to the regime, which previously on the 40th anniversary of the uprising greeted its leader with a house-arrest, his Jewish path became for a while part of this whole, Polish war story.

Edelman’s outspokenness and the opposition’s refusal to back down and allow the Polish authorities to own the ghetto heroes’ legacy brought the Jewish and Polish narratives together into one narrative of heroism. It took the clash with the opposition to demonstrate that this was not simply a story, but a legacy shaped by strong conviction. The opposition was determined to adopt that legacy, even if it meant fighting with the far more powerful regimes.

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83 Kifner, “Polish Police Bar.”

84 Krall, Shielding the Flame, 123-4.
After giving his speech at the counter-commemoration, Onyszkiewicz was arrested on charges of ‘participation in the work of underground structures’ and preparing to stage May Day demonstrations.\textsuperscript{85} In addition to his arrest, his home was searched and police allegedly found plans for May Day actions.\textsuperscript{86} The government’s commitment to eliminating the opposition, even when the world’s eyes were focused on Poland, demonstrates that Jaruzelski’s government was committed to its iron fisted approach regardless of whatever repercussions might exist. They were clearly threatened by the opposition. The martial law era’s end was in sight and, it appears, that the Warsaw ghetto commemoration may have been one of the nails in its coffin.

The government simply could not hide what was occurring. The Radio Free Europe “Facts and Views” program from April 18 gave a scathing critique of the government, calling the government’s actions at the counter-demonstration “in a way perhaps more striking than before” a clear indication that the public mood is irrelevant.\textsuperscript{87} The government completely disregarded the fact that the world was watching Warsaw at that moment. A Voice of America editorial compared the ghetto resistance to that of Solidarity in an editorial on April 20:

Today Poland suffers under a different foreign domination, that of the Soviet Union. And today there is also resistance. The recent actions of the Polish rulers, however, make us wonder whether they have learned anything at all from the ghetto heroes who are being honored this week. Of course one can only speculate about that. But it is clear that many of the Polish people understand what the 1943 uprising was all about - - and just what it means today. ‘Just as they did,’ said a Solidarity statement, ‘we want to live in dignity.’\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{85} Kifner, “Wałęsa Questioned.”
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} “Facts and Views” number 7173, April 18, 1983, RFE/RL Box 24, folder 1, OSA.
\textsuperscript{88} “Resistance and Solidarity,” \textit{Voice of America}, RFE/RL Box 24, folder 1, OSA.
The foreign press reports were not the only response to the government’s suppression of the opposition. Onyszkiewicz’s arrest mobilized the leaders of Jewish organizations concerned with human rights. George M. Szabad, the co-chair of the AJC Polish-American – Jewish-American Task Force, wrote a letter several months later to Jaruzelski asking for Onyszkiewicz’s release. Using the appeal of international support for Poland as bait, Szabad argued that:

We believe that favorable action [Onyszkiewicz’s release] in this matter would be most appropriate. It would help reduce tensions and improve Poland’s standing in the international community. We urge that Dr. Onyszkiewicz and others be released if this has not been done already.\(^89\)

Szabad, like so many of the other Jewish leaders of the period, understood the power of perception and recognized that dangling legitimacy in the west in front of Jaruzelski might produce some concrete results.

The government’s greatest concern was the impact that the counter-commemoration would have on the visitors. Would they see the militia? Would they sympathize with the opposition? Renata Kobylarz writes that from the government’s perspective, their greatest concern over the counter-commemoration was that there would be some kind of “resonance” with the foreign visits.\(^90\) While Jewish leaders protested after the fact, their absence on the day of the counter-commemoration was felt strongly by the Polish Jews who participated. Speaking about the Jewish counter-commemoration participants, Konstanty Gebert, a leading figure in today’s Polish Jewish community, said:

Visitors weren’t thinking the way we did. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity. In a communist country under martial law the last thing you want is to become involved in the underground. But there’s no law against taking a walk by the monument, Umschlagplatz, for a commemoration. They were afraid. We had the

\(^{89}\) “Letter to General Wojciech Jaruzelski,” July 18, 1983, 347.7.41 Box #14, ‘Poland,” YIVO.

\(^{90}\) Kobylarz, Walka, 372.
biggest Jewish event in Warsaw since ‘68, but there was nobody to say Kaddish. A priest said Pater Noster.

The next day we were supposed to lay wreaths at the Jewish cemetery and we were informed by the Rosh Kehillah [head of the Congregation] who had learned from superiors who then was told to lock gates. There were a few people who fought alongside [the] Jewish resurgence so we were standing there in front of locked gate. That wasn’t my proudest day to be Jewish. So we laid the wreaths and started saying tehillim [psalms] in Polish, of course, and then a bus came with Jewish tourists and stopped at the locked gate. Some took pictures of us. Then bus drove away. Of course it drives away. The driver was under instructions. There was a security guide on the bus.

Realistically, I understand each of those failures had to happen the way it did. You had somebody read a message of solidarity from Lech Wałęsa and they served 6 months in jail for it. And here you had tons of Jews who simply refused to be part of it. But take the slightest interest and risk. And I’m actually surprised at how much it hurts so many years later. The gentiles were taking risks for their Jewish friends. Jewish visitors were not interested.91

As Gebert points out, he understood why the foreign Jews opted not to participate in the counter-commemoration. What he does not understand, however, was their lack of interest in the group. Gebert said:

They could not have known. We spread the word wide. And I mean, so you’ve come to Warsaw. What else is there to do, right? So come to the monument already. Don’t join our march. Don’t take risks. Of course, it would be stupid. Just be there. But see us. And let us see you.92

Thus, it is clear that for Gebert, the mere acknowledgement of the group, that there might be some connection between them and the Jews from abroad, was extremely important given that, according to Gebert, “they were our only kind in the wider Yiddish world…On that day you had more Jews in Warsaw than there were since ‘68.”93 Yet the political circumstances, combined

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91 Konstanty Gebert, in discussion with author, November 2011. While Gebert says that there was nobody to say Kaddish, Steinlauf writes that several of the “new Jews” (the subject of Chapter 7) wore kipot and said the Kaddish (Steinlauf, Bondage, 108).

92 Gebert, discussion.

93 Ibid.
with what was in all likelihood a complete unawareness on the part of foreign Jews as to how
symbolic their presence could have been, kept the foreign Jews away from the Umschlagplatz.
Though determined to stay out of the politics, they were, nevertheless, making a politically
driven decision. As isolated and disappointed as Gebert was, the government was just as
relieved.

The PLO Debacle: Poland Caught Between Moscow and the West

As though the negative response to the quashing of the opposition was not enough to
tarnish the commemoration events, another major gaffe occurred when Fuad Yassim, the chief of
the PLO mission in Warsaw, laid a wreath at the Ghetto Heroes Memorial in the afternoon
during the ceremony for diplomatic missions. His appearance was hardly a surprise, as there had
been rumors that this was going to happen. The PLO had a relationship with the Polish
government, and thus, theoretically, this made sense. Arab leaders in Poland worried that the
events could become a sort of Zionist propaganda tool, according to an article in the Wall Street
Journal, and given the strength of the Arab lobby in Poland, the government had to be careful in
how it approached the situation. For example, in an effort to avoid provoking the Arab
representatives in Poland, with whom the Poles had good relations, the government did not
publicize the number of Israelis visiting “for fear that it will annoy the Arabs.”94 It was,
therefore, clear that the Polish government was toeing the Moscow line with respect to Middle
East politics.

Yet, the angry, vocal response from Jewish communal leaders might also have stopped
the PLO participation if for no other reason than appeasement. After all, given the extent to

94 Pope, “Jews Shun Uprising.”
which the government was attempting to gain Jewish support, the decision to allow the PLO to lay the wreath is shocking. Yet, it demonstrates just how torn the Polish authorities were between Moscow and what was expected of them from above and their desires to appease the West – and in this case, the Jews specifically.

Even before the commemoration began, a delegation of leaders from the ADL, the AJC, American Jewish Congress, and the B’nai B’rith’s International Council met on April 13 with Zdzisław Ludwiczwak, Minister Counselor at the Polish Embassy in Washington, D.C. to register their protest. Having heard the previous day that the PLO’s request to participate had been approved, the group was confused when Ludwiczwak informed the group that a request from the PLO had been received, but that no final decisions had been made. Given the conflicting reports, the group requested that he provide them with a definitive statement as soon as possible. In a memo to the AJC’s David Geller concerning the visit to the embassy, Howard Kohr wrote, “All of us left the meeting with a clear sense that Ludwiczwak knows exactly how the Jewish community feels about the PLO’s participation. However, none of us felt that the Poles were about to change their minds, but that our pressure may be helpful.”

The news made headlines in America. The Chicago Tribune reported on April 13 that a PLO diplomat said that the PLO would place a wreath at the monument. Yassim issued a statement, saying “we consider these the hero Jews. We are not against Jews as Jews. We are against the Zionist movement” The government had used similar arguments over the last decade and a half, so it is not surprising that such an argument could be made without the Polish

95 “Visit to Polish Embassy 4/13/83,” American Jewish Committee Collection, 347.1.33. Box 12 “March/April 1983,” YIVO.

government responding. In response, the Dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Rabbi Marvin Hier, said, “The PLO has vowed to destroy the very state built on the ashes of Auschwitz and has in its campaign of terror murdered and maimed Holocaust survivors and their children in Israel and around the world.” Continuing, he likened a PLO wreath at the Warsaw Ghetto monument to a tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr. by his murderer James Earl Ray. This comparison amused Yassim who responded to Hier’s statement by saying, “In fact we are not responsible for those Jews who were killed by the Nazis. But it is the Israelis who are responsible for killing children in Lebanon.” The ADL’s Abe Foxman said that by allowing the PLO to lay the wreath, the Polish government’s decision “reinforces the regrettable conclusion that the ceremonies appear to be only a facade to divert attention from the actual climate of human rights violations and anti-Semitism in present-day Poland.” While the government’s reaction to the opposition upset many Jewish observers, the PLO’s potential participation in the commemoration infuriated them.

In response to the protests, Warsaw officials claimed just as the commemoration was beginning that the PLO would not be part of the observances. A few days later, however, the authorities were reportedly planning to organize an ‘unofficial’ wreath-laying ceremony for the mission chief in response to the widespread protests. But by April 19 it appeared as though the concerns were unwarranted. Yassim left Poland for a meeting with Yasser Arafat in

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97 Ibid.

98 Ibid. The rhetoric comparing the Israelis to Nazis was not new to Poland. According to Anat Plocker, following a speech by Gomułka, in which he drew the comparison, it became “a staple” for the Polish Press throughout the 1968 anti-Zionist campaign (Plocker, "Zionists to Dayan,” 72).

99 “PLO Plan.”


Czechoslovakia, and it appeared that crisis had been averted. Yet Yassim returned to Poland and, accompanied by five other representatives, laid a green and red wreath, allegedly right next to the blue and white wreath left by Israelis earlier in the day at the official commemoration. After laying the wreath he then spoke with reporters, police, and tourists who were gathered for the event. Adding fuel to the fire, Yassim told the press present at the monument, “I have placed this wreath because the Jewish people were victims of Nazism and the Palestinian people are victims of the new Nazis,” a reference he clarified as “the Zionists and Israel.”

Thirty minutes later Rabbi Alexander Schindler, the leader of the UAHC Delegation, arrived with the acting U.S. Embassy Charge D’Affaires, Herbert Wilgus. Szurmiej had promised Schindler even before Schindler left the United States that Yassim would not be permitted to leave a wreath, calling such a suggestion a ‘provocation.’ Having agreed to go to Poland because of Szurmiej’s assurances, and realizing that Szurmiej’s promise was meaningless, Schindler was forced to react on the spot. Although he had threatened to leave, he did not, claiming “reciprocal courtesy” for the Ambassador who had accompanied a group from the UAHC earlier in the day. Schindler responded to the PLO’s presence by saying, “It is an obscenity to have a man who delights in the murder of Jewish children here. It is a hideous mockery of all this ceremony stands for.” As angry as he was about the PLO’s presence and participation, Schindler chose to stay in Poland after he convinced ZBoWiD president,

102 “AGEBCY Day Leads Poland” April 19, 1983, RFE/RL Box 24, folder 1, OSA.

103 Kifner, “Wałęsa Questioned.”


105 “UPI on PLO Laying Wreath at Ghetto Monument,” April 19, 1983, RFE/RL Box 24, folder 1, OSA.

106 Kifner, “Wałęsa Questioned.”
Włodzimierz Sokorski, to issue a public apology. Once this was issued, Schindler agreed to participate in the Auschwitz ceremony.

The Israeli delegation also spoke out against the PLO’s participation. Tel Aviv mayor Shlomo Lahat said, "The murderers have found a way to desecrate the holy memory of the heroes of the ghetto." Knesset member Menachim Hacohen responded by boycotting the evening event, which was one of the main events planned for the commemoration. Four leaders of the Israeli delegation, including representatives from the Interior and Foreign Ministries, left before their planned return to Israel. The other members, however, remained in Poland, taking advantage of their ability to travel throughout the country visiting numerous death camps. Though the group remained in Poland, they made it clear that the PLO’s participation in the ceremony was unacceptable and they demanded an apology from the government. In an official note of protest, the delegation decried what they saw as a “cynical act and a desecration of the memory of the victims.” Furthermore, while they visited Treblinka as previously scheduled, they boycotted the official ceremony. Although no formal meeting occurred between the Israeli delegation and representatives from the Polish government, unofficial Polish contacts claimed that the PLO placed a wreath without informing the authorities. And in fact, a wreath laid the previous day had been removed prior to the commemoration. Yet given how orchestrated the entire week was, the notion that the PLO could have participated in the ceremony without prior permission from the authorities seems implausible. This was a clear example of the Polish

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107 “Palestinian Wreath Laying in Warsaw Sparks Protest,” April 19, 1983, RFE/RL Box 24, folder 1, OSA.
108 Ibid.
authorities not willing to stand up to the Arab lobby, which was backed by Moscow. There was no way that the Polish authorities could appease both the PLO and the Jewish delegates on this issue. The tensions between the two were far too strong.

For the WJC delegation, this was one of the final straws. The tipping point for those who opposed further participation was the airing of a program that evening on Polish television that juxtaposed images from the Holocaust and Hiroshima with those from Lebanese refugee camps.\textsuperscript{110} This, combined with the PLO wreath laying and the absence of any mention of Jews during the Treblinka commemoration, led WJC program director and acting spokesman for the delegation, Mark Friedman, to withdraw the group from the remaining commemoration events.\textsuperscript{111} According to a WJC spokesman, the group had “been subjected to ‘a week of provocation and manipulation,’” and they were going to leave a day earlier than expected. The WJC secretary general, Gerhart M. Riegner, broke off from the WJC delegation, as he did not agree with Friedman’s response.\textsuperscript{112}

**Retrospective Assessments of the Commemoration:**

In retrospect, the WJC leadership believed that its participation at the commemoration, despite the issues that arose, was justified and important. They “succeeded in imparting a Jewish character to the manifestations and showed the strength of its solidarity with Israel.”\textsuperscript{113} Furthermore, the delegation met with both Jaruzelski and Adam Łopatka, the Minister of Religious Affairs. According to the European Branch meeting in early May, “Answers had been

\textsuperscript{110} Kifner, “Some Jews Quit.”


\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{113} “Minutes of the European Branch Meeting, Stockholm, May 8 and 9, 1983, World Jewish Congress Collection C10-3310, CZA.
received on some of these issues [antisemitism and Jewish heritage preservation] and might prove to be the basis of progress in renewed discussions at a later date." Thus the WJC leadership recognized that despite the problems, the delegation’s trip to Poland was not a total lost cause.

This assessment was further solidified when the WJC’s new East-West Relations Working Group met to discuss the commemoration, amongst other pressing issues. For the Poles present, there seemed to be no question that the WJC’s participation was important. Adam Kwaterka, who was one of the Polish observers at the meeting, said that the commemoration was important in the fight against antisemitism. Maurycey Kajler, another Polish representative pointed out that that government had spent 120 million zloty (over $1 million dollars) on the Nożyk renovation, that the Jewish theater premiered three Holocaust performances, a new exhibition was created, and Yad Vashem was able to distribute its medals. Furthermore, the ceremony at the Ghetto Heroes monument had both secular and religious elements, as did the ceremonies at Treblinka and Auschwitz. Thus, the commemoration was important, and it was only right that the WJC participated. Though the minutes do not clarify whether Kajler said this, or whether the entire group agreed that the WJC was correct in participating (other documents

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114 Ibid. According to a Washington Post article, there was a disagreement over whether the meetings were worthwhile or whether they were merely symbolic. Chief Rabbi of Romania, Moses Rosen, stated during his speech at the Synagogue rededication that Jaruzelski “spoke to us as a great humanist. He assured us the Polish government is fighting anti-Semitism. Schindler later disagreed (privately), saying later that the meeting was “little more than a ‘courtesy call’” (Bradley Graham, “Polish Police Detain Wałęsa, for 2nd Time in Week, for 9 Hour,” The Washington Post, April 19, 1983, http://search.proquest.com/docview/147618776/7CD6A48AE1B744CFPQ/1?accountid=10920.

115 Minutes of the European Branch Meeting, Stockholm, May 8 and 9, 1983, World Jewish Congress Collection C10-3310, CZA.
indicate the latter), the minutes note that, “it was therefore right and proper for world Jewry to send official delegations who participated in all the ceremonies.”"¹¹⁶

The Chief Rabbi of Romania, Moses Rosen, expressed the opinion that the Polish commemoration marked a turning point in East-West relations. Gerhart Riegner, the Secretary-General of the WJC) agreed. From his perspective, the visit to Poland was in line with the high priority of building East-West cooperation. Riegner, however, was critical of how the press in the United States had handled the events, as well as how Reagan had contributed to the hysteria. He believed that “It should have been recognized by responsible people that this was an abnormal situation in the midst of serious East-West tension”¹¹⁷ Riegner’s assessment was that this was a unique Cold War situation, further complicated by the end of détente, that had to be evaluated within the proper context.

A U.K. representative at the meeting, Hayim Pinner, believed that the visit had been important for opening the door to Poland, and that it was clear that the delegation had gone to honor the heroes and martyrs, not as a sign of approval for the government. But Pinner’s raised the issue that he “felt that the Poles overestimated Jewish influence in Western policies.”¹¹⁸ Again, the minutes do not provide any details, so it is unclear precisely how the Poles conveyed this perception of influence. But the way that the statement is worded indicates that perhaps the

¹¹⁶ “Minutes of the Meeting of the Working Group on East-West Relations European Branch Meeting, Stockholm, 8th May 1983,” World Jewish Congress Collection, C10-3310, CZA. The general minutes from the European Branch Meeting indicates that this was the consensus reached by the group (“Minutes of the European Branch Meeting, Stockholm, May 8 and 9, 1983, World Jewish Congress Collection C10-3310, CZA).

¹¹⁷ “Minutes of the Meeting of the Working Group on East-West Relations European Branch Meeting, Stockholm, 8th May 1983,” World Jewish Congress Collection, C10-3310, CZA.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.
Polish authorities had expressed their perception during some of the meetings with the WJC. Rosen, too, expressed a concern about the dangers of perception. According to the minutes:

Rosen considered the present dangerous international tension worse than a cold war. The myth of a world Jewish conspiracy was being revived along with accusations of dual loyalty. At all costs, collisions (sic) should be obviated and he therefore called for a carefully worded resolution on East-West relations.\(^{119}\)

Ilona Seifert, a Hungarian representative, also believed that the most important issue here was not necessarily what had occurred in Poland, but the larger issue of East-West relations. She expressed a hope that the events in Poland “would not mar the friendship the WJC had achieved between Jewish communities in East and West, nor interfere with their common efforts for peaceful cooperation.”\(^{120}\) Clearly for the Eastern European representatives at the meeting, it was essential that the WJC remain committed to developing East-West relations, precisely as tensions were increasing at the governmental level.

Dr. S. Levenberg, the chair of the working group summed up the discussion regarding the commemoration by reaffirming the WJC’s commitment to peace, détente, and international cooperation, but just as important, the organization’s commitment to the right for Jews to go to Israel and to live as Jews everywhere. According to the minutes, he stressed that:

It was the WJC’s responsibility to inform member communities and organizations of the true facts, both good and bad. The visit to Poland should not be debated in public. The visit was made after extensive discussions within the communities and decided upon democratically. Political realities, like the wreath-laying by the PLO, must be understood. There should be no vote on this issue.\(^{121}\)

\(^{119}\) Ibid. Rosen was likely referring to the topic of an earlier discussion, namely the impact that rise in East-West tensions at the Soviet-U.S. government level would have on Jews in the USSR and Eastern Europe. The most pressing issues seemed to be a discussion of Human Rights violations in the Soviet Union.

\(^{120}\) Ibid.

\(^{121}\) Ibid.
Kwaterka “intervened” to defend the Poles, saying that the authorities had received a démarche from Syria and Libya, though he did not specify what the subject was. A French representative, Jacques Orfus suggested that the WJC issue a resolution saying that the WJC leaders did not regret their decision to participate, but that they “deplored the unfortunate incidents that had occurred.” Riegner responded by saying that there had been an official protest in Warsaw [presumably the WJC’s early departure], and such a resolution, therefore was unnecessary. He then turned to Rosen and said that “more important than the question of whether a delegation should have gone was what the Poles were doing to remedy the past, to eradicate antisemitism, to enable the Jewish remnant to live as Jews, and to compensate for destroyed and heirless property.”

There was clearly no consensus on the commemoration, perhaps because people went to the commemoration with such different understandings of the Polish situation and the larger Cold War context. Riegner was correct to point out that this was a unique situation. But for some Jews who may have already been wary of the Polish authorities’ sincerity, it may have been difficult to keep that in mind.

After the commemoration, the authorities produced a short film clip about the event called *Pamięć Ostrzega*. It opens with a middle-aged man wiping away tears with someone in the background singing what sounds like “*El Male Rachamim*” (God is Full of Mercy), the prayer for the soul of the departed. Undoubtedly produced for propaganda purposes, the film includes scenes from the official commemoration, including clips of the foreign delegations of Jews from around the world laying their wreaths at the foot of the monument. The camera pans out to show the packed square in front of the monument before switching scenes to the also packed Nożyk Synagogue during the rededication. Distinguished guests, representing Jewish organizations and

\[122\] Ibid.
other religious confessions look on as a group of what seem to be the most distinguished guests
dance with a Torah under a chupah, or wedding canopy, to “Ani Ma’amin” (I Believe), which is
often sung at Holocaust memorials. Worshippers in Warsaw would now have a place to pray, the
audio track announced proudly. In the next scene, men dressed in suits stand over the Judaica
exhibit at the newly opened exhibition at the National Museum, seemingly impressed by the
exhibit they were viewing. The next scene, at Treblinka, shows mourners visiting the death camp
and lighting memorial candles there, once again with the somber “El Male Rachamin” playing
in the background. Next is a peace rally that was held in Auschwitz. The voiceover proclaims,
“Here in Oświęcim [the Polish name for the camp and nearby town], the shadow of death
engulfed millions of victims of the Nazi regime. Behind those fences, the Poles and the Jews
suffered and died united by the same fate.” The final scene is at the Yad Vashem Righteous
Among the Nations medal ceremony. The voice informs the viewers, that, “A quarter of the
5,000 people decorated with this medal all over the world are Polish. This is something else we
must not forget.”123 The narrative of equal suffering and of the heroic Poles dominates, while
giving the impression that the government succeeded at putting on its show, and that the guests
visiting Poland were pleased. Amidst the scenes of mourning, there were also scenes of foreign
visitors mingling and smiling. The video does not mention anything about the Opposition’s
counter-memorial, nor does it show any sense of strife amongst the visitors as the PLO was
laying its wreath. Nothing indicates any dissatisfaction, and viewers of the film could only have
concluded that the commemoration went off without a hitch.

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And yet, an April 21 headline in the *The Washington Post* perfectly summed up the events: “Warsaw Ghetto Observance Ending as it Began, in Controversy.”\(^{124}\) Given that the commemoration was organized by Jaruzelski’s military government, it was clear from the beginning that the events would be highly politicized. The very incentive for organizing the commemoration was political: namely gaining international legitimacy for a government that had lost it with the imposition of martial law. The Polish government was desperate and a large, international commemoration with prominent Jews in attendance had the potential, at least from the government’s perspective, to help Poland solve some of its financial and political problems. Yet reality prevented this from occurring. The government’s decision to use force to quash the opposition’s attempts to take ownership over this period of history as the world watched highlighted the government’s lack of concern for human rights. The foreign press ran with the story, alerting the world, once again, to the government’s actions. Jaruzelski’s government further enraged the Jewish community leaders by allowing the PLO to lay a wreath at the Ghetto Hero’s Monument, despite their protests.

An editorial in the *Christian Science Monitor* also summed up the issues well:

It could have been a poignant, healing gesture. It turned into a mockery. When a PLO official laid a wreath at the Warsaw Monument to Jews who perished in the 1943 uprising against the Nazis, the avowed purpose was to show the world that Palestinians were sensitive to the sufferings of the Jewish nation and had no animosity for Jews as a people. But the official went on to say: 'The Jewish people were victims of Nazism and Palestinians are victims of the new Nazis - Zionists and Israel.' A more tactless and provocative injection of political rhetoric can scarcely be imagined. No wonder the Israeli government ordered its delegates to the anniversary celebration to return home.\(^ {125}\)

\(^{124}\) Graham, “Warsaw Ghetto Observance Ending.”

\(^{125}\) “The PLO’s Broken Wreath,” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 21, 1983, RFE/RL Box 24, folder 2, OSA.
While this article claims that the Israeli government ordered its delegates home, some Israelis remained in Poland, thus indicating just how divided world Jewry was in their responses to the events. Some were enraged, but chose to remain for their own desires, while others were willing to take the good with the bad, as the WJC’s Riegner was.

In the end, just as the Jewish assessment of the events were mixed, so too was the Polish authorities’ assessment. Although the video suggested that the commemoration was an overwhelming success, the hope that the Warsaw Ghetto anniversary commemoration could help the government achieve any major financial concessions abroad was dashed. However, from the government’s perspective, this was not the government’s fault. According to a report of the events, this was likely because the delegation that attended “lacked people with direct influence in political circles in the West.”\textsuperscript{126} The commemoration might, nevertheless, help Poland’s image abroad, since “most of the Jews positively assessed the scope and solemn character given to the celebration.”\textsuperscript{127} Furthermore, they believed that the celebration “became proof of the openness of Polish foreign policy” and that it “presented a true picture of our country, a respect for civil liberties, and the real economic situation.”\textsuperscript{128} According to one Polish official, however, it turned into a “public relations disaster.”\textsuperscript{129} For propagandistic reasons, it was a success, but not everyone was fooled by the propaganda.

In the U.S., however, the press was brutally critical, leading the consul general of Poland in Chicago to write in a letter to the editor:

\textsuperscript{126} \textquote[Informacja Nr 12 Podsumowanie imprez związanych z 40 rocznicą powstania w Getcie Warszawskim,” April 23, 1983, MSW BU_1585/2400, IPN.}
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
I wish to add that your using the noble cause of the 40th anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising for a cheap anti-Polish propaganda exercise is simply distasteful and insulting to the sacred memory of all those – both Jews and Poles – who experienced Nazi genocide. One can only imagine what editorials would have been published in the American media if Poland had not celebrated the Warsaw ghetto uprising anniversary.¹³⁰

It is true that there would have likely been some reaction had this been the case, but from the articles, it also seemed like the Polish government might have done less harm had they not done anything at all.

Despite the great effort that the Polish government showed by putting on the grand event, they failed to achieve any significant gains with the commemoration. The government was far too deep in its internal issues, but from the U.S. perspective, détente had ended and the Jaruzelski regime deserved no assistance. If Reagan had tried to convince the Jewish leaders not to attend, how could they have convinced him that the Poles deserved any special treatment? Ultimately, the commemoration had no long-standing impact on the development of Polish-Jewish relations, as martial law ended about three months later, and the government, once again, began to reassess its approach to the Jewish community, both at home and abroad.

CHAPTER 7
INFLUENCING THE NEXT GENERATION: THE JEWISH FLYING UNIVERSITY AND AMERICAN NOTIONS OF JEWISHNESS

Describing the atmosphere in late 1970s Warsaw, Konstanty Gebert, a member of the “March ’68 Generation” and one of the leaders of today’s Polish Jewish community, said:

Try to imagine Warsaw in the late 1970s where doing something oppositional was the in thing, right? I mean, if you weren’t collecting money for political prisoners or distributing underground newspapers, or at least participating in a Flying University, you basically ruled yourself out of the company of anybody you wanted. And since this had all been going on for two years, three years, the run of the mill flying university… this was something new, something sexy.¹

When Gebert said “something new, something sexy,” he was referring to a group of young people who began to gather every other week in Warsaw in the fall of 1979 to discuss Jewish topics. Calling their group the Żydowski Uniwersytet Latający (ŻUL), or Jewish Flying University (JFU), the self-labeled “March ’68 Generation” participated in widespread Polish opposition to the Party and its ideologically driven attempts to control Polish society.

While the previous chapters have focused on perceptions of power amongst Polish government officials and international Jewish leaders, Chapter 7 shifts the perspective to look at another way that American influences played a major role in Jewish life in Poland in the 1970s.

¹ Gebert, discussion. An important example of dissident activity, Flying Universities allowed Poles to study less ideologically controlled versions of history and discuss topics deemed taboo in the socialist society. Gebert made a key distinction regarding the atmosphere in Warsaw, which he called unique, and that only there could independent Jewish life emerge in the late 1970s. For more on Warsaw’s uniqueness and the desire of Warsaw Jews to be completely absorbed into Polish culture, see Joanna Wiszniewicz, “Jewish Children and Youth in Downtown Warsaw Schools in the 1960s,” in *Polin: 1968 Forty Years After*, eds. Leszek W. Głuchowski and Antony Polonsky (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2009) 205-6. I use the term “March ’68 Generation” to describe the group for whom the 1968 student protests and subsequent anti-Zionist campaign was a defining moment. This is how they referred to themselves in the early 1980s, according to journalist Małgorzata Niezabitowska, who, together with her photographer husband, captured their stories and images (Niezabitowska, *Remnants*, 92).
In particular, I focus on a group of young Poles, many of whom had only recently learned of their Jewish roots. Referring to themselves as the “March ‘68” generation, these young Jews did not emigrate from Poland in the late 1960s and early 1970s as many of their peers did. Remaining in Poland, but feeling uncomfortable within the established Jewish institutions in Poland, they turned to the West, particularly to America, for an adaptable model of Jewishness.

In Chapter 7 I explore the development of a new, post-1968 Polish Jewishness in Warsaw that emerged as part of a wider Polish civil society at the time. This group of young Poles in Warsaw, not all of whom were Jewish, used the relatively open atmosphere in the city, made possible by societal changes, to explore Jewishness in ways that had been impossible before, given the historical and political circumstances in post-Holocaust communist Poland. The Jewish Flying University reflected the more global trend of burgeoning youth countercultures, which included Jewish youth sub-countercultures. I demonstrate that the concurrent American Jewish counterculture served as an adaptable model for these young Poles, who created their own Polish Jewish counterculture, further emphasizing Poland’s place in the 1970s within the transnational modern Jewish experience.

The Jewish Flying University, while certainly part of Polish and Polish Jewish history, also belongs to a more global Jewish history. In his book on Jewish socialism in America, historian Tony Michels pointed out that, “New York served as a laboratory of political and cultural innovation that influenced Eastern Europe in ways historians are just beginning to realize.” While Michels wrote about the period of mass immigration into the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, this transnational connection between Jews in New York—and more broadly, America—and Eastern Europe continued after the Holocaust, permeated the Iron

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Curtain, and played a major role in maintaining Jewishness throughout the Soviet Bloc. The relationship forged between young Jews from Poland and the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s reflects the wider connection between Jews on either side of the curtain.³

This connection depended on significant social, political, and economic changes in Poland that developed in the 1960s and 70s. A decade before the formation of the Jewish Flying University, in late January 1968, students protested the government’s ban on the Warsaw National Theater’s performance of Adam Mickiewicz’s Dziady, or Forefathers’ Eve.⁴ Riot police and the militia arrested hundreds of young people and university administrations throughout Poland expelled about 1,500 students.⁵ Although a response to a particular Polish incident, the students’ reaction to the ban echoed global student protests of that time. Just as popular culture and consumerism influenced youth protests in the United States and Western Europe in the 1960s, improved living conditions in Poland, stronger connections with the West, and the emergence of a Polish youth culture mobilized Polish youth to speak out against their repressive government. The regime attacked the children of economically privileged and high-ranking intellectuals and party members, referring to the students as the “banana youth,” for their seemingly decadent consumer behavior in the midst of the Polish shortage economy. Thus, the regime politicized the very consumer culture that it introduced as part of its post-Stalinist reforms.⁶

³ This relationship also included the Soviet Union and other Soviet Bloc countries, although that is beyond the scope of this chapter.

⁴ The regime banned the play on the grounds that its nationalist theme and criticism of the Russian tsar was stirring up anti-Soviet sentiment.


⁶ Ibid., 145–6, 151.
While the Polish government quashed youth protests in the late 1960s, a decade later much had changed in Poland. A Polish civil society had emerged, allowing groups like the Jewish Flying University to meet with relative openness. As political scientist Michael Bernhard has shown, the 1976 strikes against increases in food prices played a major role in demonstrating to both the working class and the intelligentsia that opportunities to organize existed outside the confines of the state. The Party’s retreat from the proposed price increases, an action that resulted from the strikes, showed the workers that they wielded “veto” power over the state’s policies. Though not directly involved in the strikes, the intelligentsia defended workers when the state brutally suppressed their strikes, thereby creating a bond between the otherwise independent groups. This unlikely pairing ushered in a period of cooperation through opposition to achieve common goals, with students joining in as well. Bernhard wrote of the late 1970s, “During this period, numerous social movements with diverse political orientations and social constituencies were born and became politically active.”7 The rise in social movements, he argued, extended the boundaries of “public space,” complicating the state’s ability to control these groups and activities.8

The expanded civil society allowed students, along with some of their professors, to challenge the state’s control over Poland’s educational system by establishing a Flying University in early 1978. Historically, Flying Universities played a significant role in Poland as a means through which teachers and scholars could circumvent state-controlled versions of history,

7 Bernhard, Origins of Democratization, 48, 130.

8 Ibid., 130. He explained “public space” as the space “between the official public life of the monarchy, the state, and the nobility, and that of private and/or communal life, or in other words, space where a variety of associations and organizations, social movements, the media, and political parties can exist” (Ibid., 3).
philosophy, and literature by meeting in private homes to discuss “unauthorized” renditions. On January 22, 1978, the Workers’ Defense Committee (Komitet Obrony Robotników; KOR) published a declaration in their information bulletin, signed by prominent intellectuals and students, explaining their desire to form the Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych (TKN), or Society for Academic Studies, also known as the Uniwersytet Latający, or Flying University. The declaration stated:

By taking this initiative, we express our wish to respond to the recently awakened aspirations of Poland’s students and young intellectuals to broaden, enrich, and complement their knowledge. These aspirations… result from the need to understand the historical period and the society we live in, as well as from the desire for self-knowledge.

The TKN became the center of independent education in late communist Poland. Philosopher and Flying University participant Hanna Buczyńska-Garewicz explained that the group met to “explore the unexplored domains of the social sciences and the humanities, teach what was restricted or banished from the official university, and provide some new publications… its purpose was to teach what was prohibited and to correct what was falsified.”

Flying University professors taught “areas of darkness” or “blank spots,” namely those topics and narratives that state-controlled universities could not teach.

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9 Polish Flying Universities emerged in the nineteenth century, and the tradition of underground educational initiatives was, according to Hanna Buczyńska-Garewicz, an essential reason why the 1978 Flying University was so widely supported. Flying Universities continued throughout Poland’s history, proving a space for Polish intellectuals to explore the humanities without any kind of ideological intervention from the state authorities who determined official university curricula (Hanna Buczyńska-Garewicz, “The Flying University in Poland, 1978–1980,” Harvard Educational Review 55, 1 (1985), 24). For more on the Flying University, see Ryszard Terlecki, Uniwersytet Latający i Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych 1977–1981 (Krakow: Instytut Europejskich Studiów Społecznych, 2000).

10 A full translation of the declaration can be found in Buczyńska-Garewicz, “The Flying University,” 20–21.

11 Ibid., 32.

12 Ibid., 28.
The Jewish Flying University, though distinct from the more general Flying University, had similar goals: both Jewish and non-Jewish participants focused on “blank spots” related to Poland’s Jewish past, with some eventual efforts made to carve out a niche for a Jewish present. None of the participants believed that the JFU could guarantee a Jewish future in Poland. Rather, participants took advantage of the moment to explore previously taboo topics. In this respect, participants of both the Flying and Jewish Flying Universities participated in much larger efforts in Poland at that time to liberate the “public space in which they appropriated their own communities, ideals, and language.”13

The growth of “public space” in the 1970s provided the necessary environment for the development of a new Polish Jewishness, but perhaps more crucial was the anti-Zionist campaign, which was connected to the March 1968 student protests. Several of their alleged leaders were labeled Zionists or children of Zionists and were accused of involvement in a Zionist conspiracy to undermine the Polish government. Generally speaking, the “March ’68 Generation” grew up with devoutly communist parents who had abandoned their Jewishness after the Holocaust and did not teach, or in many cases even tell, their children anything about their heritage. Indeed, many of the “March ’68 Generation” were unaware of their Jewish roots until the campaign, while those who did know their family background had not believed that it conflicted with their Polishness. Sociologist Małgorzata Melchior noted that, “the events of March ’68 were often particularly dramatic for those young people whose parents had survived the Holocaust and not told them anything about their Jewish origin, which they learned of now,

13 Bernhard, Origins of Democratization, 208.
often from strangers with anti-Semitic views.”

Gebert, the aforementioned leader of the Jewish Flying University, who knew of his Jewish roots, contended that he had always known that he “was of Jewish origin, but that had been irrelevant, as Poland was supposed to be an internationalist socialist society, in which nation, religion and race did not matter anymore. The events of 1968 changed all that.”

The events of 1968 forced everyone, regardless of whether one knew or did not know of his or her Jewish roots, to rethink their Polishness, and reminded everyone that historically, in Poland, “to be Polish one had to be Polish all the way; otherwise a suspicion of subversion would linger. The Jews were neither of Polish tradition, language, and custom, nor of the Catholic faith.”

Despite the widespread belief that post-war Poland was an internationalist society, the events of 1968 revealed the limits of Polish inclusivity. As a result, a deep-rooted identity conflict emerged for some “Poles of Jewish origin,” who discovered that they did not fit the narrow definition of Polishness. The notion of a hyphenated identity, similar to those that existed in the United States, was uncommon in the largely homogenous Poland at that time. Thus, the sudden realization that others questioned their Polishness, and that their Jewish ancestry

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17 Ironically, though the “March ’68 Generation” turned to American Jews for a model of how to be both Polish and Jewish, this was not a new concept in Poland. Such an identity emerged in the nineteenth century, peaked during the interwar years, and continued, arguably, until 1968 when the bulk of the remaining Jewish community left. By the late 1970s, however, such an identity had largely disappeared. For more on Jewish identity in Poland, particularly during the interwar years, see Anna Landau-Czajka, Syn będzie Lech—: asyjmilacja Żydów w Polsce międzywojennej (Warsaw: Wydawn Neriton: Instytut Historii PAN, 2006); Eugenia Prokop-Janiec, Polish Jewish Literature in the Interwar Years (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003); Katrin Steffen “‘Żydowska polskość’ jako koncepcja tożsamości w polsko-żydowskiej prasie okresu międzywojennego i jej dziedzictwo w Naszej Trybunie w latach 1940–1952,” in Żydowski Polak, polski Żyd. Problem tożsamości w literaturze polsko-żydowskiej, eds. Alina Molisak and Zuzanna Kołodziejska (Warsaw: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2011); and Steinlauf, Bondage, 14–22.
mattered, presented a monumental challenge to the self-understanding of the “March ‘68 Generation.”

As the shock and trauma of 1968 subsided and a more open atmosphere emerged in Poland, some members of the “March ‘68 Generation” began exploring the identities which had been thrust upon them a decade earlier. This generation, which Gebert describes as “shipwrecked Jews,” began looking to the United States, rather than the local elderly Jewish community, in order to understand Judaism and Jewish culture. Their American peers were in the process of creating an American Jewish counterculture that rejected their parents’ Judaism in favor of alternative trends like the *havurah* (fellowship) movement, and young Jews in Poland found kindred spirits in their young American counterparts. Referring to members of this generation as the “return Jews,” Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, a sociologist and participant-observer of the group in 1983, explained:

> These young Jews have much more in common with young and not-so-young Jews in America or France than they have with the older generations of Polish Jews. Their experience of rediscovery of Jewish heritage is far more akin to the experience of an acculturated Western Jew in search of more meaning to his Jewishness than to the traditional ways of simply *being* a Jew in Poland.

Though operating in distinct ideological worlds, participants in both the American and the Polish Jewish countercultures rebelled against established institutions: the former against institutionalized Jewishness, and the latter against the general government structure, which included Polish Jewish institutions. Yet, important differences existed beyond the geographic

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18 Gebert, *Land of Ashes*, 16. This also reflects a wider trend at the time in Poland of looking westward for cultural models.

19 The *havurah* movement emphasized more individualized Jewish learning in small groups. For more on it, see Riv-Ellen Prell, *Prayer and Community: The Havurah in American Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989).

20 Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory*, 76. Many of them did not know what it meant to be a Jew, thus necessitating this search for meaning.
and political environments in which these countercultures developed. Young American Jews had a variety of Jewish institutions that they could choose to reject; young Polish Jews, however, rejected and were rejected by official Jewish bodies that wanted little to do with the younger generation involved in the democratic opposition. Furthermore the American Jewish counterculture should be placed in the larger context of ethnic revival in America at the time, which had no parallel in the largely homogenous Polish society. Nevertheless, young Polish Jews seeking a model for Jewishness adapted the American Jewish counterculture experience to fit their needs. Despite these differences and the great geographic, political, and cultural divide between them, Polish and American Jews arrived at the same conclusions about what Jewishness could (and should) look like.

Perhaps the greatest significance of the group laid in their ability to create an independent, alternative Jewish space in late communist-era Warsaw. While some young Jews participated in Jewish institutional life in the city, many who remained there by the late 1970s wished to create an alternative Jewish realm beyond the limits of the TSKŻ or Congregation. The leaders of these organizations and institutions, often Holocaust survivors and Poles who fled to and survived the war in the Soviet Union, maintained a close relationship with the Party, which they hoped would ensure the livelihood of these organizations and institutions. This meant that the younger generation, disillusioned with, and in many cases openly opposed to, the Party, did not want to identify with these Jews; nor did the older generation want to associate with this younger

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21 On the ethnic revival in America, see Jacobson, *Roots Too.*

22 There were young Jews, such as current *Midrasz* editor, Bella Szwarcman-Czarnota, who grew up in a more Jewish household, attended youth colonies for Jewish children until they closed after 1968, and even attended synagogue in the early 1970s; Bella Szwarcman-Czarnota, in discussion with the author, November 2011. Other Jews, like Adam Michnik, identified as a “Pole of Jewish origin,” but who, Gebert writes, “feels no solidarity with the Jewish religion, tradition, culture, history, nation, or state.” See Gebert, *Land of Ashes,* 26. Others left Poland altogether. Since 1989, as avenues for exploring Jewishness have multiplied, Polish Jews have created even more models of Jewishness.
group. Describing this tension a decade later, Irwin-Zarecka wrote, “There can hardly be much of a dialogue, for example, between the director of the Yiddish Theater, a man who was elected a member of Polish Parliament in the 1985 elections, and people who campaigned for a boycott of those very elections.” Furthermore, the older generation that remained connected to Jewish life in Poland lacked an understanding when it came to these young Jews, who could successfully (for the most part) pass as Poles, and yet wanted to claim an identity or Jewish connection. This new generation, born after the war, had not truly witnessed the same kind of persecution that the older generation had during Holocaust and Stalinism, although they had witnessed their own government’s acts in 1968. Nevertheless, they remained unfazed by the stigma that so many older Jews associated—or believed non-Jewish Poles associated—with their Jewish roots.

Gebert wrote of the generational conflict:

For many of the ‘old’ Jews… we were first a nuisance, then a fraud, and finally a mystery. It was obvious that the influx of young people would elicit heightened interest from the all-controlling state authorities, which was the last thing the established Jewish community wanted… Furthermore, our Jewishness, self-made and often contradictory, did not strike them as authentic. Marek Edelman, the last surviving leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, expressed it succinctly when he branded us… as frauds, a literary fiction. The Jewish people was dead, he told me.25

 Apparently unprecedented in Jewish history and in stark contrast to the usual concern for continuity in Jewish communities, the leaders of Poland’s Jewish community viewed themselves

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23 Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory*, 76. She explains the tension as a cultural gap pronounced by stark political differences.

24 Gebert, *Land of Ashes*, 24. While this generation was the same as the one their parents belonged to, there were really two different groups. The first included those Polish Jews who remained involved in organized Jewish life, many of whom had grown up in traditional Jewish homes, speaking Yiddish, and subsequently spoke with a Yiddish accent. The second group, comprised of the parents of the “March ’68 Generation,” was part of this generation as well, though they had attempted to cut themselves off completely from Jewish life. Nevertheless, 1968 revealed their failure to do so.

25 Ibid., 24.
as the last Jews of Poland, choosing self-destruction rather than reaching out or educating the next generation.\textsuperscript{26} In fact, when asked in December 1981 about the group of young Jewish Poles who wanted to be more Jewish and have a stronger Jewish identity, Mozes Finkelstein, head of the Congregation, claimed that only two such young people had come to speak with him, and that he had encouraged them to come to the community seder.\textsuperscript{27} Given the timing of the meeting, about two weeks after General Wojciech Jaruzelski declared martial law, it is hardly surprising that Finkelstein denied the presence of this group, as they had ties to the opposition.\textsuperscript{28} Yet, he knew of their existence. Almost a year before, in January 1981, Jerzy Kornacki, a member of the Congregation executive who was not Jewish, mentioned the group during a meeting in Vienna with Finkelstein and the Joint’s Ralph Goldman. According to Goldman’s memo of the meeting:

> The more interesting comments were made by Mr. Kornacki … He told us of a Jewish ‘flying university’—a Jewish illegal organization which wanted to be helpful to the Jewish community; Mr. Kornacki put them to work in moving some 2,000 books from a synagogue while it was being rebuilt. About two years ago he was visited by a group of Jewish students—nine boys and five girls between the ages of 20 and 26 – who were seeking their Jewish identity.\textsuperscript{29}

The fact that Kornacki, not Finkelstein, mentioned the group and seemed to understand their significance reveals the tension between these young Jews and the official Jewish establishment. Goldman’s notes do not include any comments from Finkelstein, so it is not clear whether he said anything about the group. In I Seek Their Brethren: Ralph Goldman and ”The Joint,” Tom Shachtman writes that the Joint did not meet with the group because the Joint’s policy was to

\textsuperscript{26} This was, at least, the assessment of the Jewish Flying University leaders.

\textsuperscript{27} World Jewish Congress Meeting with Mozes Finkelstein, December 29, 1981, “Poland, General, 1981,” JDCA.

\textsuperscript{28} Irwin-Zarecka writes that because the young Jews were associated with the democratic opposition, their attempts to revitalize Jewishness could potentially challenge the state’s control over the Jewish organizations and institutions, and thus threaten the Jewish community; Neutralizing Memory, 76. At the moment Jaruzelski declared martial law, he held a number of positions, including Minister of Defense, Premier, and First Secretary of the PZPR.

\textsuperscript{29} Ralph I. Goldman—Memo for the files, January 19, 1981, “Poland, General 1981,” JDCA.
only meet with groups recognized by the government. Akiva Kohane, a Joint official based in Geneva, believed that association with the group could jeopardize the Joint’s relationship with the authorities. Nevertheless, Goldman was, “Attracted by their youth and by their insistence on being perceived as Jewish in a society where burying that identity was still the route to success, and he lamented that they couldn’t reach out to them.”

These tensions aside, neither of the existing Jewish organizations could provide what the young Jews wanted or needed. The Party supported the TSKŻ, and its active members celebrated communist events like May Day rather than Jewish holidays. As products of the prewar heder, the mostly elderly Congregation active members conducted services in Hebrew, with no explanations. These men simply did not know how to teach the rituals, as they often did not understand the reasons or meanings themselves. Thus, the young Jews, unfamiliar with religious services and rituals, found this option unattractive, at least until they became more comfortable with religious practices later. Even then, however, Krajewski said that he never fully felt comfortable there.

Beyond the confines of the few Jewish organizations and institutions, sparse reminders of Jewish life existed beyond the TSKŻ and the Congregation by the early 1970s. In fact, public

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31 Stanisław Krajewski and Monika Krajewska, in discussion with the author, November 2011. The heder approach included rote memorization, with little to no explanation provided.

32 Gebert, *Land of Ashes*, 24–5. Once they felt more comfortable, some frequented the synagogue more often, particularly on holidays.

33 Krajewski said in the early 1980s, “To the degree that we go for the major holidays and I have even got used to that style and come to like it. But it’s still not wholly my place, because that atmosphere that prevails among those old people is—how should I put it?—terminal, as if something is coming to an end, and I am exactly at the other stage.” Niezabitowska, *Remnants*, 90.
expressions of Jewish culture and history became taboo after 1968. Michael C. Steinlauf wrote that:

After the anti-Zionist campaign of the late 1960s, a profound and nearly universal silence descended on the ‘Jewish question.’ The subject of Jews, indeed the very word, was avoided in public discourse; silence even commonly reigned in private conversation among intimates.34

Rysia Zachariasz described the markedly changed atmosphere in the post-’68 years:

It was sad because the atmosphere, although the campaign had finished, [was] a totally different atmosphere in Poland towards Jews that you could feel on the ground. First of all the word ‘Jew’ or things Jewish weren’t spoken in this period. And you felt it. Like you didn’t exist in this period. It wasn’t dangerous in the sense that something would happen to me, but that people might not like that I’m Jewish or whatever. Generally there was a sense that it wasn’t a good thing. Poles began to think that the word ‘Jew’ was something you couldn’t say loudly.35

Within a few years, however, some Poles attempted to recover Poland’s Jewish past. Steinlauf wrote of the early- to mid-1970s that, “here and there in the circles of the emerging opposition, there were signs of an entirely new approach to the ‘Jewish question’ and everything connected to it.”36 The Club of Catholic Intellectuals (Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej, or KIK) became heavily involved in this new approach. In addition to organizing projects to clean and restore Jewish cemeteries, beginning in the early 1970s KIK members organized an annual Week of Jewish Culture, featuring lectures and films of Jewish interest.

While investigating and promoting taboo topics comprised an undoubtedly creative form of opposition to the communist system, why did this Catholic group choose to study Judaism and Jewish culture? For many of these intellectuals, Poland’s ethnic and religious diversity reflected the true Polish culture and society. The demographic impact of World War II and population

34 Steinlauf, Bondage to the Dead, 93.
35 Ryszarda (Rysia) Zachariasz, in discussion with the author, August 2013.
36 Steinlauf, Bondage to the Dead, 93.
transfers in the immediate postwar period turned the heterogeneous Poland into a homogenous nation-state, and communism imposed a strong, Moscow-based centralized government onto Polish society and culture. Members of the opposition viewed these demographic and political changes with disdain. Gebert explained that “since the last time there had been a genuine Poland it was a Poland with the Jews, then we were the stamp of kashrut of Polishness.”³⁷ Krajewski reiterated that the absence of Jews stirred up the interest in things Jewish, noting, “Jews represented the diversity better than anyone else. Especially the absent Jews.”³⁸ Thus, to some extent, the intellectuals conveyed a form of nostalgia for prewar Poland’s diverse population. Yet more significantly, the opposition used Jewishness to demonstrate how they understood genuine Polish society and culture, in contrast to how it existed under communist rule.³⁹

Krajewski described KIK’s activities as an attempt to revive the memory of the pre-war Jews and their tragic end. Thus, he explained, they focused on the past. In March 1973, for example, KIK’s historical section organized a meeting before the thirtieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising to discuss Home Army soldier Kazimierz Moczarski’s account of Jürgen Stroop’s actions during the ghetto liquidation.⁴⁰ The following month they held another meeting to discuss “life and struggle in the Warsaw Ghetto in the reminiscences of Władysław

³⁷ Gebert, discussion. Gebert’s language, interspersed with Hebrew and Yiddish terms, indicates his strong Jewish identity today. He likely would not have used such terms, at least initially, to describe these experiences and ideas at the time.

³⁸ Krajewski and Krajewska, discussion. Steinlauf writes that because of the absence of Jews, the next generation could help reinvent the Jewish past, and that their “Jewish quest was profoundly Polish, for it was an integral part of the larger movement to regain the Polish past.” Steinlauf, Bondage to the Dead, 94.

³⁹ For more on the non-Jewish interest in things Jewish, see Irwin-Zarecka, Neutralizing Memory, 83–96.

⁴⁰ Otwarte Zebrania Sekcyjne, February 19, 1973, Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej (KIK) collection, Folder 19, AAN. Stroop ordered the Warsaw Ghetto to be burned and was the author of the infamous “Stroop Report.” His conversations with Moczarski, a member of the Polish Home Army, while sharing a prison cell in Warsaw led to Moczarski’s publication of Rozmowy z katem (Warsaw: Panstwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1977).
Despite the presence of a small, but still living, Jewish community in Warsaw, the Week of Jewish Culture organizers saw Polish Jewish culture and history as precisely that—history. Activities and conversations focused on the Jewish past, with no mention of the Jewish present, let alone possibilities of a Jewish future. Yet, this non-Jewish interest in things Jewish inspired and ultimately helped create a safe space within the Polish public sphere for the exploration of Jewishness. Krajewski explained that he and others participated in KIK, and that these activities provided a foundation upon which their future learning could be built.

In addition to KIK, by the early 1980s, one could observe a change in attitude towards Jewishness in Poland, particularly in Catholic journals, such as Więź and Znak, as well as in the widely-circulated underground press. The government’s commitment to the fourtieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising commemoration enabled discussions on Jewish topics to reach the public through such publications. The opening of dialogue about Jewish things beyond Jewish circles undoubtedly created an atmosphere in which exploration of one’s Jewishness became increasingly acceptable and welcome. Krajewski viewed both KIK and the later publications as achievements in terms of opening the dialogue about Judaism and Jewishness after 1968.

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41 Program zebrań i spotkań klubowych na m-c czerwiec 1973 r, May 19, 1973, KIK, Folder 19, AAN. Bartoszewski was a member of the Polish underground and of Żegota, the underground Polish Council to Aid Jews, during World War II.

42 Więź and Znak are Catholic journals that have been published since the late 1950s. This change in attitude was particularly evident in the spring of 1983 when the government was also interested in promoting discussion about Jewishness in conjunction with the fourtieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Commemoration. Even before then there was a sense that Jewish issues could be discussed within the intellectual milieu. For example, Krajewski, under his pen name Abel Kainer, wrote an essay on the controversial topic of Jews and Communism for Krytyka in 1980, though it was not published until early 1983 before the Ghetto Commemoration (For a translation of this essay, see Abel Kainer [Stanisław Krajewski], “Jews and Communism,” in From the Polish Underground: Selections from Krytyka, 1978-1993, ed. Michael Bernhard (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 353-394).

43 Krajewski, Poland and the Jews, 209.
KIK’s Week of Jewish Culture was one of the early initiatives in the 1970s to revive an interest in Jewish culture and history, but by the late 1970s, a Jewish group interested in exploring the Jewish past began to meet. According to Jewish Flying University leaders, it was American psychologist Carl Rogers’s visit to Poland in September 1979 to lead a therapy workshop that triggered the group’s formation. Polish psychologists and professionals participated in the workshop, and following a session in which they broke into special interest groups, someone suggested that they create a Jewish group. Gebert wrote in his memoir:

Though many participants were Jewish, this proposal was met with laughter. Even in the relaxed and trusting atmosphere of the workshop, where people told each other their most intimate secrets and underground literature circulated freely, it seemed absurd and threatening to discuss one’s Jewishness in public. And yet the room set aside for the Jewish group was packed full of people for its first session. I still remember the emotion I felt at discovering that so many of my friends were Jewish. We had never discussed it; it was a guilty secret best kept in private.⁴⁴

Zachariasz also attended the workshop and remembered that approximately ten participants identified themselves as having Jewish roots during the workshop, and as they stood in the courtyard preparing to go back to Warsaw, a couple of the participants began singing a Hebrew song that they knew.⁴⁵ Within a few moments, others joined in the singing.⁴⁶ En route to Warsaw, they decided that they would create a forum open to both Jews and non-Jews.⁴⁷

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⁴⁴ Gebert, Land of Ashes, 5.

⁴⁵ There is a slight disagreement in terms of when the group came together. Gebert remembers that a room was set aside for the Jewish group, while Zachariasz remembers “vividly” that the Jewish group came together only on the last day when, after the workshop ended, one participant talked with Gebert as they were preparing to leave the workshop about how he had had trouble discussing the problem of being Jewish in the small group session he had just attended. The participants gave Rogers a book with messages thanking him for the experience. Gebert’s message on the first page of the book was a hasidic tale (with no explanation or context for why he wrote it). Assuming that they wrote these messages while the workshop was still going on, it seems as though something Jewish emerged earlier than the last day (Untitled Book, undated, Carl Rogers Collection, box 99, folder 6, United States Library of Congress).

⁴⁶ Zachariasz, discussion. She could not remember the exact song, but said that it was something commonly known, like Hava Nagila, and within five minutes, everyone around them was singing.

⁴⁷ Zachariasz, discussion.
The energy boost they received from the workshop stimulated a therapeutic journey that lasted for several years, until Jaruzelski declared martial law in December 1981. Meeting in private homes every other week, “flying from apartment to apartment,” as Krajewski described it, they called themselves the Jewish Flying University. Krajewski recalled that “it was almost an accident that we started to do things together and this American conference was the trigger. But the number was small and it wasn’t clear we could do anything.” The group, averaging about fifteen to thirty Jewish and non-Jewish men and women per meeting, began what would become a two-phase identity-building project. The first phase allowed the group to deal with the psychological aspect of exploring Jewishness in a society where Jewishness held such a stigma. The second phase provided them the opportunity to explore and begin to understand precisely what this Jewishness meant. Largely comprised of Warsaw intellectuals in their twenties and thirties, the group drew its participants due to the “Jewish fashion that was the rage of the Warsaw intelligentsia at that time.” Reflecting years later on the participants, Gebert wrote:

At first glance, the similarities among us seem more striking than the differences. For all those involved, Jewishness was first and foremost a psychological problem: a stigma of ‘alienness’ and lesser worth, imposed on us through no act of our own and against our will. Second, our homes had typically given us no Jewish background at all, and sometimes had even concealed the truth of our ethnic origin. Thirdly, having lived with our Jewishness for years, we had in a way made our peace with the fact that it had become part of us. What we wanted was to be able to

48 Gebert said that by this point the Jewish Flying University’s activities had already begun to fizzle as a result of participants channeling their energy into the Solidarity Movement. The limits imposed by martial law forced their meetings to end altogether. Gebert, discussion. Irwin-Zarecka writes that they intended to meet to discuss the group’s future, but that never happened. Neutralizing Memory, 81.

49 Krajewski and Krajewska, discussion.

50 Ibid.

51 They all speak of two different phases, though arguably there was, as I discuss below, a third phase as well.

52 Gebert, Land of Ashes, 25.
make sense of that experience, to be prepared to cope with the dangers it entailed, and possibly to transform it into something more positive.53

While Gebert claimed that the participants had “in a way made [their] peace” with their Jewishness, they continued to come to terms with it during their initial meetings. The first phase of the Jewish Flying University was psychological, as all the leaders spoke of the need to deal with one’s Jewishness. Both Krajewski and Gebert said that they experienced a period of intense identity crisis in the decade between the outbreak of the anti-Zionist campaign and the formation of the Jewish Flying University. Krajewski described his initial ambivalence:

I suppressed it forcibly. Jewishness had been thrust upon me, and I felt a need to push free of it. At a certain moment, I even disliked Jews. Well, I wasn’t an anti-Semite… I experienced my Jewishness as a hunchback feels his hump. Thus there was something in myself that I strongly disliked. After all, it is possible not to accept oneself, even to hate oneself, and also to hate those who remind me by their very existence that I am a Jew. I went through convulsive changes. I was happy to discover that those excellent people I admired were Jews, and so many of them were Nobel Prize winners. I remember how incredibly eagerly I leafed through the bibliographies of serious works of philosophy and how I latched with great satisfaction onto the large number of Jewish names. Or, again, how I walked along Krupówki shortly after March with a friend and a bully coming in the other direction said, “You, kike!” We argued about who he said it to and each of us insisted that he was the one. So there was shame, and also pride. Except that there was more shame.54

Krajewski’s spiritual journey in that decade led him first to Eastern religions, a common generational experience, he says, and then to Catholicism.55 Yet, after what he described as a difficult path, he “arrived at Judaism.”56 His use of the word “arrived” is telling, in that it shows that despite his Jewish origins, he never felt compelled to embrace his heritage; his involvement

53 Ibid., 23.

54 Niezabitowska, Remnants, 84–5.

55 Ibid., 86. While Krajewski claimed that this was a typical generational experience, it is unclear just how representative the experience was.

56 Ibid., 86–7.
in the Jewish Flying University was far from inevitable, perhaps, given the shame he felt. Gebert, too, explored Eastern religions. Yet, he also arrived at Judaism, thanks to an American cousin with whom he observed the first Shabbat of his life during a visit to the United States. Describing that experience, he admitted, “I immediately felt at home.”\(^5^7\) The time between 1968 and the emergence of the Jewish Flying University proved crucial for the eventual acceptance of one’s Jewish roots that had only recently come to hold any meaning.

Yet, Gebert, Krajewski, and Zachariasz all agreed that they still needed to fully come to terms with their Jewishness, and the therapeutic approach of discussing these issues aloud helped. Gebert explained:

> It was therapeutic just to say I’m Jewish. It was therapeutic to tell your most painful *tsuris* [troubles] and have a group of people nod their heads, bored…. You can’t imagine how liberating it was. Slightly humiliating also. But it’s a package deal and it’s well worth it. It really disabuses you of the trauma and gives you a nice injection of irony, which is a lifesaver. The very being around each other, look, we all more or less had the feeling that we were the last Jew in Poland. We also knew the Jews are terribly dangerous. And that we are not really the way Jews are. We’re an imperfect version. But then if you see thirty imperfect versions mulling around and they all look by and large like you, so a) no, I’m not the last Jew and b) maybe this Jewish thing isn’t Mt. Everest… It’s so small. So in a way, being Jewish loomed dangerous and huge. And we certainly were not the right realization of the idea. But then you rub shoulders with people and realize that there are Jews like me. No biggie. Trauma—no biggie. Being Jewish—no biggie. It re-dimensions itself…. We didn’t have anything structured as therapeutic, although if I remember correctly in the first two or three meetings we kept on the model of hot seat and telling your woes to the world.\(^5^8\)

Krajewski recalled similar feelings. Though each individual had to come to terms with their Jewishness alone, Krajewski pointed to the common questions they all asked, such as “Am I

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\(^{57}\) Ibid., 94. Gebert does not elaborate on this point, so precisely what made him “feel at home”—the religious ritual, his cousin’s openness and comfort with Judaism, etc.—is unclear.

\(^{58}\) Gebert, discussion.
“Jewish?” and “What does it mean?” Discussing the importance of those initial meetings, Krajewski said:

It was such a taboo and nobody was discussing that and we didn’t have any opportunity to talk about that elsewhere, including in our homes. The homes differed—there were very Jewish homes like Rysia Zachariasz’s…others were minimally or partly Jewish. Despite those differences, all of us had very little education or opportunities to discuss Jewishness. To all of us Jewishness was something mysterious and something threatening.  

Krajewski continued, “What was needed was to be able to speak the word ‘Jew’ without a special tension, in a more or less natural tone of voice. It had not been possible for us.”

Only when people felt comfortable saying the word “Jew,” or claiming one’s Jewish roots, could he or she begin to examine what that meant, and thus the group transitioned into a second phase; this one more exploratory than therapeutic. Zachariasz recalled the shift occurring after about four meetings. She said, “After those first meetings where we were talking about our feelings…we decided that we knew nothing and we wanted to learn. From then on, people started to look for someone to invite who could tell us something, teach us something.”

However, few in Poland had the knowledge or willingness to do so. Amongst the elderly Jews who remained there after the anti-Zionist campaign, few were practicing or religious Jews, and the deep generational clash between the Jewish Flying University participants and those active in formal Jewish organizations prevented any substantial cooperation. Thus, they had no choice but to learn on their own.

Even though they did not know much, the group’s leaders had at least a rudimentary knowledge of some elements of Jewishness. Gebert had amassed a collection of books from

59 Krajewski and Krajewska, discussion.
60 Ibid.
61 Zachariasz, discussion.
which he learned. Krajewski and Krajewska also studied on their own. Krajewska did not have Jewish roots, although she would convert to Judaism in 1984 while they were in the United States. Despite not being born Jewish, however, she was actively involved in learning about Jewish culture and spent time photographing Jewish cemeteries throughout Poland. Krajewski often joined her, and her interest in Judaism and Jewishness played a major role in Krajewski’s exploration of his roots. In fact, Krajewski said that she was the first person in his life who could “pronounce the word ‘Jew’ in a completely normal tone of voice.” They studied Hebrew and basic Judaism in order to understand tombstones, and both recalled that they learned a great deal from their interactions with foreign Jewish tourists whom they met in the cemeteries. The pair then passed their knowledge onto others. Amongst the leaders, Zachariasz had come from the “most” Jewish family. While her parents spoke, read, and sang in Yiddish, she did not know Yiddish, nor did she know anything about the Jewish religion.

Faced with a lack of teaching materials and appropriate teachers, the group improvised when it came to educating one another. Even with their own quite limited knowledge about Judaism and Jewish culture, the group’s members taught each other whatever they knew or managed to learn. When asked about the lectures held at their bi-monthly meetings, Gebert replied:

The formula was more or less the same. Somebody would give a lecture on something he or she thought he or she knows something about. It could be Geremek [a historian], but it could be yours truly discussing Maimonides knowing zilch. But who was going to tell me I’m wrong, right? Everyone is just as ignorant as I am. And I read somewhere—or I think I read somewhere—an article that said something so I’m the expert…. Also, somebody else would describe kibbutzim, somebody who once at age ten had visited a kibbutz in the early 60s. I’m not making this up. This was the level of expertise.

62 Niezabitowska, Remnants, 89.
63 Krajewski and Krajewska, discussion.
64 Gebert, discussion.
Niezabitowska’s interviews with Krajewski and Gebert reveal the mixture of historical, literary, religious, and psychological topics that they discussed:

The Sephardim, the Frankists, the Chassidim, the problem of assimilation, the Thirteen Articles of Faith, the Chosen People of the Bible, Jewish holidays, kibbutzim, the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, Freud, Kafka, and Jewish mysticism, the symbolism of wine and light in the Shabbat, the Łódź ghetto.65

Although they did not keep a comprehensive list of topics they explored together, this short list reveals their desire to understand the multifaceted nature of Jewishness.

The emergence of a public sphere in Poland at the time allowed the group to meet to discuss topics that the general public still considered taboo. Gebert stressed that they were not an underground group meeting in secret:

We would know the core [participants] and then we would know some of the external group, but they usually were kind of vaguely introduced. A total stranger who just came in from the street would have raised some eyebrows, but basically it was enough to say they knew so-and-so. There was absolutely nothing secret or confidential. We even at a certain moment wondered about advertising. Not in the papers, of course, but putting information leaflets at the university or something. But we decided against it for practical matters. If more people come, where will we squeeze them in?66

Although Gebert emphasized the group’s openness, the fact that they chose not to record anything reveals a sense of caution, perhaps more about the topic than the activity itself. Indeed, the subject, not the activity, made their meetings nothing short of subversive.67 Even in the semi-private spaces of their homes, exploring one’s Jewishness was, depending on the home, provocative. Gebert said:

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65 Niezabitowska, Remnants, 95.

66 Ibid.

67 Given that the activity was not subversive, it is therefore not so surprising that I did not find any evidence of the group in the Polish Security Services (Służba Bezpieczeństwa) collection at the Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, or IPN) in Warsaw.
Studying Jews was almost as sure to aggravate your parents as it would aggravate the dean of the faculty and the Party Secretary and certainly the parish priest. I mean, look, you can say ‘fuck’ at your parents’ dinner table as many times as you wanted and nobody would notice. You said ‘Jew’ and the conversation drops dead. Now imagine being, say, seventeen, and having that power, right?  

This power, combined with a general sense of chutzpah, as Gebert put it, fueled their involvement and further highlighted the generational clash occurring at the time. Most of their parents chose not to participate in Jewish life in Poland, thereby disrupting the traditional Jewish approach of passing Jewish tradition from one generation to the next. The Jewish Flying University participants tried to reclaim what would have traditionally been their birthright almost anywhere else in the world.

Gebert remembered their youthful rebelliousness:

So there was also a kind of total youthful chutzpah. Nobody had been where we had been, okay, we’re inventing it all. Nobody had sex until we had sex. This kind of stuff. And actually, the one feature of this all that I, at least, did not completely see coming was that we were witnessing the rebirth of the Jewish community.  

Indeed, participants lived in the moment, taking advantage of the more liberal atmosphere. Gebert continued, “It was exciting, it was fun, interesting, spiritually stimulating…. We weren’t, or at least I wasn’t, that self-aware. And I think it was very much part and parcel of the general climate of intellectual dissidence, non-conformism.” They did not, at least initially, view their activities as the beginnings of a Jewish community, or even an alternative Jewish community. Although now one can trace strands of the new Polish Jewishness that thrives in Poland today to

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68 Gebert, discussion. In her latest book, historian Marci Shore recalls literary scholar Irena Grudzińska telling Shore that Gebert’s sister once said to her “Kostek is doing it again, hassling our mother, but this time, it’s even worse.” When Grudzińska asked what he was doing, Gebert’s sister replied, “Saying he’s Jewish!” See Marci Shore, *The Taste of Ashes: The Afterlife of Totalitarianism in Eastern Europe* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2013), 305.

69 Gebert, discussion. All four of the leaders reiterated this point in their interviews.

70 Ibid.
the “March ’68 Generation,” at the time they focused only on their need to learn about Jewishness. Gebert explains that realistically, they understood the impossibility, given the demographics, of a collective Jewish future in Poland. They believed that individual Jews could have an individual future, but not in terms of a collective Polish Jewish identity.71

Yet, even an individual Jewish identity required a level of knowledge that few of the Jewish Flying University participants had. Without proximate role models to whom they could turn, the group turned elsewhere for instruction.

Gebert expressed the necessity of such guidance:

My eldest son was born and [a Canadian] woman asked if he was circumcised and my jaw dropped because that never even occurred to me to ask myself that question. And she started chewing me out—what kind of Jew are you? ...I felt horribly embarrassed because it is true that there was no possibility for a brit milah at that time but it was also true that at that time the idea never crossed my mind. And yes, I felt that she was getting on me about the kind of Jew I am that I didn’t even think about the idea of circumcising my eldest son, right? ...What we were doing was grafting on ourselves a new identity without knowing how to do it, without knowing what is it supposed to produce. Without anybody to guide us through the process. We weren’t exactly the first people to do this. But we had no patterns, no role models, we didn’t know how to do it. At that point, a Pole wouldn’t think about circumcising his son. That’s why it never occurred to me. And I was horribly ashamed of myself that I, who considered myself a Jew, didn’t have the natural Jewish reaction.72

Mirroring what Polish writer Adam Zagajewski has identified as the Central European turn to the West in an attempt to understand and embrace their perception of Western values, the “March ’68 Generation” also turned westward with the hope of understanding Judaism and Jewishness.73 Irwin-Zarecka compared the Polish experience to similar developments in the

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71 Gebert, Land of Ashes, 22–23.

72 Gebert, discussion.

West, in that they focused on “make-shift ritual, philosophy readings, interest in history—these are all common expressions of a reawakened Jewish consciousness.”

Thus, their experience should be placed within the larger context of global Jewish identity-building projects occurring at that time, most notably, the emergence of Jewish countercultures. While such countercultures developed around the world, the American Jewish counterculture provided the model that Gebert and the others wanted and needed in order to understand this new identity that they tried to graft on themselves.

One of Gebert’s first models was the cousin he spent that first Shabbat with in San Francisco in 1971. Recalling that trip and his cousin’s impact on his understanding of Judaism, Gebert said:

> We read the same books, liked the same music, told the same jokes…they were baalei teshuvah [Jews who become more religious] Haight-Ashbury style—very frum [religious] and very relaxed at the same time. This helped me immensely. I spent my first Shabbat with them and realized it wasn’t Mt. Everest. Regular human beings do it. And I bought my first batch of Jewish books with them.

And then they came to Europe in ‘76 and…we met again, and again we went to a bookstore and picked out books for me…. I had this set of a reasonable Jewish library, the stuff that the émigrés of ‘68 couldn’t take with them, but there wasn’t religious stuff.

Gebert’s emphasis on lifestyle similarities suggests why the American Jewish counterculture served as such an important and translatable model. Jack Nusan Porter and Peter Dreier, two of the leading intellectuals of the American Jewish counterculture, insisted that without acceptable Jewish alternatives, participants of the counterculture “have had to create their own. They have

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74 Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory*, 77. Having done research in France, Irwin-Zarecka seems to have France as her main point of reference when discussing the Polish experience. She also notes that there are two major exceptions when it comes to the similar forms of identity construction: the roles that Israel and the Holocaust play in this formation.

75 Gebert, discussion.
rejected the prevailing Jewish lifestyle without rejecting Judaism and Jewish culture.”

Similarly, in Poland, young Jews meeting in the late 1970s did not reject Judaism or Jewish culture (neither of which they really understood), but rather the particular expressions of Jewishness (or lack thereof) that their parents and grandparents adopted in the post-war period. They, like their American counterparts, created their own understanding of Jewishness through the Jewish Flying University. They participated in their own Polish “creative Jewing,” project, which “translate[d] the ethnic and religious distinctiveness of the Jewish experience into current relevance.”

Given these similarities, the Jewish Flying Universities used some of the tools and models created and used by young American Jews. The havurah, for example, which emphasized learning together in a more informal setting and creating a sense of community while allowing for individual explorations of Judaism, in many ways paralleled the Jewish Flying University, particularly when they began to hold holiday celebrations, such as the Passover Seder. Jewish Flying University participants also created an informal, exploratory environment for learning about Jewishness. Although they never imagined that they would form any kind of cohesive Jewish community, the collective element was nevertheless key, according to Gebert. He wrote, “The process of maturation had been a collective one, in which experiences were shared, insights developed together, knowledge passed around. Indeed, the fact that none of us had to face things alone anymore was more important than anything else.”


77 Ibid., xli.

78 Ibid. xliii.

American books constituted another essential resource for the group. While, as Gebert noted, some books had been left behind by those who emigrated after 1968, the books did not explain Judaism or ritual. Zachariasz recalled that books from America, left by foreign Jews visiting Poland or sent from abroad, were crucial in satisfying the group’s desire to learn. She said:

I don’t know how it happened, but somehow Americans started to learn about us and they came with books or sent us books so we started to learn from those books and prepare our own lectures from those books. And of course, from time to time, we talked about feelings and stuff, but mostly we felt a need to fill the void.  

When asked from whom he learned religious observances, Krajewski responded, “Nobody. We taught ourselves from American books.”

While some books came from individuals they had met, or who had heard of the group, others arrived from American Jewish organizations. In a letter to the American Jewish Committee representative in Paris, the Krajewskis requested materials concerning Jewish symbols, art, and cemetery symbols; books by Eli Wiesel, Salo Baron, and Julius Guttmann; books on Jewish mysticism and kabbalah; Jewish-Christian relations and dialogue; Polish Jews, Polish-Jewish relations, new currents in Jewish life and religion; and an English-Hebrew dictionary, “or perhaps a Polish-Hebrew dictionary.” Their request for “anything on psychology and problems of being Jewish,” attests to some of the issues they grappled with. The book list

80 Zachariasz, discussion.
81 Niezabitowska, Remnants, 91.
82 Staszek (Stanisław) Krajewski to Nives Fox, American Jewish Committee Collection, Box 14, folder “Poland,” YIVO archive. The letter was undated, but a follow-up letter dated July 28, 1980 thanks Fox for the dictionary. Yet another package of books was sent around Christmas in 1980 with the hope that “it might be safe at that time and the ‘Good Catholic Custom Gentleman’ would be more lenient with gifts from outside.” It was a common practice for Jews traveling to the Soviet Union to take books and other religious items with them to leave with the local Jews, so presumably individuals brought books to Poland as well. Michael Schudrich, the current Chief Rabbi of Poland, mentions in his personal journal leaving ritual items with individuals in Hungary and Poland during his 1979 visit, though he does not mention books. See Michael Schudrich, Personal Journal, (unpublished, 1979). While they stress the Jewish Catalog’s instrumentality, it is important to note that this was a Western text. Young Poles viewed such
also highlights the group’s desire to learn about Jewish culture, as well as traditional Judaism and Jewish ritual.

Gebert, the Krajewskis, and Zachariasz all agreed that the 1973 *Jewish Catalog*, a popular American “how-to” guide for “who, what, when, where, and why” ranked as one of the most instrumental texts for the group.\(^{83}\) While historians of the American Jewish experience have documented how this volume “helped to transform the Jewish counterculture into an influential mass movement,” the enormous impact of the *Catalog* on young Jews in Poland shows how its influence transcended geographical borders.\(^{84}\) Jews visiting the Eastern Bloc brought—or in many cases smuggled in—copies of the book to leave with young Jews, and thus the guide, although created for American Jews with access to resources and experts that were unavailable in places like Eastern Europe, became a vital source for young Jews in the region hoping to learn more about Jewish culture and religion.\(^{85}\)

In a review he wrote of the *Catalog* in a Catholic monthly, Krajewski explained that the Jewish counterculture in America allowed Judaism and Jewish life to persist and adapt itself to modern situations in ways unknown in Poland. He recalled:

> items at the time as “symbols of free expression.” While Fidelis focuses on the 1960s, this attitude continued into the next decades. Fidelis, “Red State,” 149.


\(^{85}\) The book’s focus on the American-Jewish experience could be a source of frustration. Susan Glanz, a Hungarian Jew who grew up at this time, described her own encounter with the text as somewhat frustrating because articles suggested that readers speak with a rabbi for more information. Discussion with Susan Glanz in Gainesville, Florida, March 2010. When I asked Gebert if he felt the same frustration, he responded, “It was one of those incredible things they have in America—they can consult a rabbi, free elections, fly to the moon. Part and parcel of the same impossibility. Yes, we did think in an abstract way—so what happens if you have a rabbi. We drew up long lists of questions to ask.” Gebert, discussion.
In the ‘70s our idea was that Jewishness was something happening before the war and perhaps some people still continue it, but it was imitating prewar ways…. It [the Catalog] meant that it could be relevant to our lives as we were and our modernity as we understood it. It was a bit alternative culture, hippie culture, and that was something that to us meant a lot.86

Gebert stressed the Catalog’s importance in his own identity formation:

I loved The Jewish Catalog. It took me some time to realize how non-normative it is. I actually thought this was the Jewishness. But I loved it. I loved the irreverence, I loved the respect for tradition. It was a mixture that I felt very much at home with and I was grateful that somebody out there had taken the time to produce the catalog for me. I was grateful. But at the same time, I discovered that what I had to say about spiritual endeavors actually was meaningful.87

According to Zachariasz, “It was very, very helpful. We learned most of the things from that. It was written very nicely in a simple way so everybody could learn.”88 Thus, The Jewish Catalog served as the definitive reference guide, making Judaism accessible for the Jewish Flying University participants who lacked a strong Jewish background or access to resources.

In addition to books, Jewish Flying University participants had contact with young American Jews visiting Poland. This interaction served as a crucial source for information transmission. Krajewski said:

Our home became a non-official Jewish address that was passed from person to person. Michael Schudrich [the American-born current Chief Rabbi of Poland] came first. I’m not sure how the connection was made, but if somebody wanted to, he or she could find us.89

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86 Krajewski and Krajewska, discussion.

87 Gebert, discussion.

88 Zachariasz, discussion.

89 Krajewski and Krajewska, discussion. Schudrich began visiting Poland in the mid-1970s and continued to visit, eventually becoming the Lauder Foundation’s rabbi in Warsaw before becoming the Chief Rabbi in 2004. Schudrich wrote in his journal from his summer 1979 visit to Poland that he visited the Krajewskis on two occasions and that he encouraged other Americans he encountered to visit them as well (Schudrich, personal journal).
Another important early contact for the group was journalist Ruth Ellen Gruber. Krajewski recalled meeting her in the Nożyk synagogue on Yom Kippur in 1980. Gruber had come to look for the “real” Jews of Poland. Yet, to them, she was the “real” Jew.

Gruber wrote of this encounter:

I was living in Warsaw at the time and vividly recall my first encounter with members of this group. It was at Kol Nidre services on the eve of Yom Kippur, in 1980, just three weeks after the Solidarity Union, represented by Lech Wałęsa, and the communist government signed the historic agreement in Gdańsk that allowed the formation of Solidarity as the East Bloc’s first legal free trade union. There were only a few people my age in the congregation. Three of them talked to me eagerly after services and took me home to continue the conversation. ‘You’re a real Jew,’ one of them told me. ‘You can tell us how to do things.’

Interactions with American Jews such as Gruber offered these Polish Jews an important model for how to be Jewish, and perhaps even more importantly, how to be both Jewish and American, and therefore indirectly, Jewish and Polish in the 1970s. Krajewski wrote of Gruber, “It was a deep pleasure to see how similar we were despite the cultural differences.” Gebert highlighted the happiness he felt when he discovered the similarities between his own lifestyle and worldview and those of American Jews:

I went to study in the United Kingdom to undergo a group therapy process and there was this very pretty American woman who turned me down and said, you’re like all the other New York Jews. She thought it was rejection. I was levitating with happiness! I am it! And this is what the Jewish Flying University gave us. The realization that yes, we are it. Whatever it is. About that, we were arguing. But yes, we are it.

He also felt empowered by his connection to American Jews. He continued:

The American connection was fundamental in many ways. I’m pretty sure a number of people had the kind of personal experience I had, relatives, friends, whatever. But it was more than that. It was the feeling of well, we’re actually part

90 Gruber, *Upon the Doorposts*, 223.
92 Gebert, discussion.
...of something bigger and sexier…. I could [look at] the American tourists and this could be me. So somehow, someway there was an added value in having this belonging. 93

Thus, the knowledge about Judaism and Jewish culture that they obtained from American Jews proved essential but more importantly, perhaps, was the significance of belonging to something larger. After feeling isolated from both Polish Jews and non-Jews, the American Jewish counterculture gave him a sense of belonging.

It was also important for Polish Jews to realize that the American Jews they encountered might not be the “end-all and be-all of yiddishkeyt,” as Gebert phrased it. 94 Knowing that American Jews adapted Judaism to fit their lifestyles and that the religion and culture allowed for reinterpretation helped make the Jewish Flying University participants feel like their own experience did not differ much from the American Jewish one. In Gebert’s words, “Whatever the pattern of the Jewish identity of the ‘new’ Jews, however, it is built around a solidarity with religion, tradition, culture, history, nation, and state.” 95 Just as Jews worldwide identify with Jewishness in a variety of ways—religiously, ethnically, culturally, etc., Jewish Flying University participants also found ways to identify with Jewishness in ways that worked for them as individuals. Gebert pointed out that most participants remained “Poles of Jewish origin,” not changing their identities dramatically, but choosing to do so with more knowledge and comfort with their Jewishness. 96

93 Ibid. Although this is beyond the scope of this chapter, the idea that the members of the Jewish Flying University belonged to something much larger raises a point that Gebert writes about, namely whether others viewed them as part of this larger Jewish community. Gebert opens his book with a story about a group of Israelis demanding to know why he still lived in Poland. There is a sentiment amongst Jews worldwide that Poland is nothing more than a Jewish cemetery and that Jewish life should not continue there. Although Gebert did not discuss this sentiment at that moment during the interview (he did later), it raises the question of how much this was a reciprocal sentiment.

94 Gebert, discussion.

95 Gebert, Land of Ashes, 26.

96 Ibid., 23.
For some, however, like Gebert, the Krajewskis, and Zachariasz, the Jewish Flying University had a profound impact on their lives. Although they created the Jewish Flying University to address their psychological and intellectual needs at that time, not as a way of creating a community, they inadvertently formed such a community. Without extended families with whom to celebrate holidays and Jewish events, a small group within the larger group set up “an alternative mishpocha [family] network.”97 Krajewski recalled:

Ritual opens up a certain sphere that otherwise cannot be discovered. This is why it is indispensable. I understood that long ago, but in the first place, I was a complete ignoramus and in the second, ritual requires a certain social dimension, even in a mini-society, and so only when we had gathered a group of people who were in a similar situation did we try. A more experienced friend led the Seder at our home. That started several of us going further in that direction. Kostek [Gebert] started Shabbats, and soon we did, too.98

This network ushered in perhaps a third phase of the Jewish Flying University, this one characterized by practice. The Krajewskis hosted the first group Seder in 1980. Coming together for holidays and Shabbat meals filled a critical void of Jewish discontinuity in the post-war period. They engaged in rituals that Jews worldwide continued to perform, but that their families had abandoned. Through this mishpocha network, Gebert wrote, their children received a basic Jewish education and, in fact, the network helped pave the way for the establishment of a Jewish kindergarten in Warsaw in the late 1980s.99 For both countercultures, in Poland and in the United States, the strong sense of community—and innovative continuity—provided the necessary foundation for their forays into Jewishness.

97 Ibid., 16.

98 Niezabitowska, 90–91. There is also a photo of thirteen participants at a Seder in their home on page 100.

99 Gebert, Land of Ashes, 16. The school’s success led to the establishment of the Lauder Morasha School, an elementary and middle school in Warsaw with about 200 children enrolled. For more on the Lauder Morasha School today, see https://lauderfoundation.com/gallery/warsaw-poland and http://www.taubephilanthropies.org/node/69.
While the involvement of American Jews in Poland might be construed as a form of cultural colonialism, with American Jewish notions of Judaism and Jewishness—as well as American Jewish money—imported into Poland, Gebert viewed this involvement positively. Continuing his description of the connection to American Jews, he said:

I, at least, was pretty quickly aware of it and I think others too, that we’re not poor relatives. We made this incredible American Jewry: It’s our successful export project. So I had a feeling when I was getting books back that this isn’t charity. Those guys owe me big time. We produced the whole thing that enabled them to bring books back. And also—this I didn’t realize at first—but I had it really hammered into me by a number of people that for them our spiritual experience was important. That we were discovering and fighting for things they took for granted. And that made them reevaluate and re-appreciate. It took some time for me to believe this and then I did. I said to myself okay, so this is a much more of a relationship of equals. It’s an honest give and take. Both sides profit. For me, this was important...also the fact that we were so much the opposite of what they expected to find. This also helped because it made us realize okay, those guys might not even be the end-all and be-all of yiddishkeyt.

He pointed out that much of American Jewish culture, though it had evolved significantly over the years, originated in Poland. Thus, to some extent the knowledge and books they received reflected more of a return or homecoming, rather than a completely foreign import into Poland, although this realization likely would have only come later as it depended on a certain level of historical knowledge. The Holocaust and communism nearly extinguished the rich pre-war, Polish Jewish culture, yet Jewish Flying University participants demonstrated that they could retrieve some elements of that destroyed heritage, albeit in a new form. Gebert’s view of the American Jews as a Polish “export project,” and that the Polish Jewish experience in the late 1970s and 1980s held some resonance with American Jews, supports Tony Michels’ contention that scholars should keep in mind the transnational nature of the modern Jewish experience.

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100 Gebert, discussion.

101 Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts*, 5. It is unclear at what point Gebert realized this, whether at the time or much later after much reflection.
For Michael Schudrich, the American-born current Chief Rabbi of Poland, these connections encouraged him to return to Poland multiple times in the 1970s and 80s. He recalled how the connection he made with members of the “March ‘68 Generation” while on a trip, during rabbinical school in 1979, influenced his decision to return to Poland in 1991 as an official community rabbi. He wrote in an essay entitled, “Giving Back to the Jewish People:”

The Jewish friends I made in Poland and other Eastern European countries had done nothing to “deserve” to grow up with no Jewish education or experience, just as nothing I had done had brought me the tremendous blessing of a Jewish day school education and a full, rich Jewish life. That gift was presented to me by decisions made by my grandparents and parents. I felt that the time had come for me to give something back. Yes, this is ironic, because before World War II, American rabbis would come to Warsaw to study Torah with the greatest Talmudic scholars of their time. This city was the heart of Jewish tradition. Now an American rabbi has to come here to help the Polish Jews.102

What Schudrich saw as a tragic irony was a source of pride for Gebert. Each recognized that they have given to, but also received from, the other community.103

About twenty-five years after the first Jewish Flying University meeting, Krajewski published a collection of essays entitled Poland and the Jews: Reflections of a Polish Polish Jew. In the introduction he wrote:

I am one of those deeply assimilated Poles of Jewish descent who have become deeply involved Jews. My development, paralleled by a number of other similar Poles, represents the reversal of an earlier story well-known from history. Whilst in the nineteenth century, and in the first half of the twentieth, more and more Jews assimilated into the majority culture, aspired to rootedness in it, and gave up their Jewish heritage, in the last two decades or so I and others like me have regained the Jewish identities and Jewish knowledge that our parents did not pass on to us.104


103 Ibid., 25.

104 Krajewski, Poland, 17.
He, along with the others, regained these identities and knowledge with the help of American conceptions of Judaism and Jewishness. The relative openness of the late 1970s in Poland, and particularly in Warsaw, allowed for and encouraged the exploration of Jewishness, while the American Jewish hyphenated identity provided an adaptable and attractive model for young Polish Jews who, at the very moment when ethnic identities gained strength in America, began to explore their own ethnic identity. Thus, the Jewish Flying University participants took part in both the local and global youth cultures, for which identity exploration and (re)construction was central. While Jews were not the only ones engaged in this youth culture, a particular Jewish strand developed in the West, which proved fortuitous for the young Poles. The transnational Jewish experience was a continuation of the pre-war back-and-forth cultural, religious, and intellectual exchange between European and American Jews.

The American Jewish influence gradually increased over time, with American rabbis, pedagogical experts, and organizations arriving in Poland in the late 1980s and early 1990s to help nurture Jewish life in the final communist and early post-communist years. These and earlier connections provided an important foundation for the young Polish Jews who were poised to take the reins of the post-communist Polish Jewish community in Warsaw. In 1997, the newly organized Warsaw religious community’s board included five members who had been born after World War II, a few of whom participated in or led the Jewish Flying University. Though unclear at the time, the group’s gatherings created the early foundation for one type of a new, post-communist Polish Jewishness. While both the TSKŻ and religious communities still exist today, both have changed as a new generation of leaders emerged. Additional avenues of

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Jewishness beyond these two organizations have also developed. Almost thirty-five years later, when asked if there was a sense at the time that they were creating a Polish Jewish counterculture, Zachariasz responded that there was not, for they had not created a culture, nor was there anything to counter.\footnote{Zachariasz, discussion.} Zachariasz’s response highlights their approach at the time to the “here and now.” They did not view the group’s activities as monumental. They simply hoped to come to terms with, and gain an understanding of, this Jewishness at a moment when there was a relatively open atmosphere in Poland, and particularly in Warsaw. They seized that particular moment in time when such exploration was possible, while unconsciously creating a small, but nevertheless significant Polish Jewish counterculture that would lay a major piece of the foundation for Jewish life in Poland after 1989. They had no reason to believe that communism would end, and that Jewish life would one day be free to grow in ways unthinkable at the time. Nevertheless, they created something new that could help expand into the thriving Jewishness—or, perhaps more accurately, given the diversity in Poland today, Jewishnesses—that exists today.
CHAPTER 8
EPILOGUE: RETHINKING ABSENCE IN POLAND

In October 2014, the long-awaited, highly anticipated Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews, or Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich, opened its doors to its core exhibition. The museum presents a narrative that is not well known to either of its target audiences: Polish and Jewish visitors. Intending to broaden the Polish historical narrative to include Jews, while also revealing to Jewish visitors to Poland more than a history of the Holocaust (which is why Jews are often drawn to Poland in the first place), the museum allows visitors to:

Encounter a Poland about which little is known and much misunderstood, a place that was one of the most diverse and tolerant in early modern Europe, a place where a Jewish minority was able to create a distinctive civilization while being part of a larger society.¹

The museum’s location in Muranów, a former Jewish neighborhood in Warsaw and what became the “heart” of the Warsaw Ghetto, was designated for the museum in 1994, twenty years before the core exhibition opened to the public. Roughly a decade later, in 2005, the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland, the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, and the City of Warsaw signed an agreement to establish the museum. The same year, an architectural competition was held for the museum’s design. Beginning in 2006, an academic team, comprised of scholars from Poland, Israel, and the United States, worked to create the seven gallery core exhibition. The project, from initial conception to reality, was monumental, and Poland itself changed tremendously over the period during which the museum evolved from just a dream. The plans for the museum evolved over time, as did its leadership. In addition to the logistics of the museum, and the monumental fundraising effort that it undertook (it is the

first project of this scale to be funded by both private and public funds), the museum sought to be all-encompassing. It planned to cover the entire period of Polish Jewish history, beginning with the 10th century and ending with a nod to the future of Polish Jewry. The final gallery, entitled “Postwar Years: 1944-to the present,” aims to challenge the perspective of the majority of Jewish tourists whose focus during their time in Poland is on death and the finality of Jewish life in Poland after the Holocaust. Despite the widespread assumption that Jewish life in Poland ended in Auschwitz, the gallery reveals that Jewish life in Poland continued after the liberation, and that Jews continue to live in Poland even today.²

And yet, despite the good intentions, the Postwar Years gallery omits important periods in the postwar era that would give the visitor a stronger sense of both the challenges and accomplishments that Jews remaining in Poland faced and achieved over the last seventy-one years. In particular, the lead scholars, Helena Datner and Stanisław Krajewski, were given the challenging task of narrating what has happened in Polish Jewish life since 1968. Given, as I discussed in the introduction, the small amount of scholarly work that focuses on Jewish life in that period, it is hardly surprising that these years were difficult to present. Both Datner and Krajewski are highly qualified and knowledgeable. Both have written extensively on Jewish topics. Both lived through the period. Yet, unlike the other galleries, the post-war gallery team did not have a group of expert historians on the period.

Perhaps the most controversial and problematic gallery in the museum, the Postwar Years gallery tries to address issues that continue to haunt Poland and Polish Jewry today, including postwar antisemitism and Jewish involvement in Communism (several of the staunch Stalinists

² Małgorzata Niezabitowska, “In the Beginning was the Dream,” in Creating the Museum of the History of Polish Jews (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Żydowski Instytut Historyczny w Polsce, 2014), 126-152.
in Poland were Jews). In a late May 2015 article in the Polish left-wing journal, *Krytyka Polityczna*, Datner expressed her frustration with the politicization of the gallery. The Polish authorities, she claimed, intervened a number of times, challenging the narrative – and particular quotations - that the team was presenting. Some Polish Jews were also dissatisfied with the museum, arguing that contemporary Jewish life had not been presented satisfactorily. In the face of this criticism, Datner discussed how the museum’s design left only a small space for the gallery, which was added as more of an afterthought, thus limiting what they could actually include.\(^3\)

Politics aside, the gallery’s depiction of the post-1968 years is a lost opportunity to revisit a period that has been largely overlooked. The museum continues the absence narrative. In fact, the museum’s impressive catalogue includes the heading “Absence 1969-1989” in its discussion of how the period is portrayed in the core exhibition. The catalogue text reads:

> A new era dawned in the history of Jews in Poland after 1968. Jewish organizations were in crisis, with few leaders and members. TSKZ clubs and synagogues largely drew older people, and there was a pervasive feeling of decline. Intergenerational transmission of Jewish culture and values was rare. The children of Jewish activists had either left Poland or were living their Polish lives away from the Jewish world. But at the same time, there was a growing interest in Jewish topics. It is the period after 1968 that is best described as “small numbers, big presence,” although the catchphrase is relevant even after 1989.\(^4\)

I read the catalogue after my first visit to the museum in June 2015 and was struck by how different the narrative appears in the museum. There is no sense that the post-1968 period is

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\(^4\) Krajewski, “Postwar Years,” 380.
characterized as having “small numbers, big presence.” Rather, the subheading of “absence” conveys precisely what the visitor senses when walking through the gallery.

The small room barely has a Jewish presence. One sees the cover of Hanna Krall’s book of her interview with Marek Edelman, as well as quotes from Jerzy Ficowski’s poems. On the other side of the room, one sees images of Solidarity and a copy of an antisemitic newsletter from the Grunwald Association. For a foreign visitor, and likely also for a Polish visitor, there is no explicit link between these images and quotes and the Jewish experience (nor is there much explanation of context or why these things were so important in Poland at the time). While antisemitism is referenced, one is left to question whether there were Jews in Poland at all, and if there were, were there Jews in Solidarity? In the corner a propaganda video of the fortyeth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Commemoration plays on a loop, next to negatives from *Remnants: The Last Jews of Poland*. Then comes the 1987 monumental article by Jan Błonski, “The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto,” which unleashed an intense debate over Polish-Jewish relations during the Holocaust. The disjointedness and lack of context raises a number of questions for the visitor. What does all of this mean? How is this part of the Jewish experience in Poland? The visitor never really gets a clear answer from the museum’s text.

The visitor can see that by the late 1980s there were still some young Polish Jews, but for a visitor unfamiliar with Polish history in the 1970s and 1980s, the gallery is confusing. It appears as a very brief overview of Polish history during the period, with occasional references to antisemitism and Jews. The Jews who had stood at the center of the museum’s story for almost 1,000 years were suddenly pushed to the side. And while that may be how it seemed in Poland at the time, the museum’s focus on the Jewish experience should have kept the Jews at the center throughout. It could have presented a fascinating account of what it was like to be Jewish in this
period. The team could have incorporated oral histories or archival materials. Instead, the authors continued to tell the story of absence.

Maybe they consciously chose to convey the belief at the time that Jewish life appeared to be coming to an end. Whether intentional or not, the fact remains that Polish Jewish life persisted, and they could have explained the belief that this was “the last chapter” while simultaneously discussing what remained. After all, the religious community continued to function, as did at least some of the TSKŻ clubs (the first point made in the post-1968 room is that clubs closed. Though not incorrect, not all of them closed, and this could be clarified.). The Jewish Flying University (JFU) was a major sign that Jewishness continued after 1968, and yet there’s no mention of the group. During an internship at the museum in 2011-2012, around the time that the exhibition was being finalized, I asked during a Postwar Years team meeting whether the JFU would be included. I was told that the JFU was not really significant at the time, and that they would not be included. I was too uncomfortable and new to Polish-Jewish studies at the time to feel like I could push any more or ask for any more explanations. In my discussions with Krajewski, I realized quickly how modest he is. My sense is that he did not want his own experience to be too central to the narrative. After all, the JFU was limited to Warsaw and to a small group within Warsaw. To say that it was a typical experience would be an enormous stretch. But I believe that it fully supports the argument that despite the assumption that little was left after 1968, scholars must continue to study periods claimed to be “insignificant.”

The question of significance is one that I encountered frequently as I told people what my dissertation was about. As I mentioned in the introduction, archivists were not sure whether I would ever find materials for the dissertation. And yet, the attitude from scholars as well was one of skepticism. What was I going to write about? The 1968 period never really got more than a
few pages in scholarly books. At most, it was a chapter or article in mostly Polish sources. How was I to write a dissertation on a period that the Polish-Jewish scholarly world considers to be “insignificant” or one of “absence?” My dissertation demonstrates that the absence was more of an assumption than a reality. Even as the Jewish population rapidly decreased, my dissertation reasserts Krajewski’s claim in the catalogue that this was a period best described by “small numbers, big presence.”

I hope that this dissertation initiates a discussion of the need to reassess the post-1968 period. As I walked through the gallery with a colleague who also works on the post-war period, we remarked at how much was missing from the gallery, particularly in the later years. We discussed the possibilities of creating temporary exhibits that might allow for a reassessment of the period, but we could not help but wonder whether the period is still too fresh, too emotional for those who lived through it. How does one write an objective history of the period one lived through? Does the task demand outsiders or a generation to pass before one is capable of looking back and questioning the traditional narratives? The 1968 antisemitic, anti-Zionist campaign left deep, painful wounds amongst those who experienced it. The post-1989 Jewish “revival” is a glamorous story that fascinates visitors who arrive in Poland expecting to only see Auschwitz and absence. If they allow themselves, they can witness Jewish life in Poland thriving today. And yet, the period between 1968 and 1989 is fascinating on its own. There is a unique and exciting story to be told during that period, as my dissertation has revealed. I hope that one day, when the museum’s narrative is re-conceptualized as more and more scholarship is produced, that the post-1968 narrative is rewritten to focus on what was, rather than what wasn’t.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Rachel Laeh Rothstein completed her B.A. degrees in political science and sociology at the University of Georgia. Before beginning graduate school, she took time off to volunteer with the JDC in Romania. She then completed her M.A. in Jewish Studies at Washington University in St. Louis before completing her Ph.D. in history from the University of Florida, under the direction of Dr. Mitchell Hart and Dr. Alice Freifeld.