

The Attitude of the Polish Populace Towards the Persecuted Jews

Częstochowa had always been known as a centre of Catholicism. This was due to the fact that the Catholic shrines of Jasna Góra, *Matka Boska* [Holy Mother] and various other churches were located there. Processions from the entire country arrived there on a daily basis, and this influenced the psyche of the Polish population.

The bourgeois elements belonged to the ND¹, viz. the National Democratic Party, which was governed by antisemitic currents. The nationalistic reason for the hatred of Jews was the aspiration to remove the Jews from the holy city, and their influence on its communal and social life. The financial motivation was to remove the Jewish industrialist and wholesale merchant, to get rid of the Jewish competition.

The ND (National Democrats) were proponents of the idea "*Swój do swego po swoje*" - meaning "each to his own [kind] for his own [products]". That was a more delicate theoretical-ideological warfare. But the idea developed and, eventually, cast off its cloak to reveal its true face, with the slogans "*Nie kupuj u Żyda*" (Do not buy from a Jew) and "*Kupuj wyroby własne*" (Buy your own products).

The ruling party, "Ozon" (Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego [United Nationalist Camp]), not wishing to allow the *Endecja* members to have the entire monopoly on antisemitism, also contributed its share. For every New Year, it issued billboards with statistics, showing with exact percentages, how the Jews were represented in the free professions (engineers, doctors, lawyers) and also enumerating all the branches of industry and commerce that were in Jewish hands. The conclusion of the placards was the necessity to take care of the national economy.

The press also saw to the propagation of "ideals" of antisemitism. The "ABC"² came out quite openly and aggressively against Jews. They even composed songs, which the newspaper distributors drummed into the ears of every passer-by - "*ABC³ walczy, ABC czuwa, ABC Żydów z Polski usuwa*", which means, "ABC fights, ABC watches, ABC removes Jews from Poland".

The development of antisemitism continued to expand. The ONR (*Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny* [Nationalist-Radical Camp]) organisation was established, which adhered to the system of Spanish Fascism. Their newspaper bore the name of the Spanish Fascist organisation "Falanga"⁴. They employed Hitler-like methods, such as assaulting Jews on the streets, smashing windowpanes and picketing in front of Jewish shops, not letting in any "Aryan" customers.

The majority of the Polish workforce was organised in the so-called "yellow unions"⁵, which were under the influence of the ChD (Chrześcijańska Demokracja, or Christian Democracy),

¹ [TN: Also frequently referred to as the "Endecja".]

² [TN: Radical nationalist newspaper published in Warsaw in 1926-1939.]

³ [TN: In other sources, this slogan/song is attributed to the Falanga, which is also mentioned subsequently.]

⁴ [TN: "Falange Española" in Spanish.]

⁵ [TN: A worker organisation which is dominated or influenced by an employer, and is therefore not an independent trade union.]

which was [like] another version of the ND for the workers. The workforce was also not free from antisemitism. The leftist and democratic elements did not play any significant role in Częstochowa. The nationalists and fascists fought them vigorously, due to their positive stance on Jewish affairs.

When the incident between Pendrak and Barań took place in 1937, the anti-Jewish elements made use of it for various incitements, riots and robberies.

Even in the most difficult moments, when only a small group of Jews remained alive, enslaved in the camps, the motto of every Pole was to make capital at the expense of the Jewish misery. Back in the time of the "Big Ghetto", many Jews had entrusted Poles with various valuables for safekeeping, or made over property to them fictitiously. During the "Small Ghetto" period, the Jews would be taken, in rows under a strict watch of SS and *Werkschutz*, to work and back to the ghetto. Very frequently, Poles stood in the streets and inquired after the Jews who had given them things to hide. The same question came out of the mouths of all the Poles, "Mendel jeszcze żyje? Jakób jeszcze żyje?", which means, "Is Mendel still alive? Is Jakób still alive?" What this question was driving at was clear to everyone. They did not wish there to be any claimant to the possessions in their keeping.

In many factories, Jews worked alongside with Poles. The goal of the Poles was to cheat the Jews out of their possessions for a paltry price and to charge fantastic sums for bread or other food articles.

Many Jews fell victim to Polish denunciations. Polish *meisters* and foremen often treated the enslaved Jews badly. A characteristic example is that of a Polish foreman, who had fled from the HASAG firm in Skarżysko-Kamienna in 1944, because the underground movement had issued a death sentence against him for reporting workers to the German occupation forces, came to HASAG-Pelcery in Częstochowa to work in the infantry department as a foreman. He declared in a speech that, after the War, there would not be a single Jew left and that, if any Jew did survive, he would hang him.

Many Poles were in service of the Germans to murder Jews. It is a very painful fact that the members of the AK (*Armia Krajowa*, or Home Army), whose leader was General Sosnkowski, murdered Jews. More than once, the Jewish partisans ended up fighting bitter battles against the Polish AK in the woods.