

Excesses Against Jews in Częstochowa

During the period of Polish independence, when the Republic of Poland was headed by Professor Ignacy Mościcki, Marshal Edward Rydz-Śmigły, Feliks [Felicjan] Sławoj Składkowski and others, anti-Jewish excesses took place in a series of towns. In 1919, when Poland became independent, the following event occurred, which led to a pogrom:

A Polish soldier was found murdered not far from the railway station. The contemporary *Hallerczykes*¹, along with a multitude of Poles, under the pretext of seeking out the murderers, began perpetrating a pogrom against the Jews and robbing them. The result was that seven Jews were murdered and Jewish property was partly plundered and partly destroyed. A common grave, for the innocent Jews fallen, was created by the entrance to the cemetery. In 1944, the cemetery was destroyed by the Nazis. The headstones were taken to build anti-aircraft defence cellars, and the mass grave of the seven fallen victims was also desecrated.

In the city of Częstochowa, during the period when the governor (*Wojewoda*) was [Jerzy] Paciorkowski, the district commissioner (*starosta*) was [Kazimierz] Kühn and the mayor was [Jan] Mackiewicz², an entire array of incidents took place between Jews and Poles, which were echoed during the tragic time of Hitler rule. These incidents were like weapons in the hands of the antisemitic groups, to work alongside the destroyers of Europe and the murderers of the Jewish people.

On a summer Saturday, 19th June 1937, at nine o'clock in the morning, the following event occurred:

The Jewish butcher, Josef Pendrak, the owner of a butcher shop at ul. Nadrzeczna 7/9 and a building in Zawodzie, about forty years of age, the father of two children, conducted business on a wide scale. Based on those grounds, issued by the security forces, he had a permit to carry a firearm in order to protect himself in the event of a potential assault. He passed by ul. Wały Dwernickiego, next to Mendel Zelewer and Wolf Landau's old ironmonger's premises. The Polish hooligan and ruffian, [Stefan Baran], who was just then stealing iron from the Jewish shop, upon seeing Josef Pendrak, assailed him and attempted to rob him. Polish youths gathered and began throwing stones. The Jew, Josef Pendrak, perceiving that he was under threat, pulled out his revolver and warned Baran. The Polish youths incited Baran not to let himself be frightened by a Jew, and that his revolver was not real but just a bogus one (*straszak*). Baran threw himself upon the Jew to wrest the revolver [from him]. Pendrak stood up to Baran and shot him. Immediately afterwards, Pendrak himself went to the police and gave a statement regarding the entire incident. They took away his revolver and arrested him. The *Endecja*-affiliated, antisemitic students who, for a long time, had wanted to arouse an incitement against Jews, took the opportunity and organised bands to rob and beat Jews, as well as to desecrate assets of Jewish religious and cultural value.

¹ [TN: Soldiers in the legion organised by General Józef Haller.]

² [TN: As our academic panel has advised, only Paciorkowski and Mackiewicz were actually active in the same period: Jerzy Paciorkowski was the *Wojewoda* of Kielce from 18th February 1930 to 15th May 1934, Kazimierz Kühn was the District *Starosta* (Governor) of Częstochowa from May 1920 to 1932, and Jan Mackiewicz was the Mayor of Częstochowa (actually a government commissioner) from 18th August 1933 to 31st March 1936.]

With the silent approval of the Catholic authorities, the excesses took place at exactly four o'clock in the afternoon. Every Jew passing by on the street was beaten. At the commercial centre on the First and Second Aleje, the hooligans, using street benches there, hacked out the big windows of the Jewish shops. The robbers, who arrived, plundered everything from the shops and houses and, in doing so, demolished all the furnishings. The Jewish book dealership on the Second Aleja, which had existed since before the First World War and belonged to the assimilated Jew, Rolnicki, was completely destroyed. Rolnicki, who as a result was unable to continue running the business, sold the book dealership to a Pole a couple of days after the excesses. In this manner, Jewish livelihoods were ruined. The book dealership exists to this day and belongs to a Pole. From cars, *Endecja* students yelled out, inciting against Jews, claiming that Jews had murdered a Pole and called to riot and to expel Jews from the holy city. Pendrak's house in Zawodzie was completely demolished and his wife and two children moved to live in the Jewish quarter.

Among the wounded Jews was Cieciora, who nowadays lives in the Land of Israel.

On ul. Nadrzeczna, a distinctly Jewish neighbourhood, the hooligans met with violent resistance on part of the Jewish populace and were forced to beat a hasty retreat. Nevertheless, they still managed to tear down the Old Study-Hall and throw the Torah scrolls, *chumoshim* and *machzorim*³ into the Warta River.

The religious articles, which had been thrown into the Warta, were retrieved by the Jewish *bocher* Berek Pieprz who is, nowadays, a boxing champion in the American Zone in Germany.

One of the organisers of the resistance on ul. Nadrzeczna was Szymon Młodynow, the future member of the underground movement's headquarters in the "Small Ghetto".

During the resistance, one of the rowdy Polish attackers was badly beaten. The day after the event, a secret agent from the department of investigations, whom people called "Tzope'le", arrived. He was well-known within Jewish workers' circles for his [knowledge of the] Yiddish and Hebrew languages. He came to investigate regarding the organisers of the resistance. He, "Tzope'le", went from house to house and demanded that they should point out to him the Jewish Bolsheviks who had beaten an "innocent" Pole. The riots lasted four hours - from four to eight in the evening. Bishop [Teodor] Kubina issued a proclamation pleading for the restoration of peace. In it, he appeals to the agitated multitude, using terms such as "dear children" and "faithful flock". The hooligans had, without interference, hit [people], robbed and demolished. The security forces had "not seen" what was happening. It was only later that the police and the military were deployed in order to restore peace and order in the city.

Various hooligans still attempted to attack the Jewish quarter, but unsuccessfully. The Jews put up a resistance and the police put an end to these incidents.

Behind the city, near the Polish cemetery, there was the exceptionally well-equipped agricultural farm of *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*, where young people learned practical and theoretical agriculture, with the most modern machinery at their disposal. The farm was

³ [TN: A "chumash" is a printed volume of one of the five books of the Pentateuch, and a "machzor" is a special prayer-book for the High Holidays.]

attacked on numerous occasions by Polish hooligans. Also, on that tragic Pendrak-Baran day, a band of several hundred Polish hooligans attacked the farm. The young *chalutzim* [pioneers] had foreseen that such an attack could take place and they organised a "*Haganah*" (self-defence). Despite the fact that the farm [only] numbered a few dozen members, they still fought heroically against the large number of hooligans over several hours and forced them to retreat. The hooligans, seeing that they could not overcome the *kibbutz's* organised resistance, set fire to the main building and withdrew. The fire was put out by the *chalutzim*.

Josef Pendrak was arrested and, for three months, sat in jail awaiting the trial. Notwithstanding that the city doctor and various witnesses declared that Pendrak had fired the shot in order to protect his own person, that the prosecutor delivered his accusatory speech in an objective tone, and that he was represented by the best lawyers in Warsaw, he was still sentenced to eight years' imprisonment.

Josef Pendrak sat in prison until 10th September 1939. As the front approached, the prison guards left and the inmates ran away. Pendrak went to Łódź. Poles denounced him and, as a result, he was detained by the Gestapo. In the presence of his wife and sons, he was murdered by the Gestapo. Tragic destiny decreed that, during the first "*akcja*" [operation], on 22nd September 1942, Mrs Pendrak and her two children were taken away to Treblinka, where they were gassed.

Quite frequently, similar incidents transpired that ended peacefully. It was always based on material grounds and, namely, attempts to rob Jewish property and goods.

A few months after Pendrak's story, the four Czerwiński brothers entered the Jew Hercberg's restaurant at ul. Warszawska 3, on the corner of the Nowy Rynek [New Market]. They ate and drank and, at the end, one of the four Czerwinski brothers - Mundek - threw himself upon the cash register, intending to steal money. The Jew Hercberg stood up to him and a scuffle ensued. He pulled out his revolver and shot the assailant. Hercberg also went of his own accord to the police and reported the incident. Czerwiński was a notorious criminal, had sat in prison numerous times and was always causing disturbances and brawls. As a result, the Jew Hercberg was freed and permitted to continue carrying a weapon.

There was another similar occurrence with a certain Mancie (Rozental), a horse trader, who killed a Pole during the course of a business-related altercation. Mancie had a wife and two children. His younger brother, having witnessed the event and wishing to save his elder brother, took up an axe, pretending to be the perpetrator of the tragic occurrence. A trial was held and he was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment. Destiny decreed that Mancie Rozental, his wife and two children, in 1942, were sent to Treblinka, where they were murdered. His younger brother, who was sitting in prison for an offence he had not committed, evaded the Nazi sword and remained alive.