

## The Eleventh Commandment

*“Always speak about us!  
To your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren!  
Always! For all time! Remember!”<sup>1</sup>*

The activity of the Częstochowa branch of the Social-Cultural Association of Jews (TSKŻ) was the result of what was expected and, in fact, what was allowed by the state and the size and needs of the Jewish community living in the city. It must not be forgotten that Jews living in Poland, as an ethnic minority, were the subject of a political game. Although the autonomy<sup>2</sup> which they enjoyed, under the People’s Poland, made them stand out from other minority ethnic groups, there were too few of them to exert any influence, on the situation, as a group.

In fact, the relatively small Jewish community, despite its devotion to the homeland, remained withdrawn and, mostly, remained somewhat on the margins of the country’s affairs - although, it was actively involved in the implementation of the tasks faced by post-occupation Poland. The political and social processes of strengthening the new authority, in that first period after the end of World War II, is a difficult period in the history of our country.

The years of Stalinism<sup>3</sup> were a gloomy time for Poland and Częstochowa although, at the same time, it was also a period of dynamic development of the city. Undoubtedly, the most important achievement was the development of industry – metallurgy, iron ore mining<sup>4</sup> and the textile industry<sup>5</sup>.

The need for new workers resulted in an intense migration flow. Częstochowa, not only became economically ever more dynamic, but also grew institutionally and in area.<sup>6</sup> Its dynamic development required a rapid influx of both qualified and unqualified personnel.

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<sup>1</sup> I. Amiel, *Podwójny krajobraz*, Warsaw 2008, p. 111. This cited excerpt comes from the story *The Eleventh Commandment*, included in this volume. This is the eleventh commandment for Christians. It correlates, some say, with the 614<sup>th</sup> rule, Emil Fackenheim’s mitzvah for Jews: “Do not let Hitler gain a posthumous victory”. Mitzvah (a commandment, a duty; plural mitzvot – each of the 613 commandments of Halacha (Jewish religious law), based on the precepts of the Torah, the observance of which is obligatory for every adult Jew. 248 of the mitzvot are to do, while 365 are mitzvot to not do. Every good deed is also called a mitzvah.

<sup>2</sup> Definitely higher in the first three years after the War than in the later period.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stalinizm>, or [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kategoria:Stalinizm\\_w\\_Polsce](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kategoria:Stalinizm_w_Polsce) (accessed: 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Częstochowa was raised to the rank of a central disposal centre for the district metallurgy district.

<sup>5</sup> At that time, more than 15,000 people, including over 10,000 women, worked in all the textile factories. Apart from the textile industry, other branches of industry also developed in the city and the region – such as metal, wood and paper, chemical, building materials, as well as the agricultural and food industries. Industry became an ever increasingly important source of income for both the city’s inhabitants, as well as for many families in the region. See also: J. Palczewski, *Zarys rozwoju przemysłu włókienniczego w Częstochowie*, [in:] S. Krakowski (ed.), *Dzieje Częstochowy od zarania do czasów współczesnych*, Katowice 1964, pp. 203–212.

<sup>6</sup> A general plan for the city was developed. That plan, approved in 1953 by the Presidium of the Government of the Polish People’s Republic, introduced a new element. It was a new compositional and functional axis (work axis), which was of crucial importance for the urban development of the city. Further developed, in the following years, on the basis of subsequent plans, it enabled for the expansion of Częstochowa. On this axis, the nerve centre, of which was the tram line, the most important urban investments were implemented (including the “Tysiąclecie” district).

Illiteracy had to be eliminated, craftsmen, technicians and sales people had to be trained. Therefore, primary, vocational and higher education were expanded.<sup>7</sup>

All these phenomena resulted in a continuous influx of people.<sup>8</sup> The development of social infrastructure did not keep pace with the population growth, which meant that everyday life in the city was difficult. There was a lack of shops, public services, good and efficient public transport, bars and restaurants. The network of health facilities was insufficiently developed. There was a demand for housing. In those difficult times, joy and a moment of respite were given to the residents through occasional festivals and sporting competitions. The residents of Częstochowa were especially fond of speedway.<sup>9</sup> We do not know how many Częstochowa Jews supported this new sport, so beloved by the inhabitants. However, we do know that this community entered the 1950s numerically decimated and organisationally dismantled.

The Częstochowa branch of the TSKŻ was one of thirty-two established at that time.<sup>10</sup> From the very beginning, it operated at ul. Jasnogórska 36. At that time, there was no Jewish orphanage and no Jewish school. The Jewish Congregation was not very active.<sup>11</sup> Jewish political parties were not active.

On a daily basis, the Jews of Częstochowa blended into the mainstream of city life at that time. The place, where they could cultivate their Jewish identity, was the TSKŻ premises and the club which operated there. One of the Association's most important tasks was to meet the cultural needs of the Jewish population.<sup>12</sup> This was a declared fight against enforced assimilation and against national separatism.

This task was carried out by the establishing of TSKŻ clubs, as well as youth and children's clubs. In the 1950s, the TSKŻ club in Częstochowa served as a place for meetings, for learning Yiddish, for spending free time and for developing one's own hobbies, such as playing chess or draughts. Within the club, one could also read the Jewish press. Care was taken to preserve the memory of the heroes and victims of World War II. In accordance with the new trends, people's state and internationalist anniversaries were celebrated, such as the anniversaries of the outbreak of the October Revolution or Labour Day.

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<sup>7</sup> See: J. Lipiec, B. Stępień, *Szkolnictwo powiatu częstochowskiego w latach 1945–1970*, [in:] M. Stańczyk (ed.), "Ziemia Częstochowska" 1974, vol. X, op. cit., p. 443.

<sup>8</sup> The post-War industrialisation process resulted in a significant increase in the number of the city's inhabitants. In 1946, it had 102,000 inhabitants. In 1950, there were already over 112,000 and, a year later, 120,000. See: I. Walczak, *Sytuacja demograficzna Częstochowy w latach 1950–1970*, [in:] M. Stańczyk (ed.), "Ziemia Częstochowska" 1976, vol. XI, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> The beginnings of speedway in Częstochowa took place right after the end of World War II. In the first days after liberation, the Częstochowa Association of Cyclists and Motorcyclists (CTCiM) was reactivated, focusing its activities on motor sports. The first races were held on the athletics track of the stadium on III Aleja NMP (where the Cepelia Pavilion stands today). Competitions for tourist motorcycles were organised there. At the same time, a speedway stadium was being constructed on ul. Olsztyńska. Speedway, as a sports discipline, was only just emerging and, only thanks to the ambitions and enthusiasm of the players and activists of the time, did it begin to develop. In 1950, the team, already under the new name "Włókniarz", was promoted to the First League, competing there until 1954.

<sup>10</sup> As G. Berendt wrote: "*the small number of TSKŻ branches resulted from the limited funds allocated by the state to maintain Jewish institutions and the lack of alternative sources for subsidising them*". G. Berendt, *Życie od nowa. Instytucje i organizacje żydowskie (1944–1950)*, [in:] M. Adamczyk-Garbowska (ed.), F. Tych (ed.), *Następstwa...*, op. cit., p. 213.

<sup>11</sup> Until 1948, the Congregation was developing, the expansion of its board being the result of new tasks. The main source of aid for the Congregation was the JOINT, which sent money and food. In 1948, Rozenchwajg left Poland (from Częstochowa). At the same time, the authorities blocked the activities of the JOINT and the Congregation fell into crisis.

<sup>12</sup> National (ethnic) culture in form, but socialist in content.

The Association was also actively involved in the current activities of the ruling party. For example, in 1952, meetings of the Jewish population were organised to discuss the electoral law<sup>13</sup>, as well as meetings to discuss the tasks of the Jewish population during the elections or meetings to select agitators. Evenings were organised for discussing the guidelines for the plenary sessions of the Central Committee of the PZPR, etc. Despite this, the TSKŻ's premises served primarily to integrate the Jewish community, remaining in Częstochowa, so as to provide it with a certain sense of security, based on an awareness of the functioning within its own people.



Ceremony marking the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

Source: TSKŻ Częstochowa collection

This does not mean that there was no Jewish life outside of the TSKŻ. There was still the Congregation and there were also instances of Jewish people being completely outside of the Jewish community. For a long time, Seweryn Szperling, who was raised by a Polish family, did not know that he was Jewish. He only had Polish friends. He went to church and had his first Holy Communion. It was not until he was a teenager that he discovered his ethnic origin.

*“The Częstochowa Jewish Community Council and several Jewish families knew my origin. I was invited to their homes for Jewish holidays. This was especially the case during the years 1958–1964, and also after returning from Israel in 1965–1970. From time to time, I took part in prayers at the Prayer House located in the former ‘mikvah’ on ul. Garibaldię. This was, more or less, my contact with the Jewish community in Częstochowa”.*<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In October 1952, based on a law passed by the Legislative *Sejm*, the first elections to the *Sejm* of the Polish People's Republic were held. They were accompanied by a huge, for those times, propaganda campaign. They were won by the PZPR, together with their “allied parties”.

<sup>14</sup> S. Szperling, *Syn czworga rodziców*, [in:] J. Mizgalski (ed.), J. Sielski (red.), *Żydzi...*, op. cit., p. 439.

This, he claimed, was interesting both in terms of new experiences and new friends. But it was only as an adult that he accepted the fact that he was Jewish and understood, as he himself claims, the tragedy of his biological parents.<sup>15</sup>

The situation was different in the case of Jerzy Ślęzak. No one hid his Polish-Jewish origins from him.<sup>16</sup> But was he who needed time to mature into his “Jewishness”.

*“Something, internally, was ripening within me. And, after a period of such indifference, I began to catch up with everything – books, information, everything that I could get, everything that I could read. I was passionate about it. And this deepened my irresistible urge to learn about the Jewish religion, customs, history and contact with Jews”.*<sup>17</sup>

Anna Goldman was fully aware of her Jewish origins and accepted this fact.

*“After the War, my mother told me that my name was not ‘Halinka Gawrońska’, but Anna Goldman and, without any explanation, I took it as a natural thing ... [...] I graduated from the comprehensive school in Częstochowa and then studied medicine in Zabrze. From 1965, I worked in a hospital and, later, in a clinic, where I still practise my profession.*

*“I never changed my name, except during the occupation. Everyone around me knows that I am Jewish. My family was well-known and recognisable, as Jewish, in Częstochowa. Changing my name would have not done me any good. What’s more, so few of us survived the Holocaust. I wanted to maintain the family name in the memory of those people who remembered it, as Jewish, from the pre-War years.”*<sup>18</sup>

Despite this, Anna did not go to the TSKŻ at that time. As she claims, this was due to the fact that her peers were not there at the time. Speaking about the Goldman family, it is worth mentioning that, from before the War, this distinguished family was very active – as it was after the War. Anna’s mother was an accountant in a factory in Gnaszyn, while her aunt (Dorota Hassenfeld née Goldman) and uncle (Marian Hassenfeld) were lawyers. As lawyers, they were co-founders and, later, members of Legal Practice No.1 in Częstochowa. They were active communally.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For more, see the TV Orion report entitled *Polak czy Żyd?* (author’s archive), and also see: S. Szperling, *Syn...*, op. cit., pp. 437–442.

<sup>16</sup> Before the War, mixed marriages were considered a “mis-match”. J. Ślęzak recalls that his mother’s family, after marrying a non-Jew, had no further contact with her (for more: J. Ślęzak’s memoirs, video material in the authors’ archive). After the War, these issues somewhat subsided. However, that does not mean that they were not important. According to the limited oral history on this subject, it generated some tension amongst the adults but, generally, it did not lead to any strain on the relationships with their children. For this publication, it is important in the context of the openness of the children’s and youth club at the TSKŻ, which is written about here.

<sup>17</sup> J. Ślęzak, video interview, recorded in the 1990s. (authors’ archive).

<sup>18</sup> A. Goldman, *Wywiad*, [in:] J. Mizgalski (ed.), J. Sielski (ed.), *Żydzi...*, op. cit., pp. 414–415.

<sup>19</sup> For more, see: M. Hassenfeld, *Wspomnienia*, [in:] J. Mizgalski (ed.), J. Sielski (ed.), *Żydzi...*, op. cit., pp. 423–426.

Marian Hassenfeld taught classes at the Higher School of Economics in Częstochowa<sup>20</sup> and at the Częstochowa Polytechnic.<sup>21</sup> As a lawyer, he worked for many companies in Częstochowa. He was also an active co-organiser of the Częstochowa District Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes, as well as many other projects and initiatives undertaken at that time.<sup>22</sup> His life is clear proof of the active involvement of representatives of the Jewish community in the construction of the reality of that time.

On a daily basis, that is how it was for the majority of Częstochowa Jews. They lived and worked in Częstochowa. They felt themselves a part of this city - they co-created its present and its history. The activity of the TSKŻ completed this picture.

In the initial period of the Association's activity, people such as Chil Grynbaum and Mojżesz Lederman were the motivators behind its activities. Jankiel Wasilewicz was highly respected. The TSKŻ, as the main forum for the Jewish community's cultural activity, was to play the role of main promoter of the new system. However, its activities contributed, in particular, to the Jewish community's preservation of its own dignity and identity.



The garden at ul. Jasnogórska 36. Chil Grynbaum (first on left) with daughter (Danusia), Jankiel Wasilewicz (third from left), next to Mojżesz Lederman, 1952

Source: TSKŻ Częstochowa collection

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<sup>20</sup> He held many responsible, managerial positions and, in 1949-1951, was Vice-Chancellor (Pol.: prorektor).

<sup>21</sup> Before he began lecturing at the Częstochowa Polytechnic, he was a member of the Organising Committee of the Higher School of Engineering, later renamed to the Częstochowa Polytechnic. For more, see: M. Hassenfeld, *Wspomnienia...*, op. cit., pp. 423-426.

<sup>22</sup> For more, see: *ibidem*, pp. 423-426.

At the beginning of the 1950s, in addition to building a community, the activities of the Association primarily focussed on undertakings precisely aimed at maintaining Jewish identity. In addition to the, already mentioned, anniversary commemorations, conferences, lectures and cultural events, particular care was taken to preserve the Yiddish language. This meant not only teaching courses, but also the constant collecting of Yiddish literature, for which the “Jidysz Buch” publishing house proved very helpful.<sup>23</sup>

The Jewish press (*Fołks Sztyme*) was distributed and read, motivating amateur, artistic activities. In addition, rhythmic classes were organised for children, as well as “the living word”.<sup>24</sup> After Jewish education was closed down, Jews were most willing to send their children to TPD [Society of Friends of Children] schools.<sup>25</sup> They liked their secularism, as well as the fact that their children lived in a larger Jewish environment. As Halina Wasilewicz recalled:

*“... I went to a state school, but it was a TPD school [...] 99% of Jewish children attended this school”.*<sup>26</sup>

As an organisation, in the 1950s, the TSKŻ was a faithful ally of the ruling party. This meant, among other things, the shaping of aware citizens of a socialist state, professing internationalist and secular values<sup>27</sup>, propaganda fighting against capitalism and Zionism and supporting the leadership movement among Polish Jews, etc.<sup>28</sup>

These activities, while maintaining Jewish identity, were intended to facilitate the entry of Polish Jews into the process of political transformation, which was taking place in Poland. That desire, to form a conscious citizen of a socialist state, was also related to the need to provide the Jewish community with the possibility of stabilising life and with a sense of security. Unfortunately, this turned out to be just an illusion.

After a period of hope that Israel would join the group of socialist states, it became clear that the new state was rather looking for allies in the West. This resulted in changes to the mood and attitude of the communist authorities to Israel, as well as to Jews living within its borders.

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<sup>23</sup> In 1947, in Łódź, at the initiative of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, the “Jidysz Buch” publishing house was established. In 1949, it moved to Warsaw and, a year later, became part of the TSKŻ, which was established at that time. Thanks to this, classics of Yiddish literature, accounts of the Holocaust and contemporary literary works were published. By the time that it was closed in 1968, the “Jidysz Buch” publishing house had printed circa 400 titles and magazines. In the 1950s, Poland became one of the world’s most important Yiddish language publishing centres. For more, see: J. Mizgalski, *60-lecie TSKŻ*, Warszawa 2010; A. Grabski, A. Rykała, *Żydzi...*, op. cit., p. 407.

<sup>24</sup> For more, see: H. Wasilewicz, *Moje życie...*, op. cit., p. 396.

<sup>25</sup> Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Dzieci (TPD) is a nationwide, non-governmental association which conducts charitable activities for children. From 1949, the Society began to focus on organising and running secular schools (primary and secondary), as well as kindergartens and orphanages. The TPD advocated for secular education for children and youth. The authorities, interested in promoting secular education, did not limit the Society’s activities in this area and even deliberately supported it. The Society’s schools, especially in the years 1945 to 1952, were organised for children, whose parents agreed that their children be educated in a secular spirit. For more, see: <https://zg.tpd.org.pl/pl/nasza-historia-2/historia/919-dzialalnosc-towarzystwa-przyjacio-dzieci-rys-historeczny-2.html> (accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2020).

<sup>26</sup> Source: the memoirs of H. Wasilewicz, recorded by the POLIN Museum, interview recorded on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2010, by: Piotr Kowalik, transcribed by P. Sałapa.

<sup>27</sup> The threat to the practice of the Jewish religion, at that time, was relatively small, since the ZRWM, completely dependent on the state, had declared its full loyalty to the prevailing political reality. For more, see: A. Grabski, A. Rykała, *Żydzi...*, op. cit., pp. 407–409.

<sup>28</sup> For more, see: A. Grabski, A. Rykała, *Żydzi...*, op. cit., pp. 407–409.

It was also an opportunity to fight and for change at the top of power. Accusations of conspiracies<sup>29</sup> began, as well as arrests and trials. In Poland, this wave came, albeit with a certain delay, but here, also, loyal citizens of the country suddenly became its enemies. Anti-Jewish leaflets appeared in various workplaces. Jews were dismissed from their jobs and there were beatings.<sup>30</sup>

In the People's Poland, the "Jewish question" had always been used politically. In the first ten years after the War, Poland's ruling elite loudly and decisively proclaimed the fight against antisemitism while, at the same time, accusing their political opponents of antisemitism. From the mid-1950s, the situation changed. This was due to various factors, including the international situation. Finally, during the political crisis in October 1956<sup>31</sup>, the "Jewish question" was used as an element of internal games within the ruling camp itself.<sup>32</sup>

In short, some political establishment people claimed that all the previous failures of the government could be blamed upon the Jews. That seed fell upon fertile ground, "succeeding" in creating the image of the Jews as the internal enemy. This was aided by the fact that a large number of people of Jewish descent held many important positions within the power apparatus. We must also remember the psychological effect – before the War, Jews were not permitted to hold government positions. Thus, the belief that "Poland is ruled by the Jews" readily entered into the social awareness.<sup>33</sup>

This time, Jews played the role of communist oppressors of the Polish nation. It would appear that this could harm the communists, but it did not. It freed the communist party from political and ideological responsibility (under Stalinism), shifting that responsibility to the "bad Jews", who used their power to fight Poles and Polishness. The stereotype of "Żydokomuna" ["Judeo-Communism"] became a readily accepted one.

In fact, there was a type of nationalisation of antisemitism in the People's Poland. It was then that the seed was sown, within society in the People's Poland, that would, in the following years, grow into the monstrous dimension of March 1968, which would become toxic to Polish-Jewish relations for decades. In 1956, despite the fact that, as the result of a political crisis, Władysław Gomułka (who at that time favoured Jews) had returned to power and

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<sup>29</sup> This began in Czechoslovakia, where a group of communist activists were accused of spying for Israel. In Hungary, the Foreign Minister was accused of belonging to a "Zionist conspiracy". The most famous case, however, concerned a "conspiracy" by Jewish doctors in the Kremlin who, according to the allegations, wanted to murder Stalin – of course, on behalf of American intelligence.

<sup>30</sup> For more, see: J. Mizgalski, *60-lecie...*, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>31</sup> In February 1956, the Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev delivered his famous paper entitled "*On the Cult of Personality and its Consequences*", in which he strongly criticised the policies of his predecessor, Joseph Stalin. It was a signal that it was time for a change. In Poland, it additionally coincided with the death of Bolesław Bierut, who was identified with the Stalinist system. This caused a movement related to the reshuffling of power in the country. During this political war within the one party, the issue of antisemitism was one of the main weapons.

<sup>32</sup> Two factions formed within the ruling party – the "Puławian" and the "Natolinian", who competed for political power. In order to authenticate the national character of the authorities, the Natolinians often used antisemitic slogans. The Puławians wanted to liberalise the PZPR and the state. They contributed to Gomułka's rise to power and, at the same time, they were called "Jews", because of the origins of some of its members. For more, see: F. Tych, *Marzec'68 geneza, przebieg i skutki kampanii antysemitkiej lat 1967/68*, [in:] M. Adamczyk-Garbowska (ed.), F. Tych (ed.), *Następstwa...*, op. cit., pp. 386–389; A. Grabski, A. Rykała, *Żydzi...*, op. cit., pp. 410–411.

<sup>33</sup> For more, see: F. Tych, *Marzec'68...*, op. cit., p. 387.

despite the “October Thaw”, there was a widespread dislike, amongst ethnic Poles, towards Polish citizens of Jewish descent.

Antisemitic incidents began to intensify and the Jews felt threatened and surrounded. In a dramatic manner, the leadership of the PZPR was informed about this state of affairs by TSKŻ activists, led by its chairman Grzegorz Smolar.<sup>34</sup> Thanks to these interventions, Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz, from the parliamentary podium, recalled the Jewish population’s constitutional rights and the lack of tolerance towards antisemitism.<sup>35</sup> From the clarity of his message, it also shows the dramatic situation within the country. The party leadership sent out a special circular to the local PZPR structures emphasising, in essence, the rights of citizens who belonged to ethnic minorities. It also reminded the structures of the fight against racism, nationalism and antisemitism.

*“Once again, we emphasise the international character of our party. There is no place for people who promote nationalistic, chauvinistic and racist views. The people’s party must not tolerate people who try to poison the party’s ranks with the venom of nationalism and antisemitism.”<sup>36</sup>*

These were gestures forced upon the authorities – their aim being to maintain peace within the country. These declarations were followed by the re-opening of borders, which had been closed in 1950, and the allowing of Jews to emigrate. Ultimately, this resulted in another exodus of Jews from Poland in 1956-1960.<sup>37</sup>

*“An exodus which was not formally forced by anyone, but also where no one tried to persuade those leaving from taking this step”.<sup>38</sup>*

In 1957 alone, circa 30,000 Jews left Poland. In total, circa 42,000 Jews left the country. This is how Ada Ofir, who was born in Częstochowa, recalled this period:

*“On the next day, I applied for a passport and for a month-long visa to Israel. My motivation was to visit my brother, the only family member who I had left. After a few months, I received a positive response [...]*

*“On the day that I received the permit, a man I knew came in the evening and, ignoring the fact that a few friends were with me, told me for what amount (quite modest, by the way) he could change my tourist visa into an emigration visa – and do it immediately. I gladly accepted the offer and, the next day, after receiving the travel*

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<sup>34</sup> For more, see: *ibidem*, p. 388.

<sup>35</sup> *“The government will stand steadfastly in its position of safeguarding equal rights and equal responsibilities for all citizens, regardless of their origins, nationality or religion. It will fight resolutely against all forms of chauvinistic tendencies and antisemitism, as well as attempts at discrimination and handicaps against national minorities living in Poland. Any attempts to discriminate and undermine the laws in force, relating to the “Jewish population, whose homeland has been Poland for centuries, will be met with strong opposition from the government and its organs.”* For more, see: F. Tych, *Marzec’68...*, op. cit., p. 388.

<sup>36</sup> A. Grabski, A. Rykała, *Żydzi...*, op. cit., p. 410.

<sup>37</sup> The exodus which, in Israel, was often called “Gomułka’s aliyah”. For more, see: F. Tych, *Marzec’68...*, op. cit., p. 389.

<sup>38</sup> G. Berendt, *Wpływ liberalizacji politycznej roku 1956 na sytuację Żydów*, [in:] M. Adamczyk-Garbowska (ed.), F. Tych (ed.), *Następstwa...*, op. cit., p. 383.



*document, which entitled me and my children to cross the border one-way, I went to the Israeli Consulate in Warsaw in order to complete the remaining formalities.*

*“At the consulate, I met other people who were in the same position – they had either lost their jobs or, like me, were waiting to lose them, with the expectation of harassment and public humiliation. They preferred to leave earlier. The consulate staff member, who dealt with me, asked about my economic situation. I said that my brother was waiting for me in Israel, that I had a job in Poland and that my husband had died three years earlier.*

*“He looked through his calendar and asked if 3<sup>rd</sup> January suited me to depart Warsaw. It was the end of November 1956. I said yes. He left the room and, after a short time, returned and handed me the, already paid for, tickets for the journey from Warsaw to Vienna.*

*In Vienna, a ‘Sochnut’ official would take over our group and arrange the further stages of our journey to Haifa.”<sup>39</sup>*

We do not know exactly how many Jews from Częstochowa left for abroad in the second half of the 1950s. In 1955, in Częstochowa, there was a total of 404 Jews, among them 145 children.<sup>40</sup> In August 1956, that number remained at the same level.<sup>41</sup>

From the memoirs of, among others, H. Wasilewicz, as well as from contribution payments reports and attendance lists (preserved to this day) at the Częstochowa TSKŻ, it can be concluded that, by 1962, half of them had left.<sup>42</sup>

It should be taken into account that those years were also the period of the “Repatriation of Jews from the Soviet Union.”<sup>43</sup> More than 18,700 Jews were resettled in the years 1955-1959, of whom circa 13,000 immediately emigrated to the West.<sup>44</sup> Jewish from the Soviet Union basically only passed through Częstochowa without even unpacking their suitcases. As H. Wasilewicz recalled:

*“...it was a repatriation from the East [...] a few came here but, of course, they had no connection with Częstochowa. They only came in the direction of Częstochowa. Of those repatriated, only one or two families stayed in Częstochowa, as they intended to travel further on. Some, reportedly, did not even unpack the belongings which they had in boxes. But two remained”<sup>45</sup>*

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<sup>39</sup> A. Ofir, *Tak...*, op. cit., p. 307.

<sup>40</sup> For more, see: L. Brener, *The Jewish...*, op. cit.

<sup>41</sup> For more, see: H. Wasilewicz, *Moje życie...*, op. cit., s. p96.

<sup>42</sup> Some emigrated to the West, while some to other cities in Poland.

<sup>43</sup> The wave of repatriates from the USSR began arriving from the end of 1955. Having been amnestied following Stalin's death, they were mainly prisoners of the GULAGs, a system of Soviet forced-labour camps, which held both criminals and people who were considered to be socially unacceptable or political suspicious. In the autumn of 1956, the Government Plenipotentiary for Repatriation was appointed. The rules for its implementation were established during Władysław Gomułka's visit to Moscow. The agreement was confirmed on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1957. For more, see: G. Berendt, *Wpływ...*, op. cit., p. 374.

<sup>44</sup> For more, see: A. Grabski, A. Rykała, *Żydzi...*, op. cit., pp. 410–411.

<sup>45</sup> Source: the memoirs of H. Wasilewicz recorded by the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Recording date: 16<sup>th</sup> October 2010. Researcher: P. Kowalik, transcription author: P. Sałapa.



The rear part of the garden, near the greenhouse, behind the TSKŻ building:  
Standing (R-L): Teresa Wajman, Janina Altman, Elżbieta Wajman, Tadeusz Altman  
Seated (R-L): unknown, Jola Altman, Helena Baum, Józio Baum, Henio Horończyk, unknown, 1955.

**Source: Private archive of J. Altman Radwańska**

Those, who remained, on the wave of the “October thaw”, could finally breathe a little more freely, just like other Polish citizens following the dark years of Stalinism. This could, among other things, serve towards the settling of accounts with the Stalinist period. The processes of the de-Stalinisation of the social and political life in the country also influenced program changes in the TSKŻ. It [the government] ceased to fight against the Jewish religion, but also did not give up on the secular nature of its activities. At least officially, craftsmen and people involved in trade were no longer treated with suspicion.<sup>46</sup>

The attitude towards people who, as it was put, “once belonged to other political directions”, was also to change.<sup>47</sup> The hitherto principle of “who is not with us is against us”, was condemned.<sup>48</sup>

In the 1950s, the life of the Jewish community basically centred around the TSKŻ branches and the religious congregations. The Mosaic Religious Union [ZRWM] also benefited from the “October thaw”. Both organisations, representing Jews, could once again utilise the help of the JOINT, which was now approved by Gomułka’s officials. Contrary to stereotypical thinking, the majority of Polish Jews were not wealthy people. The JOINT’s help was, therefore, very

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<sup>46</sup> For more, see: J. Mizgalski, *60-lecie...*, op. cit., pp. 26–28.

<sup>47</sup> This was regarding the Zionists.

<sup>48</sup> For more, see: J. Mizgalski, *60-lecie...*, op. cit., p. 32.

important to them. Technically, it was managed by the Central Jewish Social Welfare Commission, through local agencies, which included representatives of both the TSKŻ and the ZRWM.<sup>49</sup>

The “living committees” tried to help all members of the Association [TSKŻ], as well as non-member Jews. That social assistance was particularly important for the Jewish community, as was the launch of a network of Jewish cooperatives and the reactivation of ORT<sup>50</sup>, which supported them in activating their professions. These actions were taken to minimise unemployment amongst the Jews.<sup>51</sup> On a national scale, the number of courses quickly increased to a dozen or so, and the number of students grew to circa 2,500.<sup>52</sup> Extensive training was also directly conducted in factories and workshops.

Expanding employment, in the form of “cottage industries”, especially for women, allowed them to attain additional income, while still running a household. The majority of women, recommended to work at home by the TSKŻ, mainly due to their age, could not work under other conditions.

Jews in Częstochowa also benefited from ORT courses. On 19<sup>th</sup> May 1958, ORT manager, Daniel Kasman, wrote to the Commission for Vocational Training of the Jewish Population that he had legalised the ORT committees in the Department of Social Administration of the Częstochowa Municipal National Council and that a “ladies’ dressmaking” course had begun.<sup>53</sup> The Częstochowa branch of the TSKŻ has retained records of the first one-year examination graduates in “women’s and children’s” tailoring. On 1<sup>st</sup> July 1959, thirty females completed this course. In the following years, courses in sewing, leatherworking and shoemaking were also conducted.



Participants of the first course of cutting and sewing.

Among them, Bronisława Wasilewicz (second from left), Rachel Ajon (third from left), Fela Albert (fourth from left), Olga Tempel (fifth from left)

1959.

**Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa**

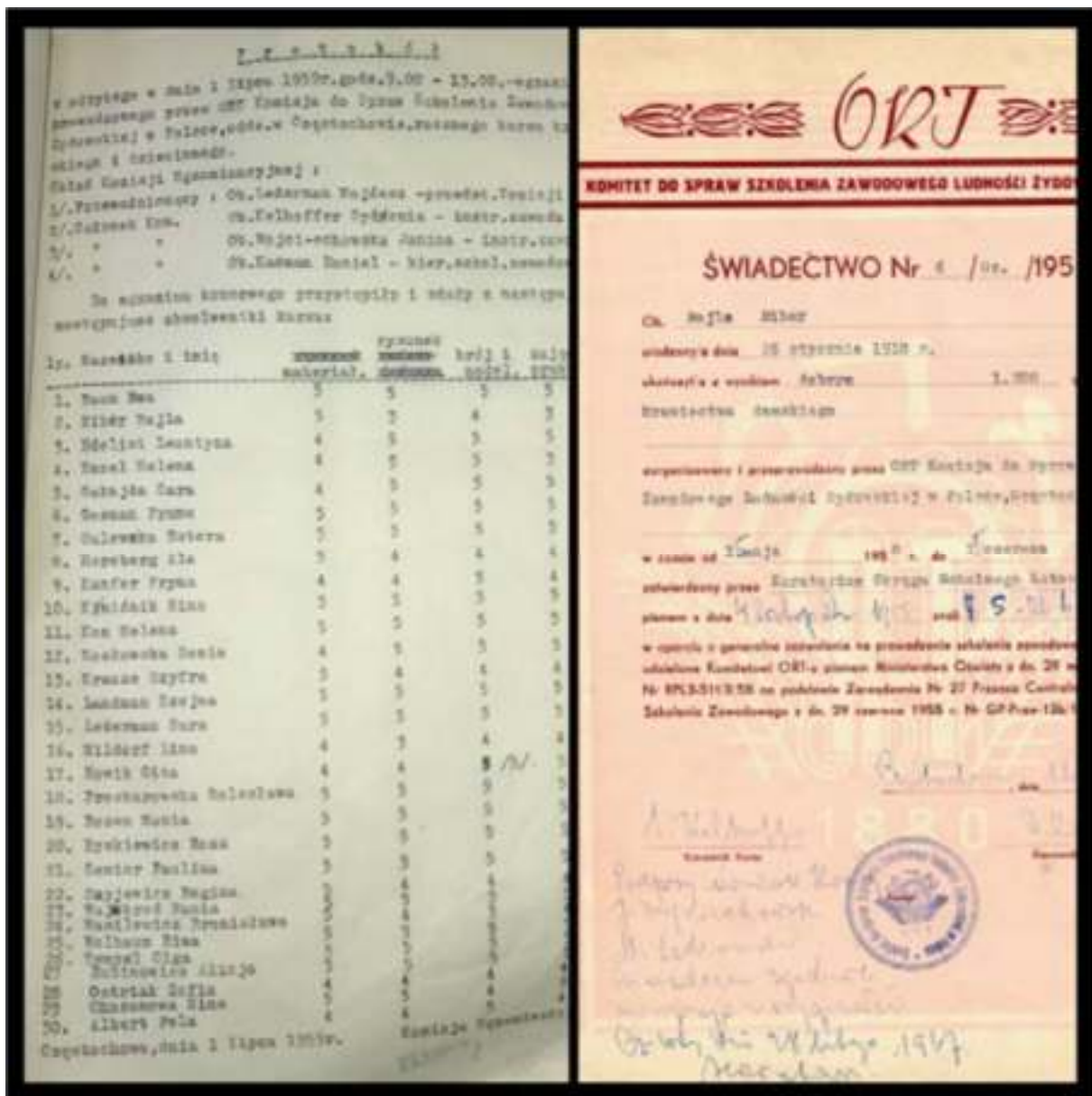
<sup>49</sup> For more, see: A. Grabski, A. Rykała, *Żydzi...*, op. cit., p. 412.

<sup>50</sup> The resumption of ORT’s activity took place after a joint resolution, adopted in 1957, by the TSKŻ and the ZRWM w 1957. For more, see: J. Mizgalski, *60-lecie...*, op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>51</sup> Jews, who were previous sacked, under various pretexts, and repatriates from the Soviet Union, were seeking new employment. It is estimated that this affected 8-10,000 Jews. For more, see: J. Mizgalski, *60-lecie...*, op. cit., pp. 32–36.

<sup>52</sup> For more, see: J. Mizgalski, *60-lecie...*, op. cit., p. 33

<sup>53</sup> The document can be found in the TSKŻ collections in Częstochowa.



The record of the ORT course examination and certificate of one of its participants.  
**Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa**

Small-scale manufacturing, crafts and private initiatives were well-received in Częstochowa. Despite the development of big industry, the city maintained its own specific atmosphere and character, boasting about the development of its small private initiatives.<sup>54</sup> Correcting the communist state's policy towards craftsmen, which occurred after 1956, resulted in a gradual increase in factories and employment.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> The management of the Guild of Diverse Crafts and the Guild of Metal Crafts had their headquarters in Częstochowa. In the years 1976-1977, there were over 1,900 craft workshops in the city, employing over 400 workers. At the end of 1978, there were 1,943 craft workshops in Częstochowa, employing 3,800 workers and 797 students. In the years 1984-1986, 3,736 craft workshops were conducting business activity in Częstochowa. For more, see: Z. Woźniczka, *Częstochowa w latach osiemdziesiątych*, [in:] K. Kersten (ed.), *Częstochowa...*, op. cit., p. 391.

<sup>55</sup> For more, see: A. Nassalski, *Przemiany gospodarczo-społeczne w okresie Polski Ludowej*, [in:] S. Krakowski (ed.), *Dzieje Częstochowy...*, op. cit.



Cutting and sewing course

Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa



Leathercraft course 1964

Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa



**Top pic:**

Commemoration of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liquidation of the Częstochowa ghetto (22<sup>nd</sup> September 1957)

**Photographs from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa**



**Bottom pic:**

Commemoration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liquidation of the Częstochowa ghetto (22<sup>nd</sup> September 1962)

Among other things, thanks to the development of crafts and small-scale manufacturing, after October 1956, the reality of life became a little more comfortable. Supplies had improved and everyday necessities were more readily available.

Cottage industries, which were practised by many Częstochowa Jews, became something normal in the city. It may seem insignificant, but it was psychologically important.

The cooperation of the TSKŻ, with JOINT and ORT, provided strong support in solving social problems. Yiddish and Hebrew language courses, as well as Polish language courses, were mainly directed at the repatriates from the USSR, giving them a sense of belonging to a community. Annual anniversary commemorations of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, as well as of wartime events in Częstochowa, did not allow people to forget their Jewish history.

The post-October reality, although much more tolerable, was of course still controlled by the Polish United Workers' Party. Until the very end of its existence, the party endeavoured to implement the principle of "democratic centralism". Under this system, the functioning of the TSKŻ, as well as all forms of its activities, were also subject to its control. This control was manifest in the various talks, evenings, meetings and events "in honour of" and "marking the occasion of".



Purim Ball 1959

Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa

Henryk Albert<sup>56</sup> claims:

*“There was no great autonomy there. Members of the party committee came to every meeting and, maybe not directly, but just by their presence, they set the tone of the discussion”.*<sup>57</sup>

H. Albert emphasises, however, that despite the situation, the importance of the TSKŻ’s activities was enormous.

*“One of the organisation’s main goals was to defend our national dignity, fighting against antisemitism and satisfying the cultural needs of the people.”*<sup>58</sup>

They found it all at the TSKŻ. H. Albert adds:

*“It was practically a second home for Częstochowa Jews and we spent most of our lives there.”*

The Częstochowa TSKŻ was very active. At the end of the 1950s and beginning of the 1960s, the celebration of some Jewish holidays, such as Channukah or Purim, were official events at the Association’s branches.

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<sup>56</sup> Henryk Albert – a Częstochowa Jews, participant in classes organised by the TSKŻ in Częstochowa, Association activist both in the city and on the Main Committee.

<sup>57</sup> H. Albert’s comment at a meeting with Israeli guides, on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2020, in Częstochowa, video recorded (author’s archive).

<sup>58</sup> H. Albert’s comment at a meeting with Israeli guides, on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2020, in Częstochowa, video recorded (author’s archive).



Channukah 1960

Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa

They did not have a religious character – they were more national-historical in character. They also served to inspire young people to become interested in the history of the Jewish nation and to learn about its contribution to the development of civilisation. This built a sense of pride in being Jewish, a respect for Jewish culture and served to maintain Jewish identity.

Similar tasks were performed by Jewish camps, organised from 1958 to 1967, by the TSKŻ, with the significant help of the already-mentioned JOINT. The camps had a nationwide character. Jewish children, from different parts of Poland, would meet in the one place. In addition to sports and recreational activities, the camp participants were taught Jewish history and culture. The children also learned Jewish songs and Jewish dances. Yiddish language classes were also conducted. All this was conducive to self-identification and to building Jewish identity.



Morning assembly at the first Jewish camp in 1958

Dawid Albert, a camp leader, and Henryk Albert, camp participant, appear in the photo.

Photo: archive of Henryk Albert



The vacation cultural and educational work was continued in the TSKŻ clubs. They had those with whom they could work, as there were more and more children and teenagers – the post-War generation of Jews just growing up. A large number of the children and youth inspired the TSKŻ activists to create special activities with this age group. It was not only the children's activities within the TSKŻ's clubs that counted, but also the newly-established special clubs for children and youth.

One of such clubs was the Children and Youth Club (KDM) in Częstochowa. In the first period, the work at the club was a little spontaneous - not fully organised, but very lively. Some forms of self-governance were introduced – under the guidance of an instructor, members of the older groups (aged 13-17) prepared classes (especially for Sundays) for their own and for the younger groups.

A major educational role was played by the youth council and peer court. This was the youth self-government (together with the instructors), who were elected for one year by all the members. They worked out the forms of functioning of the individual interest groups. They considered applications for membership in the club and who adopted resolutions. It also had the power to punish club members. The youth had their own representative of the TSKŻ Board which, through the Board of the Parents' Committee, also looked after the club. Halina Wasilewicz recalled<sup>59</sup> that her friends and acquaintances focused only on the Jewish community, but that not everyone had the same experience.



Children celebrate their birthday, 1953. Two Jewish children  
– Józio Baum (first from left) and Jola Altman (third from left)

**Photograph: private archive of J. Altman-Radwańska**

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<sup>59</sup> Source: the memoirs of H. Wasilewicz recorded by the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Recording date: 16<sup>th</sup> October 2010. Researcher: P. Kowalik, transcription author: P. Sałapa.



Friends celebrating their name day, 1957. Two Jewish ladies present:  
(First left) Jadwiga Lubelska - TSKŻ Katowice and (first right) Ewa Baum – Częstochowa  
**Photograph: private archive of J. Altman-Radwańska**

The club, at ul. Jasnogórska 36, was also visited by ethnic Poles. Some of them were even regular guests at the club (e.g., the Klekowski brothers). In the 1960s, the club was a very interesting and inspiring place. The property at ul. Jasnogórska 36 was looked after by the Romańczuk family, who had been displaced from the Soviet Union.

The family lived on the property. Mr Romańczuk worked at the steelworks. In addition, he served as the host of the house and had “golden hands” – he could fix everything and solve any problem. So, he made sure that everything worked and that everything was looked after. Around nine o’clock in the evening, he would take his keys and lock the gate leading to the property. He would then do his rounds, accompanied by his dog Kropka, and that was how each day ended.

*“The club’s location was great – a villa and two gardens, which created the possibility for a rich, all-day program of activities on every day of the week. The TSKŻ club was a second home for our parents and for us. It replaced our lack of family. None of us had real uncles or aunts. None of us knew our grandmother or grandfather. The club and the garden were always bustling. The children, namely us, spent all our free time there.”<sup>60</sup>*

If someone wanted to stay “illegally” in the garden, after nine o’clock in the evening, you had to know how to bribe Kropka. Otherwise, the entire world would know about your transgressions.

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<sup>60</sup> H. Wasilewicz, *Moje życie...*, op. cit., s. 396.



Dorota Romańczuk  
and Bogdan Baum,  
with  
the dog Kropka,  
next to the old  
greenhouse,  
1963.

**Photograph from  
collection of the TSKŻ  
in Częstochowa**

Obviously, many Jewish children and teenagers came to the club but, as already mentioned, ethnic Poles also came. Someone would bring a friend or a schoolmate and, sometimes, their “crush”.

Ethnic Poles did not have to be merely guests. They could also become members of the club<sup>61</sup> and, in fact, they did, since the club had its advantages. Firstly, there were two wonderful gardens, a table tennis table and there were interesting thematic activities. The club also had its own specific rules of operation.

Nobody forced anyone to do anything. Everyone could follow their interests and the club’s council, composed of young people, decided how the place functioned. It would appear that the club endeavoured to implement Korczak’s ideas in its approach to young people. In fact, Janusz Korczak was its patron. In 1962, in a solemn ceremony, it was named after the famous

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<sup>61</sup> This was stated in the club’s regulations, which did not distinguish between Jews and non-Jews.

Polish-Jewish doctor and educator. According to a surviving copy of the script, excerpts of Władysław Szlengel's<sup>62</sup> poetry were recited. They included:

*"Today, I saw Janusz Korczak,  
As he walked with the children, in the last procession,<sup>63</sup>  
And the children were cleanly dressed  
Like for Sunday walk in the garden.  
Janusz Korczak walked straight ahead  
With a bard head, with fearless eyes.  
A child held him by the pocket,  
He held two little ones in his arms.  
Someone arrived, a paper in hand  
He explained something and yelling nervously,  
"You can go back..... this is a card from Brandt".  
Silently, Korczak shook his head.  
He did not even explain much to them.  
Those, who came with German favour,  
How to place it into these soulless heads  
What does it mean to leave a child alone...  
So many years in this stubborn wandering  
To place a ball of sunshine into a child's hand  
How can you now leave them frightened  
He will go with them ... onward... to the end..."<sup>64</sup>*



Graphics circle.  
Zosia Hercberg  
is looking upwards,  
1963.

Photograph from collection of  
the TSKŻ in Częstochowa

<sup>62</sup> Władysław Szlengel (1912-1943) – a Polish-Jewish poet, lyricist, journalist, stage actor. In 1940-1943, he was in the Warsaw ghetto. Because of the poems which he wrote in the ghetto, he was known as “the ghetto poet”.

<sup>63</sup> Janusz Korczak, together with a few associates, ran an orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto. At the end of July 1942, during the “Great *Akcja*”, circa 250,000 Jews were deported from the ghetto. The majority of them ended up in the extermination camp in Treblinka, where they perished in the gas chambers. Children from the Korczak orphanage were among them.

For more, see: <https://culture.pl/pl/tworca/janusz-korczak>; [http://edukacja.warszawa.pl/wokol-nas/jubileusze/rok-janusza-korczaka/3584\\_wladyslaw-szlengel-kartka-z-dziennika-akcji](http://edukacja.warszawa.pl/wokol-nas/jubileusze/rok-janusza-korczaka/3584_wladyslaw-szlengel-kartka-z-dziennika-akcji) (accessed: 2nd June 2020).

<sup>64</sup> W. Szlengel, *Kartka z dziennika Akcji*, excerpt.



Marek and Henryk Horończyk during a gardening club activity, 1964.  
Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa



Sasza Kurcbard plays the accordion during a music club class, 1963.  
Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa



Learning English on the club terrace – English teacher Mr Hozakowski (back to camera), 1965  
Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa

An unknown photograph of Jerzy Duda-Gracz, from the period when he works at the TSKŻ (still a graphics high school student in Częstochowa).

He later continued during his studies at the Kraków branch of the Katowice Academy of Fine Arts



Photograph: private archive of J. Altman-Radwańska

For several years, the Częstochowa KDM teemed with life in its various forms and manifestations. Halina Wasilewicz recalled:

*“There were theatre classes in the club, led by actors Bolesław Weroński and Ryszard Nadrowski. The photography circle was led by Jan Kukliński [a well-known press photographer – ed. Author]. The graphic arts circle was led by, among others, Jerzy Duda-Gracz...”*<sup>65</sup>.

The clubroom wall, created<sup>66</sup> by Jerzy Duda-Gracz, has gone down in history, often serving as the background for performances and shows prepared by the youth. The later-famous painter was strongly linked with the club at ul. Jasnogórska 36. There, he taught classes, helped in the interior decorations and organised his own exhibitions. This connection with the club, with the TSKŻ and the Jewish community strongly inspired the artist at that time. Duda-Gracz contributed greatly to graphic arts in performances prepared by the theatre club classes.

The show entitled *“Zaczarowany krawiec”* [*“The Enchanted Tailor”*], in particular, has gone down in the club’s history. It was with him that the Częstochowa club attended, among others, the artistic review of TSKŻ clubs in Warsaw. This resulted in a cash prize which, as Henryk Albert recalls, was used to purchase the first electric guitar. In addition to Warsaw, the Częstochowa TSKŻ’s KDM presented its achievements in Bielsko, Gliwice, Sosnowiec and Katowice. It also hosted clubs from other cities. Most often, these took place during the organisation of special Korczak sessions and mutual artistic reviews.



Youth in the club room – behind them J. Duda-Gracz’s wall, 1962–1963  
Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa

<sup>65</sup> Source: the memoirs of H. Wasilewicz recorded by the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Recording date: 16<sup>th</sup> October 2010. Researcher: P. Kowalik, transcription author: P. Sałapa.

<sup>66</sup> According to oral accounts, it was a painting on plaster, created and fixed with a special technique, which could only be removed by chipping off the entire plaster (which, at some point, was done for some unknown reason).



Renia Grosman admires the exhibition of Duda-Gracz's works, 1964  
Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa



The show entitled "The Enchanted Tailor". Pictured – Henryk Albert and Jerzy Romanczuk  
and the famous goat from the performance created by Duda-Gracz, 1963-1964  
Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa



In addition to the activities of the photography, art and theatre circles, “... there were also music and gardening circle activities. We learned Jewish language - Yiddish, Hebrew, English”<sup>67</sup>, recalled Halina Wasilewicz. Over the years, classes were conducted by some very interesting instructors: Leon Winnicki – the nature club, Bogdan Niezgoda – trombonist with the Filharmonia – the music club, Chaim Segal taught Jewish language and Polish and Hebrew languages were taught by Teresa Wajman.

There were class performances, balls and games. The club newspaper “*Nasz Głos(-ik)*” [“*Our (Small) Word*”] was published. The skills acquired during those classes were utilised and presented during the performances. The activities of the arts and photography clubs found their finale in the form of exhibitions and competitions.

Club children prepared events for various occasions. The most important was the commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising anniversary. Special programs were prepared for the holidays of Channukah, Purim, Women’s Day and Mother’s Day. Children’s performances were enhanced with performances by members of the vocal circle and by mandolin players.

There was something always happening at the club. Each day was carefully planned by educators, with the participation of the youth. All activities were supervised by the club’s long-serving manager Marian Klajn and the already mentioned team of instructors.



Channukah, 1961 r. Among others pictured are Bajla Biber and Dawid Albert.  
Among the children: Dorota Romańczuk, Stefa Biber, Romek Wolfowicz, Mietek Szyjewicz, Mirek Gosman  
**Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa**

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<sup>67</sup> H. Wasilewicz, *Moje życie...*, op. cit., p. 397.



Afternoon tea time, 1961  
Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa



Marian Klajn,  
Manager KDM, 1963

Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in  
Częstochowa



Farewelling the Braun family prior to their leaving for Israel  
 In the first row is Teresa Wajman, Polish and Hebrew teacher, 1966  
 Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa



Scenario for a poetry presentation  
 for the 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of the  
 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa

As mentioned, one could remain at the club until late in the afternoon and, basically, in the evening also (until 9:00 pm). Therefore, care was taken (in which Mrs Ramończuk and other mothers excelled) to ensure that there was no shortage of afternoon tea and dinners.<sup>68</sup> If someone talked about the club being their second home, then the amount of time spent there and the complexity of the activities would certainly justify such statements.

It is worth mentioning that, in the club's work, where young people and children spent a great deal of time, great importance was attached to historical and civic education. Patriotic celebrations, dedicated to both Jewish heroes and to nationwide holidays, were not forgotten. The anniversary of the outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and anniversaries, relating to the martyrology of Częstochowa Jews, were approached with particular reverence. They were commemorated, not just with children's performances or evening events, but also with wreath-laying, holding special events, the collecting of memories of those who had managed to survive the War or by preparing small gifts for people who had helped Jews during the War.



20th anniversary of the [Warsaw] Ghetto Uprising, 1963.  
Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa

Numerous events, organised by the Club, were also attended by people not associated with the TSKŻ. These events were very popular, as they were famous for their perfect organisation and very high level of performance. According to a 1965 survey, signed by Częstochowa TSKŻ

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<sup>68</sup> Club members were entitled to a meal "for one zloty". However, no one there ever went home hungry. According to an analysis of the club's budget (e.g., for 1st November to 31st December 1963), shows the item "feeding" as a serious expense in percentage terms. This was prepared on the basis of documents preserved in the TSKŻ in Częstochowa.

secretary L. Frank, over 1,200 people part in Club events.<sup>69</sup> So that attendance was quite substantial.

The years passed. The Club experience better and slightly worse moments. For quite a time, due to the lack of a teacher, Yiddish classes were not conducted. In the mid-1960s (in 1965, to be precise), the KDM's activities diminished. A section of the youth grew up and left the Club, or reduced their involvement in its daily activities. High school students were reluctant to become overly involved. So they focussed on the slightly younger members. Reports by the head of the Club show that [in these activities – authors], "*Jurek Kromowski, Ela Skowronek and Dorotka Romańczuk proved themselves*".<sup>70</sup>



Jewish scouts guard the mass graves of ghetto victims on ul. Kawia, 1962.  
Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa

By May 1966, everything began to return to normal. According to preserved reports, each day in May was carefully planned and filled with activities.<sup>71</sup> In 1966, the millennium of the Polish state was celebrated. Lectures, readings and various events were organised as part of the celebrations, during which the joint activities, in defence of and fight for Polish statehood, of the Polish and Jewish communities were emphasised.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Based on the 1965 survey – source: TSKŻ Częstochowa collection.

<sup>70</sup> Based on documents found in the collection of the Częstochowa TSKŻ.

<sup>71</sup> Based on documents found in the collection of the Częstochowa TSKŻ.

<sup>72</sup> At the same time, the thousand-year Jewish presence on Polish soil was recalled.



Members of the Children and Youth Club of the Częstochowa TSKŻ tidying the Jewish cemetery, 1964.  
Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa



Channukah, 1965. From left: Gosman, Stefcia Biber, Boguś Baum, Renia Garfunkiel and little Marek Zomer-Szlajn, Jurek Garfunkiel, Ania Ajon, Józef Baum, Mr Lancman  
Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa

Club members were even more active in 1967. According to a report<sup>73</sup> summarising the activities of the club for March 1967, this was the result of the fact that the club's work was strongly supported by primary and high school students, in total a dozen or so individuals. The drama circle was reactivated. With increased momentum, presentations were prepared marking the year of Janusz Korczak and the 24th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising., The photography and art circles were active also.

The KDM's thriving activity did not, of course, the ceasing of the Club's activities for adults. Halina Wasilewicz recalled:

*"The adults also met. There was a reading circle and a discussion circle. There was a reading room with many books."*<sup>74</sup>

An important role was played by the first "Belweder" television set which, later, sat in a cupboard as a souvenir. But, in its time, it was a real attraction. Halina Wasilewicz said,

*"Almost the whole street would come to watch it as though they were going to the cinema."*<sup>75</sup>

Children's performances, balls and parties were organised to celebrate significant dates. From the memoirs of Halina Wasilewicz (as well as from other's), it shows that one of the most important holidays was the anniversary of the liberation of Częstochowa.<sup>76</sup> Not only were there performances, but also games. [Halina] Wasilewicz said,

*"I always repeat these were not political issues. The simple explanation is that it was not for that freedom, but for the next freedom. For the Jews, it was very important because, as I mentioned last time, then, at least a few thousand gained their freedom."*<sup>77</sup>

In the 1960s, Stefan Laufer was TSK chairman and the secretary was Leon Frank. Reports show that the Częstochowa branch of the TSKŻ had circa 150 members.<sup>78</sup> The branch ran a children's and youth club, but not only. ORT course were still conducted through the TSKŻ<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> A report on the activity of the Janusz Korczak youth and children's club in Częstochowa for the month of March 1967, dated 5<sup>th</sup> April, from the collection of documents of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa.

<sup>74</sup> Source: the memoirs of H. Wasilewicz recorded by the POLIN Museum. Interview date, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2010, interviewer Piotr Kowalik, transcription P. Sałapa.

<sup>75</sup> Source: ibidem.

<sup>76</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> January.

<sup>77</sup> Source: the memoirs of H. Wasilewicz recorded by the POLIN Museum. Interview date, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2010, interviewer Piotr Kowalik, transcription P. Sałapa.

<sup>78</sup> As at 31<sup>st</sup> October 1962, the number of members shown was 150. In the 1965 summary report, it was stated that the Częstochowa TSKŻ had 151 members, of whom 30 were KDM members (based on the report, for the first half of the year of the branch's activities – the report dated 18<sup>th</sup> July 1966, No. 235/66, submitted to the TSKŻ Main Organisational Department in Warsaw). In mid-1966, the number of members was 127 from Częstochowa, plus nine from Radomsko and nine from Krzepice – totalling 145 individuals. In May 1967, there were 147 members, including nine from Radomsko and nine from Krzepice. Data from 1966 and 1967 is based on documents which have been preserved in the collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa.

<sup>79</sup> In 1965, fourteen people were training in ORT courses – based on the report of the branch's activities, covering the first half of the year, dated 18<sup>th</sup> July 1966, Ldz. 235/66, submitted to the TSKŻ Main Organisational Department in Warsaw), in the collection of documents of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa.

Support was provided to those working from home, who were employed by the Lewartowski cooperative in Gliwice. The economic and social committee was very active.<sup>80</sup>



The TSKŻ Club in Częstochowa, 1963.  
Sitting at the table (from left): Messrs, Frank, Horończyk, Kurcbard and Laufer.  
Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa

Anniversaries were not forgotten. Various types of special events were organised. In 1967, a total of twelve anniversary events were held – three literary, six political and ten others.<sup>81</sup> Subscriptions to Jewish publications continued<sup>82</sup>. A summer camp was planned and prepared for thirty children.<sup>83</sup>

Throughout its operation, the Częstochowa TSKŻ strived to honour, with dignity, the memory of the Jews murdered during the War. This was not just limited to performance events and the laying of wreaths, but also to maintaining and commemorating the places of execution on ul. Kawia<sup>84</sup> and the renovation of monuments on mass graves in the cemetery. At that time, the construction of a brick fence around the cemetery was initiated. This became the subject of intense negotiations with the Częstochowa Huta [Steelworks], the property of which was directly adjacent to the cemetery.

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<sup>80</sup> Twenty people used this social welfare, while twelve did so on a temporary basis. Prepared on the basis of a report of the first half-year's activities of the branch, dated 18<sup>th</sup> July 1966, Ldz. 235/66, submitted to the TSKŻ Main Organisational Department in Warsaw), in the collection of documents of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa.

<sup>81</sup> Based on a report of the first half-year's activities of the branch, dated 18<sup>th</sup> July 1966, Ldz. 235/66, submitted to the TSKŻ Main Organisational Committee in Warsaw, in the collection of documents of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa.

<sup>82</sup> 46 subscriptions to the "Folks Sztyme", 31 to "Idisze Szriftn", 33 to the "Jidysz Buch". At that time, awards were given for "recruiting subscribers" to the publishing house of the "Jidysz Buch". For Mr Hercberg, for example, it was a bonus in the form of a two-week stay in Śródborów in August. Based on a report of the first half-year's activities of the branch, dated 18<sup>th</sup> July 1966, Ldz. 235/66, submitted to the TSKŻ Main Organisational Committee in Warsaw, in the collection of documents of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa.

<sup>83</sup> Based on a report of the first half-year's activities of the branch, dated 18<sup>th</sup> July 1966, Ldz. 235/66, submitted to the TSKŻ Main Organisational Committee in Warsaw, in the collection of documents of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa.

<sup>84</sup> The idea was to create a permanent fence and to place appropriate commemorative plaques.





Members of the Częstochowa TSKŻ lay wreaths at the mass graves of Holocaust victims on ul. Kawia, on the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the extermination of Częstochowa Jews, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1961.

**Photograph from collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa**

Efforts were also made to erect a monument to commemorate the Jews who were murdered in Częstochowa. Contact was maintained with *landsmannschaften* (Jews from Częstochowa who organised themselves into mutual support groups following emigration).

Certainly, the premises of the Częstochowa branch of the TSKŻ, at ul. Jasnogórska 36, with all the activities carried out there, at that time, was the centre of Jewish life in Częstochowa. The activities organised there created personal bonds, also providing a sense of unity and security. They contributed to the cultivation of Jewish identity.

But, at that time, it was not just the TSKŻ which endeavoured to organise the life of Częstochowa Jews. Parallel to the TSKŻ was the Kongregacja Wyznania Mojżeszowego on ul. Garibaldiiego, its long-term chairman being Jakub Landcman. Henryk Albert recalls:

*“There was a mikvah, a prayer house, a pre-burial house, a hearse and horses which took Jews on their final journey<sup>85</sup>. The dead were escorted from ul. Garibaldiiego, from the pre-burial house, on foot from ul. Krakowska right up to the cemetery, which was under the care of the Kongregacja”<sup>86</sup>.*

Of course, it was also a place for celebrating all kinds of religious holidays. As it happened, even bar mitzvahs were organised in the 1960s<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> Source: a statement by H. Albert at a meeting with Israeli guides in Częstochowa, on 10th February 2020, video recording (authors' archive).

<sup>86</sup> Source: ibidem.

<sup>87</sup> Bar mitzvah- a Jewish ceremony, celebrated since the 14th century. During the ceremony, a Jewish boy becomes an adult according to religious law. From that moment onwards, he is accountable to God for his actions and can take an active part



The bar mitzvah of Henryk Albert, Czestochowa, 1961.  
**Photograph from private archive of H. Albert**



Henryk Albert with his parents Fela and Dawid Albert on the day of his bar mitzvah.  
**Photograph from private archive of H. Albert**

And, suddenly, this rich multi-faceted Jewish community, both in Poland and in Czestochowa, was interrupted.

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in religious ceremonies held in a synagogue. For more, see. J. Mizgalski, *Tożsamość polityczna polskich Żydów w XIX i XX wieku na przykładzie Czestochowy*, Czestochowa 2008, [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bar\\_micwa](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bar_micwa) (accessed: 2nd June 2020).