

Rejected and Abandoned

*“the dresses and ostrich fans have withered
time hangs suspended like a lotus cloud
everything ended sooner than it had to
I have no dance partner still the music is loud
the divine dancer dances elsewhere
neither I nor you know where
if I cannot see him here
how will I find him in the great beyond”¹*

We have already mentioned that the authorities of the People’s Republic of Poland (PRL) used Jewish minority stereotypes for their temporary, political purposes. Building his own political base over the years after October 1956, Gomułka increasingly moved away from the Puławians (in later years, accusing them of revisionism) and slowly switched sides to that of the dogmatists associated with Moczar camp – the so-called “partisans”.² Finally, in 1967-1968, Gomułka accused the Jewish community of sabotage against Poland.

What we refer to, in history, as “March’68”³, is, in fact, a complex and multi-faceted sequence of political events at the end of 1967 and beginning of 1968, which had its apogee in March and April 1968. The trigger for this sequence was the “Six-Day War”⁴, in which Israel defeated a coalition of Arab states which were supported, politically and in terms of equipment, by the USSR and the “socialist states”.

Bearing in mind the “Six-Day War”, the student revolts in Poland and in the West, the demands of intellectuals and the removal, from the National Theatre, of Mickiewicz’s *Dziady* [“Forefathers’ Eve”], directed by Kazimierz Dejmek, for this publication, we must state that it is important that antisemitic rhetoric was being used in Poland. Words about a “fifth column”⁵ were the stones that began an avalanche. In fact, they constituted top-down consent for what actually happened later to the Jews.

The antisemitic propaganda carried out by party elements and “social factors”, did not bypass Częstochowa. During the mass rallies, organised in workplaces and institutions, slogans inspired by party authorities, such as “Cleanse the party of Zionists”, were placed on banners.

¹ Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, *Zgubiony tancerz (The Lost Dancer)*. Maria Janina Teresa Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska (1891–1945), née Kossak, primo voto Bzowska, second voto Pawlikowska, third voto Jasnorzewska – Polish poet and playwright during the inter-War period. Winner of the Golden Academic Award of the Polish Academy of Literature in 1935. Loosely associated with Skamander. For more, see. https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska (accessed: 2nd June 2020).

² This was a party faction centred around Deputy Interior Minister Mieczysław Moczar. This group, often called the “Red ONR” [National Radical Organisation] by the Jews, began using pre-War language – to “de-Jew” Poland.

³ For more, see https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marzec_1968 (accessed: 2nd June 2020).

⁴ For more, see https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wojna_sze%C5%9Bciodniowa (accessed: 2nd June 2020).

⁵ W. Gomułka’s word, spoken at the trade union congress on 19th June 1967.

In “Życie Częstochowy” [“Czestochowa Life”], a resolution was published under the title *The Voice of Częstochowa Textile Workers*. It stated that;

*“Rebellious Zionist politicians must not be allowed to use the enthusiasm and energy of young people for their own purposes and direct them against the people’s authority. We demand the absolute removal, from their positions, of all Zionists whose children participated in provocative speeches [...]”*⁶.

A similar tone was voiced by teachers who, in a resolution condemning political centres in the West, which were hostile to Poland, stated:

*“We will not permit the democratic freedoms, which exist in our country, to be abused by hostile and pro-German Federal Republic and Zionist elements, who seek to exploit students for their dirty and selfish interests”*⁷.

Propaganda, broadly conducted, had its impact on the reality. Being Jewish had become dangerous.

The TSKŻ became the natural “Jewish habitat”. So, a stone would be thrown into the garden, offensive slogans appeared on walls or there would be loud hooting from the drunks in the nearby bars. Tension and fear were growing. It seemed that old, forgotten fears and anxieties were returning. Even though most of the children lived near the club, it was safer to walk them home after school. No one knew where and when an attack might occur. The loss of positions and jobs by Jews was obvious.⁸

A terrible mood prevailed and the top-down permission, on how to deal with Jews, only heated up the atmosphere. It was no wonder that, as soon as the compulsory possibility to leave was instigated, Jews from Poland, including from Częstochowa, left *en masse*. The hardest hit by March’68 was the new generation of Jews. This was a generation that did not remember the War. It was a generation of well-educated young Poles, who were Jewish.⁹

Halina Wasilewicz recalled that, after March, it was:

“very sad. All my youth left, meaning all my friends left. The whole community disappeared”.¹⁰

⁶ T. Wolsza, *Częstochowa w latach 1957–1970*, [in:] K. Kersten (ed.), *Częstochowa...*, op. cit., p. 180, cyt. for: “Gazeta Częstochowska” No. 12 dated 19th–25th March 1968.

⁷ T. Wolsza, *Częstochowa...*, op. cit., p. 180, cyt. za: *Głos Częstochowskich Włóknarzy*, [in:] “Życie Częstochowy” No. 64, dated 14th March 1968.

⁸ Such an example of this in Częstochowa were Mr and Mrs Hassenfeld, Mr & Mrs Kromotów and Mr & Mrs Wajman. Source Henryk Albert’s address at a meeting with Israeli guides in Częstochowa on 10th February 2020, video recording (authors’ archive).

⁹ Wśród niechcianych obywateli było blisko tysiąc studentów, kilkuset lekarzy, kilkuset naukowców, muzycy, dziennikarze, pisarze, reżyserzy, inżynierowie. Jak się oblicza, na przestrzeni lat 1968–1971 wyjechało z Polski ponad 2 tysiące osób z wyższym wykształceniem.

¹⁰ H. Wasilewicz, *Moje życie...*, op. cit., p. 397.

According to data from the Ministry of the Interior, the effect of the 1967-1968 antisemitic campaign was the departure of 13,333 Jews and members of their families.¹¹

They left on the basis of a “Blue Book”¹² – a one-way travel document, without any right of return to Poland and, of course, without Polish citizenship.

Henryk Albert recalls:

“This was such a tragic period in my life when, as an employee of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa, I’d come to work, just before it closed, and I’d have practically no friends around me anymore. We accompanied Jews, who were leaving for different parts of the world, to the Częstochowa railway station. It was a special train, which left from Warsaw-Gdańsk station to Vienna. And here, at 8:56 pm, that train was in Częstochowa. We thought, then, that we would never again in our lives see those who left. Thank God that it has turned out differently.”¹³

They left in a hurry and with only hand luggage – without citizenship, without a passport, with a sense of injustice – into the unknown.

As already mentioned, what allowed the events of March’68 to happen had their roots in the 1950s. In many respects, its effects on Poland were very unfavourable. The theory about the Poles’ incurable antisemitism became popular in Europe and around the world. The country had lost many outstanding citizens. Educated and dynamic young people had also left. The effects of March’68 were also disastrous for the organisations and institutions of Jewish life in Poland. Still-operating Jewish schools were shut down, as was the “Jidysz Buch” publishing house. The activities of JOINT and ORT were suspended.

It was with the greatest difficulty that the ZRWM and TSKŻ continued to operate. The congregations were deserted and many branches of the TSKŻ were closed.¹⁴ The fact that the TSKŻ condemned Israel’s aggression against the Arab countries in 1967 caused many Jews, after March 1968, to distance themselves from the activities of this organisation.¹⁵ The organisation suffered a great loss in numbers, combined with a significant increase in the average age of its members, as well as minimisation of its activity.

In the documents collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa, a copy of a document, dated 8th October 1968¹⁶, sent to the Presidium of the City Council, Internal Affairs Department, regarding the TSKŻ’s work plan until the end of that year. In it were foreshadowed on four ceremonies:

“a ceremony to commemorate the 26th anniversary of the liquidation of the Częstochowa ghetto... a performance to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the

¹¹ For more, see: A. Grabski, A. Rykała, Żydzi..., op. cit., p. 414.

¹² Called a “blue notebook” by Jews.

¹³ Henryk Albert’s address to Israeli guides in Częstochowa on 10th February 2020, video recording (authors’ archive).

¹⁴ The State Jewish Theatre and the Jewish Historical Institute were also maintained. For more, see: A. Grabski, A. Rykała, Żydzi..., op. cit., p. 414.

¹⁵ There were accusations of collaboration and treason.

¹⁶ It was signed by Feliks Ponar as secretary.

establishment of the Polish Army Reborn, a performance to celebrate the Great Socialist October Revolution... a performance to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Communist Party of Poland and the Unification Congress of the Polish Workers' Party (PPPR) and the Polish Socialist Party (PPS)".¹⁷



Jola Altman, at the grave of her grandmother, 1963.
Source: Private archive of Jola Altman-Radwańska

At that time, the TSKŻ's centre was open on Tuesdays, from 5:00 pm to 6:00 pm, and on Saturdays, from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm. But the centre was still located at ul. Jasnogórska 36¹⁸. That turned out to be only "negligence" on the part of the authorities, who were already preparing for a change. As Halina Wasilewicz recalled:

"... just after March, we received a letter from the Ministry of the Interior, that we are not the owners of these premises and that the mortgage indicates the Markowicz couple, whose address was unknown. So, to put it mildly, we were required to leave the premises.

At that time, I was at university. But I knew who were in charge of the Częstochowa branch. Well, in the light of what was happening in Poland, they were simply afraid to prove anything [to the contrary] or to argue the point. So, they agreed to what was proposed.

What was offered was an apartment on ul. Kilińskiego. It was on the second floor – two rooms and a kitchen. The move was accompanied by vandalism from various neighbours. There was no caretaker, no one lived in that building any more, no one officially watched over the building and it was destined to be liquidated. And the

¹⁷ Based on documents in the collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa.

¹⁸ Based on documents in the collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa.

*collection of records, many books were destroyed and the Perec painting has traces of damage – it was simply riddled with holes”.*¹⁹



At the grave of Sara Altman: Tadeusz and Janina Altman,
Anna Wyględaczowa²⁰, Mr Wolfowicz²¹
Source: Private archive of Jola Altman-Radwańska

For those, at that time, who were active in the TSKŻ²², the most important task was to maintain the branch, irrespective of the losses – and losses were inevitable. Jewish life, in Częstochowa, basically came to a standstill. That sadness and emptiness was symbolically complemented by the last burials at the Jewish Cemetery. On 3rd May 1970, one of the last funerals was that of Dawid Albert, after which the cemetery was closed.²³

Following its closure, its degradation began. It was very difficult for Jews from Częstochowa to visit the cemetery²⁴. The lack of people who could care for the cemetery and the lack of

¹⁹ Source: the recollections of H. Wasilewicz recorded by the POLIN Museum, interview date: 16th October 2010, interviewer: P. Kowalik, transcription author: P. Sałapa.

²⁰ Anna Wyględaczowa and her husband, Roman, helped many Jews during the occupation: based on the oral testimony of Jola Altman-Radwańska.

²¹ Wolfowicz, expert in funeral rituals, reciting *Kaddish* at burials and anniversaries: based on the oral testimony of Jola Altman-Radwańska.

²² Including S. Laufer, H. Grynbaum, F. Ponar.

²³ Source: Henryk Albert's address to Israeli guides in Częstochowa on 10th February 2020, video recording (authors' archive). There are also reports that the last funerals took place in October 1970 and illegal burials in 1973. The obligation to care for cemeteries rests with Jewish communities. It was no different in Częstochowa. Unfortunately, the cemetery was adjacent to a steelworks. At some point, the B. Bierut Steelworks began to grow and ever more surrounded the cemetery. In 1953, the authorities took over 2.5 hectares of this area (concluding that it did not contain any graves). At the end of the 1950s, it was probably only thanks to the Congregation of the Mosaic Faith and the TSKŻ, that the cemetery was saved from closure for the first time. However, the growth of the steelworks meant that access to the cemetery was already difficult in the mid-1960s. At the end of 1970, after its closure, surveyors appeared. Complete liquidation of the cemetery and exhumation of the corpses was planned. In the end, this did not happen. But the abandoned cemetery, one of the largest in Poland, covering an area of circa 8.5 hectares before the war, was gradually being destroyed.

²⁴ The former entrance was closed. The cemetery became dangerous due to the presence of hooligans. So, the "trip" to it usually involved hiring a taxi. For the sake of safety, three-four people were left at the cemetery, by the taxi driver, who returned for them at an agreed time.

funerals, combined with the expansion of the steelworks, became a real threat to the cemetery. The graves decayed, damaged or even disappeared. This was the case of the grave of Sara Altman (née Jakubowicz). As Jola Altman-Radwańska recalls:

"In the year 1970, my grandmother's grave, one of the first in the "new cemetery"²⁵ created during the occupation, simply disappeared. The only proof that it existed at all are photographs".²⁶

The cemetery was closed and an attempt was made to close the Częstochowa branch of the TSKŻ. The reason, this time, was purely practical - money. There was a lack of funds to pay for the premises and for any necessary services. This is how Halina Wasilewicz described that difficult situation:

"There was a real threat of liquidating the TSKŻ branch. At the time, fresh from university, I volunteered to serve as social secretary of the branch. I remember the responses of some of the branch members, the older people: 'Even if we can't come to the club, let us know about the meetings – do everything to save the branch'. That's what we did.²⁷ These were people whom I knew. I knew them very well, the situation of each family, they were a substitute for my own family. For the most part, we are Częstochowa residents from families connected with this city over many generations. Our parents and ancestors live in us."²⁸

For the TSKŻ in Poland, the 1970s and 1980s was a time when the organisation's activity diminished. But, at the same time, a group of new members appeared – Jews who, for various reasons, had not emigrated from Poland and who had, previously, avoided contact with Jewish organisations. Thanks to this, the TSKŻ could continue to operate. In Częstochowa, Halina Wasilewicz, together with a handful of Jewish supporters, fought for the survival of the organisation. The situation was paradoxical. As a city, Częstochowa again entered a period of accelerated development²⁹, while the branch barely functioned.

²⁵ The "new cemetery" was commonly referring to the area allowed, by the occupier, for Jewish burials. There was no separation between the two cemeteries. We know about the funeral, before the ghetto closure (April 1941), from the example of Sara Altman's funeral, based on the account of J. Altman-Radwańska, who received as description of it from her father: *"The deceased person was prepared for burial in their apartment. Fees had to be paid and a bricklayer had to be hired – who was to partially brick up the grave. Anyone could come to the cemetery for the funeral, provided that they wore a Star of David on their clothing and that the curfew was strictly observed. There was no guard at the cemetery and no one watched over the mourners. The coffin was transported on a special cemetery wagon, which was pulled by people especially hired for that purpose. The deceased was placed into the partially-bricked grave, which was later completed and closed up after the mourners had departed"*.

²⁶ Based on the authors' correspondence with J. Altman-Radwańska.

²⁷ Source: the recollections of H. Wasilewicz recorded by the POLIN Museum, interview date: 16th October 2010, interviewer: P. Kowalik, transcription author: P. Sałapa.

²⁸ Source: the recollections of H. Wasilewicz recorded by the POLIN Museum, interview date: 16th October 2010, interviewer: P. Kowalik, transcription author: P. Sałapa.

²⁹ In 1975, as the result of an administrative division, the Częstochowa Province was created. Częstochowa counted more than 200,000 inhabitants. In the 1970s decade, a process of significant modernisation could be observed in the city, both in enterprises and in urban infrastructure. The first years of the decade was favoured by a good economic situation. The city's cultural institutions became more active. Częstochowa's tertiary education institutions strengthened their positions in the national rankings and the construction industry was also developing.

Oddział w Częstochowie
ul. Kilińskiego Nr 3 m. 21
tel. 412-41

Częstochowa 12 stycznia 1974r.

Informacja

o działalności stowarzyszenia na 1973 rok

- I. Nazwa stowarzyszenia, adres siedziby:
TOWARZYSTWO SPOŁECZNO KULTURALNE ŻYDÓW W POLSCE oddział w
Częstochowie ul. Kilińskiego 3 m. 21
- II. Nr. rejestru i data wpisania:
PPRN Wydział Spraw Wewnętrznych 6.X.1948r. pos. 12 rejestru oddziałów
stowarzyszenia.
- III. Teren działania m. CZĘSTOCHOWA.
- IV. Kadencja władz: 28 listopada 1971 rok.
- V. Struktura organizacyjna: TOWARZYSTWO SPOŁECZNO KULTURALNE.
- VI. Organ dotujący-międzyrządowy: Zarząd Główny Towarzystwa Społeczno Kultu-
ralne Żydów w Polsce WARSZAWA Pl. Grzybowski 12/16
a/wysokość dotacji stałej: 36000 zł.
b/wysokość dotacji docelowej: 600 zł.
- VII. Liczba członków 50 osób.
a/fizycznych-składka członkowska: 12 zł. roczna
b/młodzież do lat 18 składka członkowska: -
c/wspierających-wpływ roczny składek: -
d/ prawnych składka roczna -
- VIII. Ilość statów i osobowy fundusz płac:
a/staty pełne i niepełne w przeliczeniu na pełne: 1 stat
b/osobowy fundusz płac: zł. 9000.-
c/bezosebowy fundusz płac: zł. 6100.-
- IX. Działalność gospodarcza na podstawie:
a/uzyskanych zezwoleń: -
b/statutu /bezwynikowa/ -
- X. Wysokość dochodów:
a/ ogółem: zł. 330 -
b/ z działalności statutowej zł. 330
c/ z działalności gospodarczej -
- XI. Wysokość wydatków:
a/ ogółem: zł. 34.652,65.-
b/na osobowy fundusz płac: zł. 9000.-
c/na bezosebowy fundusz płac: zł. 6870.-
- XII. Przymagalność do innych organizacji:
członkiem TPRP i PCK .-

Sekretarz:

/I. Bronstein/

Przewodniczący

/S. Laufer/

Information
about
the TSKŻ's
activities
in
Częstochowa,
1973.

Source: the
document
collection of the
TSKŻ in
Częstochowa

Stowarzyszenie Społeczno-Kulturalne
Związek w Polsce
Oddział w Częstochowie
ul. Książkiewicza Nr 3 m. 21
tel. 412-61

P R O T O K O Ł

Zebrania członków oddziału TSKŻ w Częstochowie odbytego w dniu 30 czerwca 1974r. o godz. 18.30 w lokalu własnym.-
Zebranych według listy obecności 19 osób.-
Porządek dzienny:
1. Informacja o podjętej uchwale Zarządu Głównego o likwidacji oddziału w Częstochowie i o pobycie członków Zarządu w powyższej sprawie w Zarządzie Głównym w Warszawie.-
2. Dyskusja.-

Zebranie zgłosił sekretarz oddziału Kol. I. Bronstein który odczytał zebrany treść pisma Zarządu Głównego o podjętej uchwale Zarządu Głównego likwidacji oddziału, a także pismo Zarządu Głównego wysuwające członków Zarządu do Warszawy, celem powtórnego przedyskutowania sprawy likwidacji i możliwości zmniejszenia wyłączenia by zapobiec likwidacji.-
Głos w sprawie pobytu w Warszawie zabrali kol. Kol. Laufer S. i Skowronek A. którzy poinformowali zebranych, że Zarząd Główny stoi na stanowisku, że wszystko należy od członków w Częstochowie, żeby oddział istniał, musi się odbywać praca kulturalno oświatowa, na imprezach żeby zawsze była liczna frekwencja i żeby członkowie częściej odwiedzali klub i że on nie będzie pustkami tak jak do dnia dzisiejszego.
Po informacji nastąpiła wymiana zdań w którym głos zabrali wszyscy zebrani z której wynika, że zebrani członkowie jednogłośnie chcą podtrzymać istnienie oddziału i zobowiązują się przyłożyć się do tego, aby wznowić działalność przez swoją obecność na imprezach i współdziałanie.
Po wymianie zdań podjęto następujące uchwały:
1. Wystąpić z wnioskiem do Zarządu Głównego aby zechciał powyższe przyjąć do wiadomości i pozytywnie ustosunkować się do życzeń członków.
2. Uchwalono również, że wniosku z tym że Zarząd Główny nie przyznał funduszu na opłacenie sekretarza, członkowie zadeklarowali chęć zebrania wśród siebie kwotę zł. 550 miesięcznie dla wynagrodzenia sekretarza.
3. Na zebraniu kol. mgr Halina Wasilewicz wyraziła gotowość prowadzenia sekretariatu.
4. Uchwalono powtórnie takie zebranie zorganizować w dniu 7 lipca b.r. o godz. 11-ej celem zastanowienia się nad dalszą działalnością.-
Na tym praca zebrania zakończono.-

Za zgodność:
/ I. Bronstein/

Minutes of a meeting of member of the TSKŻ branch held on 30th June 1974, during which the closure of the branch was discussed.

In it, Halina Wasilewicz expressed her willingness to serve as secretary of the organisation

Sources: both from the document collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa

Stowarzyszenie Społeczno-Kulturalne
Związek w Polsce
Oddział w Częstochowie
ul. Książkiewicza Nr 3 m. 21
tel. 412-61

Uprzejmie zawiadamiamy, że w niedzielę 24.IV.1977r. o godz. 17⁰⁰ odbędzie się wieczór poświęcony 34 rocznicy wybuchu powstania w Getcie Warszawskim. Z montażem słowno-muzycznym pt: "Hymn patetyczny" wystąpi młodzieżowy zespół artystyczny przy TSKŻ w Katowicach.

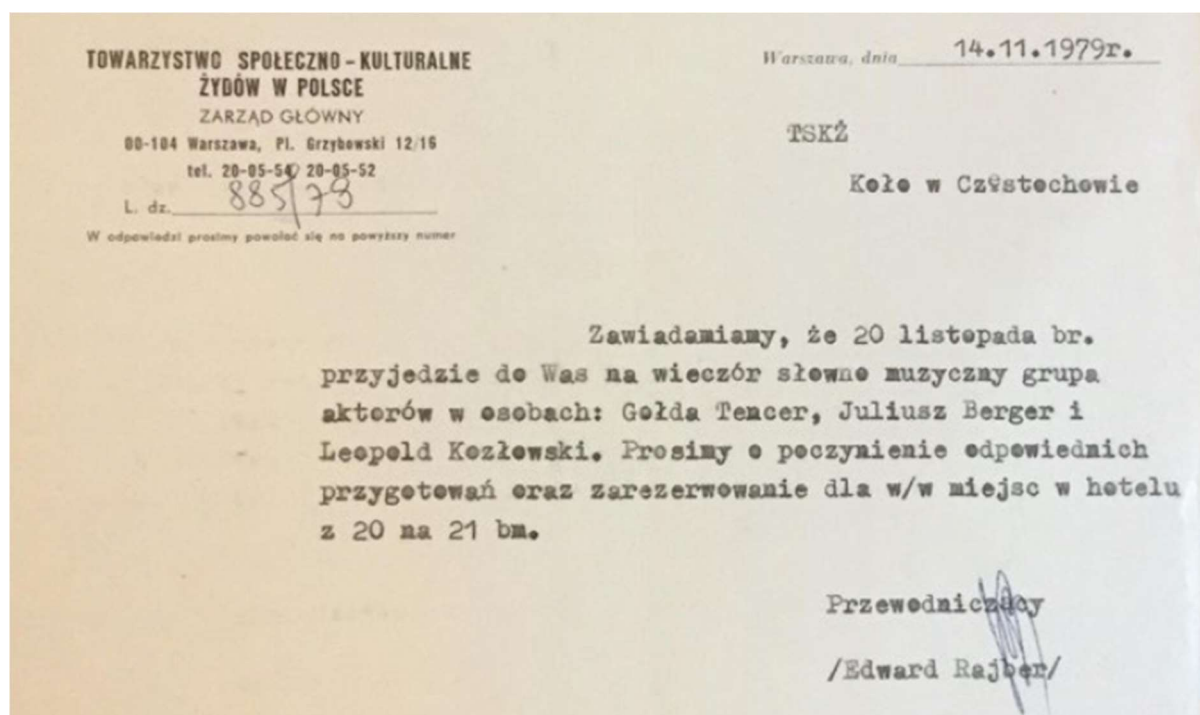
Zapraszamy.

Invitation to an evening event commemorating 34th anniversary of outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

Based on a 1976 list of members, which has been preserved, we know that forty-nine people were officially registered with the branch. It was the number of members, including five people from Radomsko, Halina Wasilewicz herself, her aged mother and many older generation activists.³⁰

The organisation's activities in the 1970s, 1980s and, partly, the 1990s, were mainly focussed on organising closed, social meetings which was, in fact, the implementation of the TSKŻ's Main Board. Lectures on the history of Jews were delivered, films on Jewish topics were screened and a book club was active. There were performances (music and poetry evenings) by State Jewish Theatre (PTŻ) actors, Gołda Tencer, Czesław and Zofia Rajfer, as well as Gerardo Ojeda. Jewish songs were performed by Sława Przybylska, Aleksandra Koncewicz or Jan Krzyżanowski.

Members of the Częstochowa branch of the TSKŻ continued to meet marking the anniversary of the liberation of Częstochowa. There were events held on subsequent anniversaries of the liquidation of the Częstochowa ghetto, as well as the anniversary of the October Revolution, May Day (1st May) and Women's Day. Formal of mutual aid were cultivated, such as visiting the sick. It was also remembered to lay flowers in places of mass executions. Events were held to celebrate Channukah or Purim.



Information about the arrival, in Częstochowa' of Jewish actors from Warsaw
for an evening of words and music.

Source: Document collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa

³⁰ A list of members of the Częstochowa branch of the Social-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland, as at 1st January 1976, From the documents collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa.

In the 1970s, members of the committee of management of the Częstochowa branch of the TSKŻ were Chil Grunbaum, Stanisław Laufer, Halina Wasilewicz, Leon Frank, Abram Wolfowicz, Józef Fajge, Henryk Ruziewicz, Henryk Borkowski and Leon Stawi. Stanisław Laufer was still chairman.

Frida was "Club Day". Then, it was possible to engage in economic and political discussions, literary events and music evenings. In 1978, marking the jubilee of the birth of Janusz Korczak, those related to his figure were included in the activities. It comprised a series of meetings, during which attempts were made to learn more about Korczak as a social activist, educator, writer and columnist.³¹

In 1978, the TSKŻ branch in Częstochowa officially had fifty-four members.³²

As admitted in their reports, the Jews, who gathered around the Częstochowa TSKŻ, did not enter the 1980s successfully.³³ Although it was still possible to maintain a series of occasional events, there were no speakers or performances from outside the city. Due to financial problems and a lack of fuel, it was necessary to suspend the branch's activities over the 1980-1981 winter. However, to mark the 30th anniversary of the TSKŻ, an exhibition was organised, which displayed documents and photographs from the first days of the Association. There was also a series of meetings, during which Chil Grynbaum, Henryk Ruziewicz and Halina Wasilewicz shared their memories.

In the 1980s, there was another reduction in activities. Members of the Częstochowa branch, or rather circle, met every first Saturday of the month and, of course, on the occasion of various holidays. The number of members varied around forty-eight. Membership of the Committee of Management remained quite constant. New people were rarely co-opted. In the early 1980s, Natalia Urbańska was such a person.

The TSKŻ's Częstochowa branch lived on, basically thanks to subsidies from the Association's headquarters. The poor financial position of the entire organisation had an obvious impact on the state and capabilities of individual branches. The Częstochowa Congregation fared even worse. In the whole of Poland, it was estimated that, at that time (the late 1970s), Congregations had a membership of less than 2,000, with an average age of 67.³⁴ For objective reasons, due to the age structure and dispersal, religious life was very weak and almost died out. In Częstochowa, it was no different. The weakness of both the TSKŻ and the Congregation had an extremely detrimental influence on the condition of the Jewish cemetery in Częstochowa.

The situation in the mid-1980s became really bad. In a special report, prepared by the TSKŻ, we read:

³¹ Based on handwritten minutes and reports on the activities of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa. Source: the collection of documents of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa.

³² Based on handwritten minutes and reports on the activities of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa. Source: the collection of documents of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa.

³³ Based on handwritten minutes and reports on the activities of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa. Source: the collection of documents of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa.

³⁴ For more, see: A. Grabski, A. Rykała, *Żydzi...*, op. cit., p. 415.

*"In the near future, the cemetery will be completely destroyed. Some of the graves are already covered with vegetation and a further section is being destroyed by the current production [of the steelworks – authors' note]. Currently, there are the following threats to the cemetery: approximately 2/3 of the fence no longer exists, so that the cemetery is no longer a fenced-in area, which is secured somehow. Although the area is closed off by the industrial security of the steelworks, it is an obvious protection, because people manage to enter cemetery and destroy monuments in a hooligan manner and desecrate graves by digging them up. Plaques are dismantled and monuments are stolen. These are later converted into contemporary tombstones in other cemeteries. There is landfill of metallurgical ashes against the north-west fence. The ashes are piled so high, that they collapse over the wall and this threatens to, systematically, cover the cemetery area."*³⁵

The above words are an excerpt of a note about the cemetery, prepared by Halina Wasilewicz.

A happy coincidence for the functioning of the Jewish communities was the change, by the state authorities, in their position towards the Jewish minority. In the 1980s, the policy of the state towards the Jews, and the organisations representing them, began to somewhat warm. One of the first signs of this change was the authorities consenting for JOINT to return to Poland (from 1981).³⁶

Also, in 1981, the TSKŻ and ZRWM established a joint Social Welfare Coordination Committee. The Committee cared for the sick, the disabled, the elderly and those in bad financial circumstances.

*"Funds for the activities of the Coordination Committee were primarily provided by the JOINT. In 1983, circa 5,500 people received support, from the JOINT, in the form of food parcels, money and medical aid. Ten years later, in 1993, 3,000 Jews benefited from JOINT's assistance."*³⁷

Thanks to these activities and the TSKŻ working fully with the state authorities, the Association began to gradually revive. The number of members grew. For the first time in sixteen years, a youth rally was organised.³⁸

In 1985, at the initiative of Zygmunt Nissenbaum³⁹, a foundation was established in his family's name. For many years, it has been involved in saving Jewish cultural monuments (including cemeteries) in Poland. The issue of securing and restoring the cemetery was raised many times by the Częstochowa Jewish community. However, it was not until the mid-1980s that the gateway and wall were rebuilt. Some of the windbreaks were removed and bushes

³⁵ Information regarding the cemetery in Częstochowa from 1976, prepared by H. Wasilewicz. Source: document collection of the TSKŻ in Częstochowa.

³⁶ For more, see: A. Grabski, A. Rykała, Żydzi..., op. cit., p. 416.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 417.

³⁸ For more, see: ibidem.

³⁹ Z. Nissenbaum – a prisoner in the Warsaw ghetto and in the Treblinka and majdanek camps.

were cleared. The steelworks and the Nissenbaum Foundation contributed to the works and the accompanying costs.⁴⁰

In the second half of the 1950s and at the beginning of the 1960s, the Jews of Częstochowa returned to a normal life. They lived in a reality that was given to them after the War. Families were started, children were born and new friendships were made. The TSKŻ⁴¹, next to the Congregation, was certainly the most complete grouping of this community. The sense of responsibility to preserve the memory of the history of Jews in Częstochowa was conducive to building Jewish identity in the younger generation also. This did not mean a desire to leave Poland – on the contrary.

It can be stated that, in 1968, there were Jews in Poland who consciously decided to be Polish, mostly without renouncing their Jewish identity. March'68 definitively crossed out all these efforts, endeavours and plans. The Jewish community in Poland practically ceased to exist. For those who left, 1968 gave them the experience of stigmatisation, exclusion and an institutional deprivation of their Polishness. Those who remained tried to continue the work of their predecessors under very unfavourable conditions. These were rather timid attempts, attempts made on the basis of the memory of the former glory, basically without a future – a real vegetation on the ruins.

Jewish social and cultural life, following a period of great prosperity in the 1960s, basically ceased to exist. The problem was not only the lack of the generation which had left Poland as the result of March'68, but also the fact that some Jews did not want to admit their Jewish heritage and cut themselves off from their roots. The main achievement of the Częstochowa activists of the 1970s and 1980s was to maintain the branch and to preserve the memory of the history of the Jewish community of Częstochowa to new times – times when there was a renaissance of interest in Jewish culture amongst young Poles – both those with Jewish roots and those who did not have such roots.

⁴⁰ In 1986, at the request of the Nissenbaum Family Foundation, the cemetery was entered into the register of heritage sites. In 1988, a team, for the restoration of the cemetery, was constituted, which included representatives of the steelworks, the municipal authorities and the Jewish Religious Association. In 1989, the steelworks officially gave up its intention to develop cemetery property.

⁴¹ Next to the Congregation and everything related to the functioning of the Jewish cemetery, it was one of the three pillars for the survival of Jewish identity in Częstochowa.