

# **RESISTANCE**

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THE WARSAW GHETTO UPRISING

Israel Gutman

Published in association with the  
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum



A Marc Jaffe Book

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ISRAEL GUTMAN  
Jerusalem  
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## Introduction

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NO ACT OF Jewish resistance during the Holocaust fired the imagination quite as much as the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of April 1943. It was an event of epic proportions, pitting a few poorly armed, starving Jews against the might of Nazi power. The ghetto Uprising was the first urban rebellion of consequence in any of the Nazi-occupied countries and was a significant point in Jewish history. The Uprising represents defiance and great sacrifice in a world characterized by destruction and death.

The Polish writer Kazimierz Bradys called Warsaw "the invincible city." "Warsaw," he wrote, "was the capital of World War II," for the city symbolized all that was both sublime and tragic during the war—and the ghetto was the heart of the Warsaw tragedy. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is a historical event, but it also has become a symbol of Jewish resistance and determination, a moment in history that has transformed the self-perception of the Jewish people from passivity to active armed struggle. The Uprising has shaped Israel's national self-understanding. It is viewed as the first Jewish rebellion since the heroic days of the Bar Kochba revolt in 135 C.E. The Uprising has become a universal symbol of resistance and courage.

The commanders of the Uprising were young men in their twenties, Zionists, Communists, socialists—idealists with no battle experience, no military training. With but a few weapons and limited ammunition, they knew that they had no chance to succeed. Their choice was ultimate: not whether to live or to die, but what choice to make as to their death.

We begin this work at the end: the ghetto, which only two years earlier had become the home of 400,000 Jews, is empty. Bereft of its population, the ghetto is reduced to rubble. Buried beneath its streets are the material remains of Jewish culture and civilization. Some sixty miles away in the skies around Treblinka are the ashes of the Jews of Warsaw who were brought in the summer of 1942 by train to its gas chambers. Within hours of their arrival, their material possessions confiscated, their hair shaved, they were gassed and their bodies cremated, sent up in smoke.

To understand the full meaning of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, we must sojourn among the Jews of Warsaw on the eve of World War II. Warsaw was a metropolis, the capital of the Polish Republic, and the largest center of Jewish life in Eastern Europe. It was also the heart of Eastern European Jewish culture during a time of transition and intense creativity. Political movements were centered in Warsaw; Zionists and Bundists, Communists and socialists competed for the allegiance of the young. Jewish theater and film thrived in Warsaw, Jewish newspapers proliferated. Jewish-Polish relations were changing as Jews entered the mainstream of Polish society. Jewish religious life was intense and devout. The religious community was piously observant, the secularists ardently secular. The religious community was deeply divided among the Hasidim and their opponents (*mitnagdim*), Mizrachi (Zionist Orthodox Jews), and the fiercely anti-Zionist Agudath Israel. The tensions and diversity within pre-war Warsaw's Jewish community continued in the ghetto and shaped ghetto life.

Just before World War II, Warsaw's Jewish population was 375,000, almost 30 percent of the city's total. One could not think of Warsaw without considering its Jews, who were to be found in every part of the city, though it was its northern part that contained the traditional Jewish neighborhoods. Jewish Warsaw was a city of contrasts. Offices of Jewish political parties and of many welfare, educational, and religious institutions were headquartered in Warsaw. Most of the Jewish periodicals, published in a variety of languages, were located in Warsaw. There were Jewish publishing houses, theater groups and sports clubs. Warsaw was the home of writers and poets, including S. Anski (author of *The Dybbuk*), Y. L. Peretz, and the Singers—Isaac Bashevis and Israel Joshua. The Warsaw that was flourishing with Jewish culture stood in stark contrast to the depressed status and abject poverty of the Jewish masses who constituted so visible a part of the city.

The Nazi invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, transformed and divided the city. By September 8 the Nazis stood at the gates of Warsaw. The Poles decided to resist as long as possible, thus the city was bombarded from the air; twenty days later it fell. More than one quarter of its buildings were destroyed or damaged. Casualties were high: fifty thousand dead or wounded. The German entry into Warsaw ended an era; the diversity, intensity, and distinctness of the pre-war city were gone. Three and a half years later, Jewish Warsaw stood in ruins, its ghetto reduced to rubble.

After occupation, the Nazis followed a familiar pattern established in Germany: Jews were first identified, and by December they were required to wear the Jewish star. Jewish property was confiscated and the remaining Jewish shops were marked. From local shops to art collections, from factories to private libraries, the Nazis followed a disciplined procedure of confiscation. All radios were taken. Collective responsibility and punishment were imposed: the deed of one endangered all. Jews were isolated from their former neighbors and concentrated into restricted living quarters. Forced labor was required, and the Jewish Council members were charged with the task of gathering the needed workers. The poor substituted for more affluent conscripts in response to ever increasing German demands. Class divisions deepened. They were soon to narrow: both the rich and the poor grew increasingly poorer. By the summer of 1940, more than 100,000 workers, more than 2.5 percent of the Jewish population, were conscripted by the Nazis. They faced long hours, no pay, and sadistic masters.

The Jewish Council was formed with the remnants of previous leadership. Adam Czerniakow, an engineer who had previously served on the Jewish Community Council, was appointed its head. The behavior of the Judenrat in Warsaw during the Holocaust has always been a matter of considerable controversy. The debate intensified with the charges made by Hannah Arendt in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* that had the Jews been leaderless and without formal institutions, the task of killing them would have been considerably more difficult. Arendt charged that Jewish leaders, wittingly or unwittingly, became tools of the Nazis. In the past three decades the ardor of this debate has not diminished. Czerniakow struggled to serve two masters—the Nazis, who viewed the Judenrat as an indispensable instrument of their policies, and the Jews, whose ever growing needs he desperately tried to meet.

On November 16, 1940, the ghetto was sealed. Over the next years, the population of the Warsaw ghetto would vary from 380,000 to 440,000 Jews. Death was pervasive throughout the ghetto. In 1941, 43,000 inhabitants died inside the ghetto, more than one in ten of its residents. Every day, ghetto residents struggled for survival. Jewish Self-Help manned the soup kitchens and provided fuel and coal, meager resources in the struggle for survival in the cold Polish winter. The formal structure of the ghetto as prescribed by the Germans and the Judenrat coexisted alongside the informal structure of the ghetto as it emerged in real life. The Judenrat developed into a multilayered government with a series of departments, which often functioned as fiefdoms for their directors. Those who worked for the Judenrat were seemingly protected. Tensions developed between those with "protection and connections," and those without. Religious tensions were rampant between the devout and the secular and between Jews and Catholics of Jewish origin who were defined as Jews by the Nuremberg race laws. (Daily services were held for "converted Jews" at the ghetto's Roman Catholic Church, which in the end was the only building left standing in the ghetto.) The informal structure was more creative, but no less developed.

A political underground published a vital clandestine press; youth movements and cultural life continued; political movements pushed their partisan agendas; education, religion, and culture endured in this hostile environment. Often ghetto institutions had a double life, one legal and open, the other clandestine and secret. Youth movements and urban training communes were camouflaged as soup kitchens. Cells of the Jewish underground were disguised as agricultural workers' groups.

There were basic tensions between the formal structure of the ghetto and informal structures that filled the vacuum of leadership and alleviated, at least in some small way, the harsh conditions of ghetto life. Children were indispensable to smuggling food, and family life was preserved despite the strains.

By mid-July 1942 the ghetto was in a panic. Rumors of deportation were rife. Czerniakow heard these rumors, and sought reassurance for his people. The leader of the Judenrat sought exemptions for children and for orphans. In the end, the order for deportation appeared, without Czerniakow's signature. The wife of the Judenrat chairman was held hostage to ensure his compliance with the Nazi master. On the evening of July 23, the ninth day of Av—the day of mourning commemorating the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and the exile of the Jewish people—Czerniakow completed the ninth book of his diary. To continue writing, he would have had to open a new book. Instead, that very same day he swallowed cyanide. There were no words of warning, only a final tragic confession of failure: "The SS wants me to kill children with my own hands." He could not participate.

Even in death Czerniakow remained controversial. Those close to him felt that his suicide was testimony to his personal courage, to his sense of public responsibility, an act of ultimate integrity. Underground circles were less charitable. They saw his death as an act of weakness. He had not even summoned the courage to warn the ghetto and to call for resistance.

During the days that followed, hundreds of thousands of Jews were dragged to the *Umschlagplatz* (assembly and deportation point) and transported in cattle cars to Treblinka. Initially, the task of rounding up the Jews for deportation fell to some extent to the Jewish police, but within a week the SS, aided by Ukrainian, Latvian, and Lithuanian soliders, as well as by the German gendarmerie—some two hundred men in all—took the lead and systematically laid siege to blocks, buildings, and streets. Those awaiting deportation were anxious; families struggled to stay together while some sought to escape the ghetto, to find a place to hide on the "other side of the wall." Others, such as Janusz Korczak and his orphans, went together—children and educators. Emanuel Ringelblum described the scene: "Korczak set the tone: everybody was to go to the *Umschlagplatz* together. Some of the boarding school principals knew what was in store for them there, but they felt they could not abandon the children in this dark hour and had to accompany them to their death." Korczak had firmly resisted all personal offers of safety.

The first to be taken were the weakest. Then came those who lacked papers and permanent jobs. They, in turn, were followed by relatives of those who had exemption papers, and finally even workers with proper papers were taken. Everyone was a potential victim. Families had to decide whether to stay together. Should mothers go with their children? What of the fathers?

Among the young and the resistance, demoralization set in after the deportations. Demoralization and recriminations were especially prominent, since in the early days of the July deportation a decision had been made that the time was not yet ripe for resistance. The survivors were frustrated and enraged that they had not fought the Germans or even struck out against the Jewish police. Remorse was deep. As Yitzhak Zuckerman reported on a conversation:

Jewish resistance will never come into being after us. The nation is lost. If we couldn't organize Jewish force while there were still hundreds of thousands in Warsaw, how can we do so when only a few thousand are left? The masses did not place their trust in us. We do not have—and probably never will have—weapons. We don't have the strength to start all over again. The nation has been destroyed; our honor trampled upon.

Because there was no choice, despair soon gave way to a firm determination to resist. Yet first, deep political divisions had to be overcome and alliances had to be forged among Jewish fighting factions



torn by deep ideological rifts. Zionists of the right and the left, religious non-Zionists, socialists, Bundists, and Communists were at odds with each other, divided over what tactics and strategies to employ, when to strike, whom to trust, what contacts to make. Divisions were so deep that the Revisionist Zionists established their own fighting unit, with only marginal contacts with the major resistance organization. Even the Nazi threat of total destruction could not unify the Jews, but the unification that was finally achieved represented almost all major political and social streams in Jewish life.

The Germans were hesitant to destroy the entire ghetto population. They did not want to lose the assets of the ghetto, including enterprises they wanted to transfer intact. Furthermore, they required Jewish labor to gather, store, and guard existing property. The deportation of July-September 1942 reduced the ghetto population from 400,000 to between 50,000 and 60,000 people. After the summer deportations the ghetto was left a mere remnant consisting mostly of men, whose chances for survival were enhanced by their usefulness for heavy labor. Almost all were between the ages of fifteen and fifty.

Belated efforts were made to forge a fighting organization. Political solidarity was required as was a unity of purpose and program. These were not easily achieved amidst the tensions and anguish of the post-deportation ghetto. The Jewish Fighting Organization, the ZOB, its leadership and fighters, emerged from the shadows of the first deportation. The ZOB members saw themselves as rejecting a Jewish tradition of passivity and compliance and returning to the heroic days of Jewish fighters of biblical times. And they conceived of themselves as an expression of Jewish national redemption.

Mordecai Anielewicz, who was to emerge as the undisputed leader of the Uprising, returned to Warsaw after the deportations from eastern Silesia, where he was engaged in underground work. Because he had been outside the ghetto during the decisive days of July—September, he was also free of the hesitation and powerlessness that had eroded the spirit of some of the ZOB members when they recognized the full consequences of their failure. He was soon to become a hero because of his extraordinary accomplishments during the few months of dynamic preparations and at the height of the battle.

The first act of resistance was an assassination attempt against the chief of the Jewish police, Jozef Szerynski, who, in the words of one diarist, "aided in the execution of 100,000 Jews." Soon Jacob Lejkin, another prominent policeman, was assassinated. Within a month, the first Judenrat official, Yisrael First, was killed. The ZOB were convinced that the ghetto could not be transformed into a fighting force unless the fifth column elements were eliminated. They also understood that the Nazis would not intervene in internal Jewish vendettas.

The ZOB insisted that there could be no next time, no further deportations, at least not without a fight. They proclaimed, in a public manifesto:

Jewish masses, the hour is drawing near. You must be prepared to resist. Not a single Jew should go to the railroad cars. Those who are unable to put up active resistance should resist passively, should go into hiding ... Our slogan must be: *All are ready to die as human beings.*

On January 9, 1943, Heinrich Himmler paid a visit to the ghetto. Two days later he ordered the deportation of eight thousand remaining Jews, who constituted the "illegal element." This time, the Jewish reaction was different. Ghetto streets were deserted, many went into hiding. A group of fighters under the command of Anielewicz attacked the Germans, and the first street battle occurred in the ghetto. By the third day of the *Aktion* the Germans were reduced to shooting wildly—and for the first time Jews had shot German soldiers. Armed resistance had begun. The Germans were suddenly hesitant and cautious. They did not go down to cellars, and each Jew they captured was searched. Streets became the scene of battle.

The *Aktion* ended within a matter of days. The remaining Jews were electrified. They falsely assumed that Jewish resistance, not Jewish compliance, had brought the deportations to a halt. Again they reproved themselves for their inaction during the fateful deportations. Hideouts were fortified, resistance units were strengthened. "The January revolt made the April revolt possible!" said one of the major leaders of the Uprising.

No doubt remained regarding the fate of the ghetto, and the only decision to be made was the response of those who remained. The ghetto had to be purged of dangerous collaborators. Money was desperately needed to purchase arms, cultivate contacts on the Aryan side, and acquire modest but substantial aid from the Polish underground. Planning for battle began in earnest. The leadership rejected a plan to transport some Jews to partisan areas clandestinely, and thus rescue at least a remnant. The reasoning was simple, Yitzhak Zuckerman said:

We saw ourselves as a Jewish underground whose fate was a tragic one ... a pioneer force not only from a Jewish standpoint but also from the standpoint of the entire embattled world—the first to fight. *For our hour had come without any sign of hope or rescue.*

The attitude within the ghetto had changed completely. When the Germans approached the leader of the Warsaw Judenrat, Marc Lichtenbaum, to speak to Jewish workers, his response was, "I am not the authority in the ghetto. There is another authority—the Jewish Fighting Organization." From January onward, Jewish forces stood on high alert, ready for action if the need arose. The high alert lasted eighty-seven days.

The Uprising itself, which began on April 19, 1943, the first night of Passover, continued until the final liquidation of the ghetto. Three days were allocated for liquidating the Warsaw ghetto. The battle of the bunkers continued for more than a month.

As the ghetto was set aflame, some Jews escaped through the sewers. One survivor reports:

On May 10, 1943, at 9 o'clock in the morning the lid of the sewer over our head literally opened and a flood of sunlight streamed in. At the opening of the sewer Krzaczek [a member of the Polish resistance] was standing and calling us to come out. We started to climb out one after another and at once got on a truck. It was a beautiful spring day and the sun warmed us. Our eyes were blinded by the bright light, as we had not seen daylight for many weeks and had spent the time in complete darkness. The streets were crowded with people, and everybody stood still and watched, while strange beings, hardly recognizable as humans, crawled out of the sewers.

The Uprising was literally a revolution in Jewish history. Its importance was understood all too well by those who fought. On April 23 Mordecai Anielewicz wrote to his comrade in arms Yitzhak Zuckerman:

What we have experienced cannot be described in words. We are aware of one thing only: what has happened has exceeded our dreams. The Germans ran twice from the ghetto ... I have the feeling that great things are happening, that what we have dared is of great importance....

Keep well, my dear. Perhaps we shall meet again. But what really matters is that the dream of my life has become true. Jewish self defense in the Warsaw ghetto has become a fact. Jewish armed resistance and the retaliation have become a reality. I have been witness to the magnificent heroic struggle of the Jewish fighters.

# 1. THE FIRST WEEKS OF WAR

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BY MID-MAY 1943, the rebellion of the Warsaw ghetto had come to an end. The last groups of Jews had been murdered or sent to death camps. Perhaps a few thousand were hiding underground. The people were gone; so too their homes, apartments, workshops, factories, public and welfare institutions, synagogues, makeshift houses of prayer, hospitals, and old-age homes—all had been systematically erased from the face of the earth, vanished forever.

On the fifteenth of May 1943, SS General Jürgen Stroop, whose forces had destroyed the Warsaw ghetto, triumphantly reported that the guards on duty the night before had encountered only six or seven Jews in the ghetto area. Only a handful of Jews remained within the ruins of the ghetto. Stroop also noted that he had blown up the great synagogue of Warsaw, located outside the ghetto area. This imposing structure, the work of the architect Leandro Marconi in 1878, was the pride of many Jews. To the Nazis, its destruction symbolized the final victory of German power and spirit. The Jews of Warsaw had been destroyed. The material remains of Jewish life would also be eradicated.

General Stroop began his report of May 15 with an enthusiastic description of the victorious military campaign. Heavy artillery had been employed; thousands of casualties had been inflicted on the enemy. In the words of his summary: "The Jewish quarter in Warsaw is no longer."

Indeed, Jewish life in Warsaw had ended. For nearly four years, Jews had fought for their lives, their children, and their homes. The non-Jewish world ignored their struggle or simply became resigned to the situation. Only a few, a very precious few, risked their lives by coming to aid the Jews.

The final chapter of the Jewish community in Warsaw had begun only four years earlier, on September 1, 1939.

In the summer of 1939, Germany presented Poland with an ultimatum demanding changes in the boundaries between the two countries; German inducements were tangible, its threats veiled. Poland stood firm. Along with the rest of the world, Polish leaders had followed the Reich's trail of broken agreements, dictates, and territorial expansion. Poland knew from the sad experience of Czechoslovakia and Austria that initially restrained German demands soon would be followed by ever-growing claims and threats to destroy the enemy and all European democracies. The Polish affair would end with the German occupation of its enfeebled neighbor. An attack could be expected; the only question was when.

Warsaw took some modest steps to prepare for war. Volunteers dug trenches around the approaches to the capital. Members of the Polish intelligentsia, who had never held a shovel, stood shoulder to shoulder with caftan-clad Jews, and they worked feverishly to protect the capital city. On August 19, 1939, Warsaw mayor Stefan Starzynski told residents, "Yesterday, more than 20,000 men dug trenches. Therefore, there are now a dozen kilometers of trenches already in a proper condition."

The Polish political crisis occurred just as Europe was abandoning its policy of appeasement, which was particularly strong in Great Britain. Public opinion was shifting against the Nazis. The abrogation of the Munich Agreement shortly after it was signed in March 1939 and the subjugation of Czechoslovakia, perhaps the most stable and successful democracy created by the Versailles treaty, convinced many that Hitler would not be satisfied by redressing the inequities resulting from World War I or gathering all Germans into one state. The German leader was intent on conquests and war.

The British policy of appeasement and the country's desperate attempts at negotiation had convinced Hitler that Great Britain and France would be reluctant to defend Poland despite their treaty obligations. Unwilling to display any weakness, Hitler resolved to attack Poland, correctly assuming that Poland would remain isolated during a short campaign. The last step that isolated Poland and ensured Hitler's fast victory was the Nazi-Soviet pact signed on August 23. Hitler and Stalin, who

were until then outspoken ideological and political rivals, united in the plot to give the Nazis a free hand in their invasion and to divide conquered Poland between themselves.

The first of September was a sunny summer Friday. Polish children were about to begin their new school year, but instead they were awakened by the sound of bombing. Zila Rosenberg, a Jewish girl who later became a member of the resistance in Vilna, remembered her terror: "I am lying in an open field, trying to shrink, to turn into a tiny invisible dot. Low-flying heavy German bombers are passing overhead. My heart is beating like a thousand hammers: oh, God, don't let them harm me."

No official declaration of war by the Nazis preceded the attack. Rather, German prison inmates were dressed in Polish military uniforms and armed with rifles, and they initiated what the Nazis claimed was a Polish attack on a radio station in the small German border town of Gliwice. The ruse was successful, and the bombing of Warsaw took its inhabitants by surprise. At about 7:00 A.M., hours after the bombing began, Polish radio broadcast the first warnings:

At 4:45 A.M., the German army, without declaring war, crossed the Polish borders from the north and the west... the first air-attack on Warsaw this morning caused damage in the airport area Okiecie and in residential quarters ... the newspapers printed during the night do not give any news as yet of the beginning of these acts of war.

On September 3, Britain and France declared war against Germany. Euphoria swept through Warsaw. The national anthems of Great Britain and France were broadcast endlessly. No one asked how the Allies would reach the Polish battlefields or where and when the western front would be set up. Excited crowds streamed toward the British embassy, then continued toward the presidential palace. A young Jew grasped a microphone:

Brothers, Poles, Jews. The enemy is beating and murdering us, burning and destroying our houses, our property, the effort of generations. I am a simple tinsmith, I don't understand politics. But it is clear to me that when we are attacked, we must defend ourselves. All of us—the rich and the poor, and even if we think there has been some injustice in the past, this must be set aside for the time being. Now we have to think of but one thing: if we all concentrate on a single purpose, we will be united—and we will win. But if we are not united, it will be bad. Long live our homeland and its allies and down with fascist Germany!

Still, despite the demonstrations and the war, the theaters and cinemas stayed open and were well attended.

On September 4, a newspaper reported, "The first transport of wounded reached Warsaw. Discouraging news is streaming in about the situation at the front, particularly about the advance of the German army in the southwestern sector. Escaping civilians turn up from Western Poland."

The Polish authorities ordered a partial evacuation of the capital. On September 5, President Ignacy Moscicki left town. On the same day, a railway station where refugees were concentrated was attacked from the air, resulting in many casualties. On the sixth, the prime minister, General Slawoj-Skladkowski, announced that "due to the danger facing the capital, the government was obliged to leave the city in the determined hope of returning after we have achieved victory." The chief commander of the armed forces, Marshal Rydz-Smigly, also fled. The situation deteriorated rapidly as the front was breached at critical points. The commander of the Polish forces abandoned the defense of the western districts.

With the attack against Poland, the Germans launched their "blitzkrieg" for the first time, which shocked Poland and surprised the world. The speed of the attack was unanticipated by Poland's high

command. It wreaked havoc before the defense forces of the country were even activated. One commentator noted,

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The pace of the Germans' advance during the first week of the war astonished us ... the chaos, the unbalanced and faulty organization ... From the very outset, there was a complete devitalization of the railways ... and in the confusion surrounding the movement of the railways, one could explain the phenomena which made me realize that we were entering an entirely new phase in life: that of leaving Warsaw.

Warsaw was threatened from the air and on the ground by the German tank corps, artillery, and infantry. The colonel responsible for the information services of the Polish general command broadcast a call for all young men of recruiting age to depart for the eastern regions, where the new front would be established. His ominous words yielded unanticipated results, for masses of inhabitants started on their exodus from the city. Adam Czerniakow, who later headed the Judenrat, the Jewish Council, in Warsaw, noted in his war diary on the seventh of September, "With knapsacks on their backs, they set out for the unknown."

Government authority had completely broken down. The administration, the political party structure, and various public functions were on the brink of collapse. Individuals took their fate into their own hands, crowding onto the bridges over the Vistula River. The roads leading eastward were thronged with an endless procession of people, who made an easy target for low-flying German aircraft, which machine-gunned the exposed migrants.

Many Jews took to the roads along with their Polish neighbors. Among the first to leave were political activists and prominent public and cultural figures in the Jewish sector. Jewish leaders felt uneasy, however, about leaving the city. Some claimed that they were likely to be on a German "wanted" list because they had published anti-Nazi articles or had taken part in activities against the Third Reich, such as advocating an economic boycott. Among those heading east were the heads of the Zionist movement, such as Moshe Kleinbaum (Sneh), who was later to play a decisive role in the organization of Jewish defense forces in Palestine; Menachem Begin, the central figure of the Zionist Betar movement, who headed the right-wing Irgun underground in Palestine and later became prime minister of Israel; and Zerah Wahrhaftig of the religious Zionist Mizrachi party. They were not alone. Long-standing leaders of the leftist non-Zionist Bund, Henryk Ehrlich and Victor Alter, Communist leaders, leaders of the Left Po'alei Zion, and the head of the Warsaw Jewish community, Maurycy Meisel, also fled.

The top echelon of Jewish leadership in political life, in both municipal and civil affairs, escaped the city together with the wave of refugees. Some of those who did not flee during the first days of September took advantage of other opportunities to slip out of Poland before the summer of 1940, including Apolinary Hartglas and Moshe Koerner of the General Zionists, Abraham Weiss of Mizrachi, Shmuel Zygelbojm of the Bund, and Yitzhak-Meir Levin and the Rabbi of Ger and his retinue from the heads of the ultra-Orthodox Agudath Israel. As a result, when Warsaw Jewry faced its greatest crisis, its most experienced leaders—political and religious—were elsewhere.

The leaders and many members of the Zionist youth movements declared that the movement's activities had ceased temporarily, and they too moved eastward. In all, it is estimated that some 300,000 Jews were in the wave of migrants streaming eastward from western and central Poland prior to January-February 1940. While no figures are known, it is likely that nearly 20 percent of all those who left were Jews from Warsaw, although some returned or eventually lost their lives at the hands of the Germans. Many who departed were young men who had left their wives and children behind. Thus from the beginning of the ghetto, the Jewish community was disproportionately composed of women

children, and the aged.

The flight of émigrés weakened the Jews remaining in Warsaw. Only a few top-level functionaries and public figures remained behind, generally for personal or family reasons. But there were also those who deliberately stayed behind because they would not abandon their people in distress. This spirit induced the historian and public figure Emanuel Ringelblum to stay in Warsaw during the time of the ghetto. In his diary he noted, "The nights of the 6—7th September. Thousands and thousands of young people—more than a hundred?—phone me: 'Are you leaving?'" As the hour of their greatest crisis approached, Warsaw Jews would be led by second-tier leaders. Ringelblum would not leave.

Unlike the Jews of Germany and the annexed countries, Polish Jews had no time to consider how to avoid the German snare closing around them. Jews of an older generation remembered the German troops who occupied Warsaw and parts of Poland during World War I—those soldiers had been polite and civil to the local population. Surely, they thought, the Germans could not undergo such an extreme and drastic change despite their professed ideology and territorial aggressiveness. Many Jews were convinced that the intended "solution of the Jewish problem" was the expulsion of Jews from Germany.

As the enemy approached the gates of Warsaw, two men who stood their ground earned the respect of the Warsawites, Mayor Stefan Starzynski and General Walerian Czuma, the man in charge of defending the capital. Their courage posed a stark contrast to a pathetically vague and fragmented government and the boastful arrogance of the establishment. Starzynski's voice and appeals had a calming effect and carried conviction.

The army decided to turn the city into a fighting fortress, surrounded as it was by retreating combat units lacking effective air defenses. Some thought that the city and its inhabitants could block the enemy's advance, demonstrating to the world the city's unwillingness to surrender and Poland's courageous spirit.

As the 16th Division of the German armored corps arrived at the gates of Warsaw on September 8, the 4th Armored Division attacked with air support. General Czuma announced that Warsaw was to be defended, and he called on its inhabitants "to go about their business as usual." According to Polish sources, the mission assigned to General Czuma was well beyond the power and means at his disposal. His forces consisted of several units in the city and what few troops could be realigned during their retreat.

The civilian population was asked to dig trenches and erect ramparts and barricades. Despite their enthusiasm and strong will, the many volunteers could not overcome the powerful arms and methods of the enemy. Defenses were improvised. The Poles were overwhelmed, yet still they refused to yield.

On the 12th of September at 10:00 A.M., Stefan Starzynski announced on the radio that General Czuma had been allowed to recruit an armed battalion of defenders of Warsaw made up of 600 men and expressed the hope that this unit would be raised within half an hour. Volunteers were asked to report at 11:00 A.M. before the Mostowski palace: "I need 600 dedicated, healthy, strong young men, who want to fight for Warsaw. The first unit must be ready at once. I call on 600 youths to come forward immediately; men who are determined and ready to die for their homeland and for Warsaw..." In a dozen minutes, there were some thousand at the gathering point—from young boys still in their teens to old men.

This hastily thrown together defensive body succeeded in arresting the advance of the invading Germans and even inflicted damage in direct combat. But the true obstacle to German domination was the city itself; its houses and citizens became the front, and they paid a heavy price for it. German forces surrounded Warsaw on all sides and continued to advance, subjecting the city to murderous air

attacks and artillery bombardments.

The mayor and army commander appealed to the inhabitants to withstand the assault and prevent the city's occupation. It is unclear whether this stubborn defense of the city was part of a larger plan to provide a breathing spell for the Polish army which might change in the course of the war. For the first three weeks, the inhabitants of Warsaw displayed unbelievable endurance, discipline, and spirit of sacrifice, despite the intensifying attacks, wanton destruction, disturbing shortages, and the absence of any encouraging change. One commentator wrote:

In such conditions, with no information about the real course of events, the eternally deluded Warsaw lives the life of a besieged city. The extended trenches and barricades prepared for street fighting were an aspect that the enemy had not considered at all, for there was no need or desire to sacrifice thousands of victims when such battles were absolutely unnecessary from the German point of view. They had two effective means of achieving the desired results: bombing from the air and attacking positions with heavy artillery, and in addition, there was always the possibility of letting the city starve.

During the first two weeks of the siege, the bombardment did not deter Warsaw's inhabitants, but then the Germans supported their air attacks with unceasing bombardment from their artillery. Fires spread throughout the city. In many instances, there was no attempt to save victims trapped under collapsed buildings. There were only a few reinforced shelters. The cellars in which people gathered for shelter proved helpful against the noise and quaking incurred by the bombing. In the event of a direct hit from the air, however, they were fatal traps.

Hospitals were destroyed, and in one, most of the seven hundred patients could not be saved. The water supply gave out. Hunger spread through the city, causing severe suffering among the thousands of refugees who had found shelter in public buildings. During the night, when the air attacks stopped, long queues of people formed outside the bakeries to await the distribution of bread before dawn. The supply was generally insufficient.

Even graver was the water shortage. The first signs of sickness began to appear, threatening the population with serious epidemics. The morale of the inhabitants, which had been high at first as people helped their neighbors, turned into nervousness, intolerance, and grumbling. The atmosphere was rife with rumors about battles that were supposed to have broken out on the western front on the border between France and Germany, or about Soviet penetration into the eastern part of Poland.

The desperation of Warsaw's inhabitants is detailed in one account of September 17:

The third Sunday of the war was one of the most difficult days experienced by besieged Warsaw. From dawn onward, heavy artillery was shelling the city and in the course of a dozen hours, some 500 shells had fallen. Added to this, both during the morning and the afternoon, planes were bombing the town and dropping incendiary bombs. People fell in great numbers in the streets. Tens of houses were burning, collapsing or turning into rubble. Thousands were caught under the debris of bombed churches during Sunday services.

On September 21, Colonel Wacław Lipiński, head of the information sector of the high command, announced on the radio:

We are fighting. We are fighting in special circumstances but we have the will to fight and we shall continue despite the fact that the German general command claims that the war in Poland is at an end, although we are making a stand against the tremendous advantage enjoyed by the

enemy in the air and in its armored division ... We must remember the words engraved on the hearts and spirits of every Pole: to be defeated in battle but not to surrender, is victory.

But after broadcasting these statements, the radio went off the air. The water supply, the electricity, gas, and telephone systems were out of commission.

The heavy bombing on Yom Kippur, September 23, 1939, was deeply etched on the minds of the Jews of the city. On Friday, Yom Kippur eve, Adam Czerniakow wrote, "Today is Yom Kippur—the Day of Judgment. Throughout the night the sound of cannon-fire." The teacher Chaim Aaron Kaplan, who kept a detailed diary, described that Day of Atonement:

The forces of the enemy increased on Yom Kippur. We did not have a single hour of peace. The heavy artillery is showering fire and iron on our heads ... the enemy is offering us two "treats": during the day—shells flying over our heads and houses, which, even if these are six stories high, become heaps of ruins together with its inhabitants ... while at night, in the terrible darkness, the enemy drops his bombs.

Mary Berg, a young Jewish girl, not quite fifteen, told her diary:

On the 20th of September, the radios went silent and the water-pipes were destroyed. It seemed to me that here we were living on an island abandoned and cut off from the whole world. I shall never forget the 23rd of September, Yom Kippur of 1939, which the Germans intentionally set out to make a day of aggressive bombing of the Jewish quarter.

A Jewish youth of sixteen recalled:

Yesterday was Yom Kippur. At Kol Nidre in the evening, all the people assembled in the shelter were in tears. Until today, I haven't seen adults gathered together and crying from the depths of their hearts. Every year, with the advent of Yom Kippur, the Jewish women would usually be shedding tears, whether or not this was brought on by genuine emotions or merely out of habit. This time they were the tears of those who were struck by catastrophe. People's voices were choked and they held their heads in their hands. They did not take into consideration the fact that children were present, or perhaps the sight of the children was an even greater reason for their emotional reactions and tears. On the very day of Yom Kippur there was continuous bombing from morning to night and most of the bombs fell on the Jewish quarter. Perhaps this was a special token prepared by the Nazis for the Jews on this day.

Two days later, while Hitler was staying in the area at an advanced post of the Eighth Army command, Warsaw was subjected to a seemingly endless German attack, intended to break down the resistance and the spirit of the population. Unbeknownst to the citizens of besieged Warsaw, the entire Polish campaign had been resolved some two weeks earlier, and Warsaw's stand had only symbolic significance aimed at showing the world how Poland had fought for its freedom long after any chance of victory was gone. Although not the victors on the battlefield, the inhabitants of Warsaw had proved their courage and had been ready to sacrifice for their capital, their home.

However, when the city entered the first stages of total destruction, there were signs of hesitation, dissatisfaction, and disappointment. Planes appeared like vultures, bearing destruction and death. Whenever the whistling sound piercing the air was heard, and then the rumble of houses being destroyed, the response was trembling in the hearts and minds of thousands of people. With every



whistling boom, one's mind measured the distance and one's heart skipped a beat. The sound of a hit, the impact of catastrophe, also brought with it a sense of reassurance to those who had not been the target. But this reassurance lasted only a fleeting moment, for it was soon followed by another whistle signifying yet another bomb on its way to the earth.

On the twenty-seventh, the skies were no longer blackened by planes. The shelling had stopped. With fear and uncertainty, the inhabitants of the city crept out of the cellars and ditches to confront the sight of heaps of destroyed buildings blocking the streets, carcasses of horses, and the debris of war. Above all, there was a sort of cloud of down feathers hovering strangely about the city.

On the twenty-eighth, the people of Warsaw were informed that the city had surrendered. General Julius Rommel, commander of the German armed forces, announced on the twenty-ninth to "the citizens of the capital" that, as a result of the letter of surrender, enemy forces would enter the city on the following day at noon. The announcement ended with these words: "The fate of the war is changing. I rely on the population of Warsaw, which stood bravely in its defense and displayed its profound patriotism, to accept the entry of the German forces quietly, honorably, and calmly."

According to reliable estimates, some six thousand Polish soldiers died and sixteen thousand were wounded in the defense of Warsaw in September. Of the civilian population, there were ten thousand dead and fifty thousand wounded. An estimated 11—12 percent of the buildings of historic importance were destroyed, as well as all the hospitals and many houses.

A Jewish youth who strolled around the wounded streets of the city, with their mounds of ruins, was struck by the feeling that the days of his youth had come to an end and that the Warsaw he knew and loved was gone. The city, its people, and its life would never be the same again.

## 2. THE JEWS OF WARSAW BETWEEN THE WARS

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JEWISH LIFE and the place of Jews in Polish society was rather different from what it was in Western Europe. From the French Revolution onward, Jews throughout Western Europe pressed for equal rights as individuals and confined expressions of their Jewishness to the religious sphere. In contrast, most Jews in independent Poland between the wars insisted on their recognition as a people, with the rights of a national minority. The Jews wanted to be recognized as a community—part of and apart from other elements in Polish society.

In the Western European countries, Jews were a small percentage of the overall population, but one in ten persons in Poland was Jewish, and in many cities, towns, and hamlets, Jews constituted a large percentage of the total population. In some cities, Jews constituted a majority of the population. Unlike other minority nationalities within Poland, Jews were dispersed throughout the various parts of the Polish state. Thus, they were not in the same position as the Ukrainian minority, which was concentrated in a specific territory and could demand a form of territorial autonomy, such as governmental recognition of their language as the official language of a region, or independent judicial and educational systems.

Polish nationalism was intensely Roman Catholic and far more immune to the pressures of secularization than the more Western countries. As a result, the gap between state and society was deep, and Jews were far more inner-directed than their Western European counterparts. Though the sojourn of Jews in Poland was lengthy—the presence of Jews can be traced to the year 963—it was almost always uneasy. Jews had arrived in Poland at the invitation of Polish princes to perform economically complementary functions that could not be undertaken by the majority population. The economic utility of the Jews led the ruling class to be more inclined toward tolerance and pluralism; thus, Poland attracted Jews suffering from discrimination in Germany in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Among the general population in the economically backward Polish society, the masses did not experience prosperity, or even economic security. Their resentment against the Jews was intense. The Roman Catholic Church, itself a late arrival to Poland, often pursued a policy of discrimination and hate toward the Jews. It perpetuated negative Jewish images present in Christianity; of Jews as outsiders, betrayers, and perpetrators of deicide.

After World War I, Poland attained independence after 136 years of partition and occupation. The restoration of the Polish state, which had been the objective of a prolonged and obstinate struggle by the Polish people for the right to national self-determination, was a direct result of the disarray (be it due to military defeat or revolutionary turmoil) among Poland's enemies and occupiers: Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Russia. This led to the political-territorial decisions made at the Versailles peace conference.

The political and territorial order resulting from World War I seemed to play into the hands of those seeking national minority status. Under the minority treaties that were authorized and imposed on Romania and a string of new or renewed states—including Poland—the new states were obliged to give minorities rights protected by law and supervised by the League of Nations. The decision to undertake these treaties and define their contents was largely due to the insistence of American representatives at Versailles (including the American Jewish groups) and other European countries. Actually, the minority treaties granted rights to the Jews solely as a religious group, but many Jews mistakenly interpreted these treaties as offering them the rights of a national minority.

In Poland, the "minorities treaty" seemed to guarantee constitutionally the rights of Jews as one of Poland's minority groups. On paper, the treaty assured equal rights for religious and national minorities as a fundamental provision of the new constitution. Jews and other minorities were given

political and civil rights. As a matter of right, they were entitled to equal justice under law. Even their linguistic and cultural heritages were preserved, including Jewish school systems. Discrimination in hiring and professional employment was outlawed.

When the Polish government, which was made up of right-wing and centrist parties, tried to adopt an electoral system that would affect the proportional representation of the minority in Parliament, the Jews responded by setting up a united front to contest the elections—a "minorities bloc." In the end, the bloc's list gained a substantial victory, winning 22 percent of all the votes to the first Polish Sejm in 1922. The Jewish faction alone had elected 35 representatives out of 444 members of the Sejm, some 8 percent. In the Sejm, warring political factions of the right, the center, and the left neutralized each other's power. None had the power to put together a government on its own or to tip the scales in its favor on decisive questions. Consequently, the influence of the minorities bloc was enhanced. However briefly, it enjoyed disproportionate influence.

Members of the Jewish faction in the Polish parliament differed in their assessment of the politics of the minorities bloc. Some believed that the bloc was a permanent parliamentary body that should be active in the general Polish political scene while serving to protect essential minority matters. Other representatives, particularly those from eastern Galicia, believed that the bloc was a marriage of convenience, speculative and tactical at best. One could not presume that disproportionate Jewish representation would continue. They were dubious of the long-term prospects for cooperation with the Ukrainians, who were noted for their deep-rooted animosity toward the Jews. Thus, they urged that Jews become less involved in the internal power struggle over the various political trends in Poland.

Over time, it became clear that the solidarity of the minorities was questionable. After Hitler's rise to power, it seems that the German minorities in various countries were not inclined to oppose anti-Jewish legislation in Nazi Germany. So, the Jews were constrained to leave the organization of European minorities when they were abandoned by other minority groups and by the general public.

During 1924 and 1925, prominent members of the government put out feelers that resulted in practical discussions with Jewish representatives to the Sejm. They sought an accommodation along the lines of traditional Jewish politics. Jewish representatives would be obliged to adopt the government's line on basic matters and support the power interests of Poland, a concept that could be interpreted as supporting the regime's conduct toward the Slav minority on Poland's eastern border. In exchange, the government promised concessions and relief in a variety of essentially Jewish areas, such as economics, employment, civilian rights, education, and religion. This political agreement, known as UGODA, was instigated by one of the heads of the nationalist movement Endecja and the brother of then prime minister Stanislaw Grabski and was supported by the majority of the Jewish representatives in the Polish parliament.

Extreme nationalist Jews, Zionists, and Bundists alike, intent on preserving Jewish national rights, viewed the UGODA as a near-betrayal of the national Jewish principle and appealed to the wider Jewish public for support in the controversy. But the public was indifferent and disappointed in the results of its political and parliamentary efforts.

In the early days of the revived Polish state, the Jews had great hopes. But these hopes faded away. Fiery speeches in the Sejm had no power to sway the authorities or to alter patterns of economic discrimination. UGODA was also little help and was not even implemented.

In the first years after independence, the minorities bloc, to which the Jews belonged, temporarily held the balance of power between right and left. After impressive initial successes in 1922, the minorities bloc lost strength in the subsequent elections. There was also a marked fall in the standing and popularity of the main Zionist faction led by Itzhak Gruenbaum. The Jewish population learned that the parliamentary struggle had little tangible impact on their daily life and that the operative and decisive power in economic life was concentrated in the hands of the government and the ruling

administration.

In May 1926, with the help of a group of officers and some loyal units of the army, Jozef Pilsudski organized a bloody coup d'état. A socialist in his youth, Pilsudski had founded the national armed forces in World War I and led the Polish army in the 1920 campaign that overthrew the Bolsheviks, who had penetrated deep into Poland and nearly reached the outskirts of Warsaw. The masses saw Pilsudski as a hero symbolizing the renaissance of Poland. He was greatly admired in leftist circles, but he chose to leave the political scene when he realized that he could not dominate it. The right, which had gained the majority's support in the elections, viewed him with suspicion. But Pilsudski's "retirement" was short-lived. He was merely biding his time in anticipation of the appropriate moment in which to take the helm and impose his authority.

Polish political thinking concerning the structure of an independent Polish state moved in two contrary directions. The rightist conception was that there should be a complete identification of the state with the Polish nation, while the left and the center were inclined toward a wider partnership in the state. Ethnic Poles were the first among equals, but Poland was to become the fatherland of many nationalities.

Endecja opted for a Polish Catholic state—a state that would be the domain solely of the ethnic Poles. They considered minorities as tolerated citizens or people who assimilated into the Polish state. Jews were seen as aliens who had no legitimate right to be in Poland—as unnecessary, even harmful. In contrast, Pilsudski and his supporters wanted to see Poland as a political power and the focus of a federated alliance of the smaller states in the region, rather than as a state exhibiting the expansionist tendency of Russia and Germany.

Rather obscure outlines of territorial autonomy for the minorities were drawn up, particularly in the eastern Slavic sector. What to do with Jews was a more complicated matter, for they were dispersed. Nothing definite was contemplated for them, but it was commonly believed that Pilsudski was interested in the integration of the Jews into Polish society.

With regard to the Jews, the attitude of Pilsudski's administration was positive and heartening, particularly at its outset. Marshal Pilsudski centered most of his attention on matters of defense and foreign affairs. He did not show any special interest in the Jewish question, nor did he display any anti-Jewish sentiments in either his public or his political statements, and he evidently curbed antisemitic leanings among his supporters. He was not prone to using the Jews as a scapegoat for his failures or his administration's errors, which was a common phenomenon not only in Poland but also in other European countries. Apolinary Hartglas, one of the Zionist leaders in Poland, wrote that the first year or so was a time of genuine change:

That period was like a real "springtime among the nations." Anti-semitic propaganda ceased ... no one dared to publish blacklists of Poles who dared to buy in Jewish shops, no one assaulted or beat up the Jews. The governors of outlying regions forgot about the existence of restrictions that were valid in the Czarist times ... Jewish secondary schools began to receive official recognition, committees were set up to assess matriculation results, and there were even some examiners who knew Hebrew. New Jewish lawyers were being registered while some Jews were even accepted into the ranks of the civil service. And the Jews stopped complaining about the heavy burden of taxes imposed on them.

The hope that Pilsudski would impose a multinational concept never materialized. The idea of a federation was not at all practicable because at the very outset of the new Poland's existence, there were tensions and claims regarding the regions in dispute, the dictated boundaries, and the areas taken over by force.

But even in the smaller area under Poland's authority, the assumption that, with Pilsudski at its head, Poland would experience greater liberality and democratic order was not realized. The new leader believed that the source of Poland's weakness lay in its excessive number of political parties and in its anarchic parliamentary structure, spreading corruption and generating a faulty order of priorities. He therefore strove to undermine parliamentarianism, to free the political establishment of its class interests and corruption. He did not look to the left for support; on the contrary, he turned toward the aristocracy organized in the conservative movement and to big business.

Pilsudski's authoritarian rule did not display the cast of a fascist regime, although it took quite a few steps that were brutal deviations from a democratic order. In its first years, the regime enjoyed certain helpful economic proposals, but after the profound crisis that resulted from the 1929 crash the state was subjected to a deep depression and mass unemployment. Planned reforms were set aside in view of the need to cope with troubled daily pressures.

No real analysis was made of the minority question, no plans were made for improving their situation, and eventually there was a regression in the attitude of the authorities and on occasion the brutal use of force. In time, the Pilsudski camp changed from a concept of statehood encompassing all the country's citizens to a nationalist ideology.

The perceptible weakness of Parliament and the entire democratic structure did not lead to a revolt nor did it work to the advantage of the Jews. Discrimination against the Jews was hesitantly renewed but until the marshal's death in 1935 a measure of restraint was maintained. His passing undoubtedly marked a turning point. The Jews were well aware of the fact that Pilsudski's strong personality, even during his illness, had restrained sharp anti-Jewish outbursts, and they felt a sense of bereavement and apprehension for the future. During the first year after his death, an interim government ruled under the aegis of the president, Ignacy Moscicki. Because of its weakness or genuine intention, this government tried halfheartedly to guide the state along democratic lines, but increasing economic difficulties and social tensions overwhelmed it. In the government that was established in 1936, power was divided between the president and Pilsudski's heir to the high command of the army, Marshal Rydz-Smigly, who had not shown any marked ability in his country's military and defensive preparations. The results were miserable. The regime moved in a totalitarian-populistic direction and rejected out of hand any attempt to create a united front out of the various currents of opinion in view of the growing danger from Nazi Germany.

During the post-Pilsudski period, hatred of the Jews increased and an anti-Jewish policy was adopted by the administrative system as well as by the right-wing opposition. Pilsudski's death seemed to unleash all the forces he had restrained. From June 1935 onward, violent disturbances were carried out in a number of places on the initiative of extremists of the Endecja and radical right. At universities and schools, where anti-Jewish quotas were imposed, Jews were pushed increasingly onto separate "ghetto benches" despite objections voiced by Jewish students and the solidarity of their fellow Christian students and some members of the academic corps. This process of discrimination ended in most cases in the imposition of racial separation and the introduction of quotas. Proposals of an anti-Jewish and even racial nature were introduced in the Sejm, but these were never passed. Radical anti-Jewish proposals were soon overshadowed by the political crisis presaging the advent of the war.

Nevertheless, the anti-Jewish trend continued to spread among the ruling camp, and their leadership assumed a slightly different tone. In Pilsudski's day, the Jews were part of the large range of supporters within his camp. In the elections to Parliament, Jews, who were excluded as representatives of bodies supporting the Pilsudski faction, appeared on the lists of the broad nonpartisan body of government supporters and the nonpartisan bloc for collaboration with the government. Shortly after the death of Pilsudski, the "bloc" was dissolved and Walery Slawek, the man who stood at its head and

had been close to Pilsudski, was ousted from the political scene.

At the beginning of 1937, a new body was formed that helped the ruling Diadochi (the successors)—the OZN, the "camp of consolidated nationalists." Within the OZN, emphasis was placed on totalitarian principles and Catholic ties. In its early stages, the new "party" tried to attach itself to the ranks of the antisemitic and profascist radicals who had left the Endecja because they found it insufficiently extremist. The leaders of OZN stated that they would not accept Jews because they considered the Jews a separate national entity, and that their organization was open only to Christians. In May 1938 the supreme council of this party was busy formulating its position on "the Jewish question" in Poland which would ban Jews from certain professions. The solution of the Jewish problem would be achieved by getting rid of a major part of the Jewish population. Antisemitic propaganda had reached its peak.

During the early years of the republic, antisemitism had been an accepted, albeit restrained, fact camouflaged by the formal pretense that everything was as it should be. By 1938 antisemitism united both the opposition and the government. The government refrained from using violence and physical terror—riots, assaults, and forced eviction—and insisted that the antisemitic policy must function through quasi-legal channels. The government was cautious—street violence directed by a totalitarian-inclined opposition could easily redirect the anger of the masses against it. The radical right spoke of the wholesale expulsion of the Jews and claimed that this could not be achieved without the use of pressure and violence. On the other hand, the spokesmen of the government feverishly sought out places that would accept Jews as immigrants. The emigration of Jews to Madagascar was even considered. Jews were described as a real handicap to Poland's progress. Many socialists on the left and the liberal circles opposed antisemitism and came to the defense of the Jews. There were also those who held liberal opinions, especially those who were sympathetic to Zionism, who spoke warmly of Jews' emigrating to Palestine, but they always made a point of stating that emigration or integration was a choice to be made by the Jews themselves and was not a matter to be dictated or forced from without. In the various polemics that occupied the press and public opinion in those days there were active socialists who pressed for a large Jewish emigration for economic and social motives. Among the Jews themselves, some leaders called for a mass exodus of the Jews from Poland. Understandably, these outcries unwittingly added fuel to the antisemitic fires.

For example, in 1936 Zev Jabotinsky, the charismatic leader of the Zionist Revisionists, publicly broadcast his "evacuation" plan for Polish Jews. Government circles and the Endecja were enthusiastic about the plan, but this proposal also encountered sharp criticism and anger from most Jewish journalists. The loudest protests came mainly from among the Bund and Agudath Israel, who, no matter how much they differed with one another, both sought to secure Jewish life in Poland. Yet even most of the pro-Zionist press considered Jabotinsky's views impractical, for they presumed the mass emigration of the Jews of Poland depended primarily on the Jews themselves.

The social tensions in Poland, the increasingly anti-Jewish mood, and the growing public demand to bring about the mass emigration of Jews undoubtedly spurred on the desire to emigrate. Prior to World War I, the Jews numbered 30 percent of the emigrants from Poland, Poles were 55 percent, and the Ukrainians 15 percent. This pattern changed during 1921—25. During the first years of Poland's independence, Jewish emigration was 69 percent of the total. In absolute numbers, some 270,000 Jews left Poland, of whom 190,000 went to the United States and 30,000 to Palestine, which was then at the very beginning of its development as the Jewish national homeland. After 1926, the percentage of Jews emigrating decreased somewhat (in 1926, some 40 percent of the total number of emigrants), but the absolute number of Jewish emigrants was still rising. The slowdown did not reflect an essential weakening of their desire to emigrate from Poland but could be ascribed to the increasingly difficult conditions devised by the countries that were their potential destinations. For the Jews to leave, they

needed a place to go. In reality, the number of applicants eager to emigrate from Poland and other countries was in reverse proportion to the number of requirements and immigration laws imposed by the governments of their intended destinations. Foremost on the list of urgent international priorities at the time was the need to find a solution for the refugees fleeing from Nazi Germany. During these years the United States placed limitations on immigration by introducing a quota system that discriminated against applicants from Eastern Europe. Other spacious and underpopulated countries followed the American lead and refused to accept immigrants. The severity of the Great Depression and the pressure of unemployment brought with it the fear of low-priced immigrant labor. Those countries prepared to permit controlled immigration wanted farmers, and the Jews could not offer them much in the way of experienced farmhands. In the heated atmosphere of anti-Jewish incitement in the 1930s, many countries did not hesitate to declare their unwillingness to accept Jews.

IN THE PERIOD between the two world wars, Polish Jewry, and especially the Jews of Warsaw, played a central role in Jewish life throughout the world. Second only to New York in the size of its Jewish population, Warsaw contained a Jewish life that was both traditional and creative, religiously conservative and nationalist. Despite intense involvement in Polish culture, Jews in Poland saw themselves primarily as part of the Jewish people dispersed throughout the world and less as an integral part of Polish society.

From 1918 onward, Warsaw was the capital of an independent Poland, which comprised areas that for more than a century had been occupied by foreign powers intent on undermining Polish nationalism. Under Russian occupation Warsaw had been the major target of a policy designed to eradicate all evidence of Polish nationalism. Nevertheless, despite Russian efforts, the younger generation remained politically oriented and nationalistically inclined. Warsaw was also the scene of economic development and drive.

As in Western Europe, Jewish entrepreneurs played a trailblazing role in banking, railroads, international finance, and new industries. Jewish families figured largely in establishing a capitalist economy in Warsaw and in expanding it throughout Poland. Many of these economic pioneers were surrounded by aides and loyal agents, most of whom were Jews. Like the "uptown" Jews of New York City, some members of these leading families converted to Christianity when they were still young, while others of the second or third generation assimilated into the Polish aristocracy and bourgeoisie. Others remained within the Jewish community.

The impact made by these individuals and families was extended to the advancement of cultural and artistic institutions, journalism, and publishing. In philanthropy, Jews contributed extensively to education and to the founding of hospitals and public welfare institutions. Their charitable gifts also enabled like-minded Jews to advance in Polish society, yet their progress often attenuated their ties, loyalty, and utility to the Jewish community. Still, when these families were at their prime, their members gave generously to the public needs of both the Polish population and the Jews. Some of them—but by no means all—were also active in the affairs of the Jewish community.

The growth of Warsaw as an influential Jewish community was the result of Jewish migration over several generations. In 1781, when Poland was on the verge of losing its independence, there were 2,609 Jews in Warsaw. In Praga, a suburb of the city on the eastern banks of the Vistula River, the Jewish community numbered 244. On the threshold of the twentieth century, in 1897, the Jewish population of the city had reached 219,128. At the outbreak of World War I, the Jews of Warsaw made up 38 percent of the entire population of the city, a percentage that was to become even larger when refugees and displaced persons streamed into Warsaw during the war. In the independent Republic of Poland of the interwar years, the number of Jews living in Warsaw grew in absolute terms, but there was a comparative decline in the Jewish component of Warsaw's population. In 1921 the Jewish

community comprised 310,300 people, or 33 percent of Warsaw's 936,700 inhabitants. In 1939, on the eve of World War II, there were some 375,000 Jews living in Warsaw, and they composed 29.1 percent of the city's 1,289,000 inhabitants.

Numbers alone do not reflect the importance of the Jewish community of Warsaw between the wars. Jewish Warsaw lacked the tradition and distinction that characterized other Jewish communities in Poland such as Cracow, Lublin, and Lwow, where Jews had lived for generations. Warsaw had neither ancient buildings nor the aura of glorious memories, the vestiges of an influential past. There were no ancient synagogues such as the one in Cracow; none that had been the home of world-renowned scholars. There was no tradition of greatness. In fact, the oldest tombstone in the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw was dated 1807. Nevertheless, there was ample opportunity for newcomers to make their impact, and the city had the feel of a community coming into its own. Warsaw's comparatively new facades and its fast-growing strength were a source of openness. New inhabitants and casual visitors could feel welcome. Social change was more prevalent than stability.

Partly owing to Polish society's rejection of these would-be assimilationists, ideas flowing from the East—regions of Russia and Lithuania, where Jewish nationalist culture had already taken on varied organizational forms and ideological maturity—gained increasing influence in Warsaw's Jewish community. Jewish life was characterized by a large number of political parties, overlapping institutions, violent public debates, and private quarrels.

Three far-sighted and politically realistic Jewish movements emerged on the eve of Poland's independence: Zionism, with its various orientations; the Bund and its organizations; and Agudath Israel, which united Orthodox, Hasidic, and *mitnaged* (Orthodox opponents of Hasidism) elements of Polish Jewry. All three movements viewed the Jews as a distinct nation separate from the Poles, though their differing definitions of what constitutes a distinct nation caused the three groups to be at times bitter rivals.

The Zionist movement in Poland adopted two fundamental principles: the resettlement of Jews in Palestine, and the national rights of Jews living in the Diaspora. The Zionists believed that a national renaissance in Palestine would also have to provide the Jews in the Diaspora, outside Palestine, with a sense of their national unity during their seemingly lengthy sojourn in Europe. In Poland, Zionism undertook intensive activity within Jewish society in the Diaspora as "work for the present," with settlement of Palestine as the future goal (though in the interwar period Hehalutz and other Zionist youth movements actively engaged in fostering immigration to Palestine as a "present-day activity"). Hebrew was revived as a spoken language, but Yiddish remained the movement's working language.

The Bund, the General Jewish Workers Union devoted to secular Jewish nationalism, used Yiddish both for organizing Jewish workers into a separate framework and for disseminating the idea of socialism among Yiddish-speakers. The Bund soon advocated national rights founded on national and cultural autonomy: the right of the individual or group of individuals to maintain a separate language, culture, and social life in a specifically socialist state.

The Bund worked on a national scale throughout Poland, and its primary connections were often class based. Thus, the Bund preferred to work with local non-Jewish socialist parties rather than with bourgeois Jewish organizations. At the same time, many Polish Jews converged in a separate socialist party, which rested on a national Jewish base rather than on international foundations. This phenomenon was unknown in Western Europe, yet it became a movement of considerable strength and impressive achievements in interwar Poland.

Agudath Israel—the Orthodox party that included large Hasidic groups—adopted certain aspects of modern political organization similar to those of other political parties despite its attachment to tradition and its meticulous observance of Jewish law. These aspects included representation in government institutions and limited reforms in the educational system. Agudath Israel had its own



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