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THE BEGINNINGS OF JEWISH SETTLEMENT  
IN LOWER SILESIA AFTER WORLD WAR II  
(MAY 1945 — JANUARY 1946)<sup>1</sup>

*I. Plans for Jewish Settlement in Lower Silesia*

After the end of World War II many Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust settled in Lower Silesia. Their choice of that region was due to the attitude of the Polish government, the Central Committee of Jews in Poland and local Jews, as well as to the situation of Jews immediately after the war.

To understand this situation we must remember that the Jewish faction of the Polish Workers' Party (*PPR*) and the Bund opted for the reconstruction of Jewish life in Poland while the Zionists opted for emigration, a concept which was supported by the Polish government. We must also remember that that was the time when the repatriation agreements signed in September 1944 were being implemented and when work was in progress on an agreement between the Polish and Soviet governments on the repatriation of persons of Polish and Jewish nationality living in the USSR, an agreement which was finally signed in July 1945.

It was mostly the Jews who survived imprisonment in Nazi camps in that region that launched the idea that Jews should settle in Lower Silesia. After unsuccessful attempts to return to the localities in which they had lived prior to 1939, they went back to Wałbrzych, Bielawa and other towns in Lower Silesia, to the "towns in which they had experienced tortures but in which they also saw the arrival of freedom. Those who survived struck up a friendship and launched the idea of creating a new life in the places where

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Hitler has intended to destroy it”<sup>2</sup>. A year later, in July 1946, Jakub Egit, chairman of the Jewish Voivodship Committee in Lower Silesia, developed this concept in his article *A Year of Jewish Life in Lower Silesia*; he said: “To build a new Jewish life in Lower Silesia ... Why in Lower Silesia? First and foremost because Lower Silesia was a place of concentration camps for Jews, who throughout that time stubbornly manifested their Polishness and immediately after the liberation set to work to consolidate it ... Secondly, because the 7,000 Polish Jews who thanks ... to the liberation of this region by the Red Army, survived the bestial slaughter carried out by Nazi hordes expressed their will to build a new life in that land. In this way they wanted to take vengeance and obtain even a partial compensation for the losses they had suffered. Thirdly, because there were no serious war devastations in the southern districts of Lower Silesia”<sup>3</sup>. The reasons mentioned by Egit referred to a broader political concept concerning the Western Territories of Poland. Let us add that the material conditions briefly mentioned by Egit played an important role. Returning Jews were frequently given a chilly reception in Central Poland because their property, their houses and shops had been taken over by their Polish neighbours. In Lower Silesia, where Germans were deserting their property, this problem did not exist. Let us recall that 13 Jews were killed in the Kielce voivodship in June 1945 (ten of them in assaults resulting from appropriation of Jewish property)<sup>4</sup>. In Lower Silesia there were not only empty flats but also factories and farms which offered prospects of employment and work. The Lower Silesian Jews’ plans concerning this region were formulated in a memorandum to the Ministry of Public Administration in June 1945. The memorandum read: “there are now about 7,000 Jews in Lower Silesia ... Some citizens ... bent their steps eastward to the places where they had lived, looking for the remaining members of their families and hoping to find a base for rebuilding their lives. But they found no peace in their native towns and have returned, or are returning, to the place where the majority of their comrades are ... Lower Silesia has become their homeland ... Ever since Germany fell ... Jews have kept a guard over factories and work places, declaring their

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<sup>2</sup> J. Egit, *Cu a Naje Lebn*, Wrocław 1947, translated from the Yiddish by Frydka Rotem. Jakub Egit (b. 1908) was editor of a periodical in Yiddish entitled “Unzer Weg” in Boryslaw before the war. He was twice imprisoned (1935–1936, 1937–1939) for communist activity. He spent the war years in the USSR. After the war he was chairman of the Jewish Voivodship Committee in Lower Silesia (1945–1949). He was a member of the PPR faction at the JVC. He moved to Warsaw in 1950 and he left Poland in 1957. He is living in Canada now.

<sup>3</sup> J. Egit, *Rok życia żydowskiego na Dolnym Śląsku (A Year of Jewish Life in Lower Silesia)*, “Nowe Życie” July 15, 1946 (special number).

<sup>4</sup> Archives of Modern Records, (AAN) in Warsaw, Ministry of Public Administration, call number 786, p. 17.



Polishness loudly and boldly. In Lower Silesia they have paid for their citizenship rights by blood and work ... Lower Silesia is both an agricultural ... and an industrial region ... Industrial and agricultural experts as well as factory workers could fill the places which are already free and those which will be vacated by Germans. Jews, who in the well known tragic, bestial way have been deprived of their nearest and dearest ones, want to forget the tragedy they went through and start a new creative life among friendly people who can understand one another. The desire for friendship and mutual understanding, usually existing in families, can now, when these are missing, materialize only in a homogeneous community. The Jews' endeavours to create homogeneous centres sharing spiritual interests is therefore not strange. The transfer of Jews who have no productive work in other districts to a centre which offers them good material and cultural conditions is dictated by the well-understood interests of the country and human dignity"<sup>5</sup>. The memorandum used new arguments in favour of Jewish settlement in Lower Silesia, among them the psychological factor which was of great importance for the Jews in the period immediately following the war.

A large part of the memorandum concerned the proposal to settle Jewish repatriates in Lower Silesia. It was expected that with the help of administrative authorities about 20,000 Jews could be settled in Lower Silesia, provided that conditions were created enabling them to find work. Stress was laid on the necessity of drawing Jews into production. What was needed was "to enable Jewish repatriates to take over German work places and make it easier for them to set up food and production co-operatives ... to take care of deliveries of raw materials to the factories already in operation and those to be set in motion, and to find markets for finished products ... to enable Jews to fill posts in communal and state administration ... To facilitate Jewish settlement on the land ... to organize courses and training centres in order to make it easier for local Jews to change their vocation and become more productive"<sup>6</sup>. The transfer of Jewish population to Lower Silesia was part of a broader concept aimed at populating the Western Territories of Poland. The intention to create a Jewish centre in this area was formulated in the memorandum sent to the Ministry of Public Administration. Its implementation was in the hands of the Jewish Voivodship Committee (JVC) in Lower Silesia. Let us stress that when discussions were still going

<sup>5</sup> Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw (henceforward referred to as AJHI), Department of Productiveness of the CCPJ, call number 11, np. Memorandum concerning the settlement of Jews in Lower Silesia, 23.6.1945. This is also mentioned by Irena Nowakowska in her study *Analiza więzi społecznej ludności żydowskiej w Polsce powojennej (An Analysis of the Jewish Population's Social Ties in Postwar Poland)*, Warszawa 1965.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

on and the final decisions were not yet taken Jewish communities were already being set up in Lower Silesia.

In July and August 1945, delegations of the Central Committee of Polish Jews (CCPJ) were sent to Lower Silesia to examine housing and employment possibilities in the individual centres. In the towns visited by the delegations, namely, Wałbrzych, Głuszyca, Ludwikowice, Dzierżonów, Bielawa and Nowa Ruda, Jewish committees had already been set up or were being organized in July–August. Each town had different problems and the results they had achieved in the settlement of Jews were not the same. For instance, in Wałbrzych “Jews occupy important positions in offices, and this makes it easier for the Jewish population to find work and have decent living standards ... persons willing to work can find employment in Wałbrzych more easily and quickly than anywhere else ... 45 per cent (of the Jews) are employed ... Cultural and educational life is quite satisfactory”<sup>7</sup>. The situation was different at Głuszyca, where “the Jewish population consists of ... sick people, hospital convalescents and some 30 persons who have not found a job yet”<sup>8</sup>. The situation was similar at Ludwikowice, where “the life ... of the Jewish population resembles camp life ... not much can be done here to make the Jews productive”<sup>9</sup>. A large number of Jews were already working at Bielawa and Dzierżonów, it had been possible to employ from 70 (Bielawa) to 100 persons (Dzierżonów) a week. “In other towns this will become possible when Germans have been expelled from work places ... the success of settlement depends on two things: the attitude of administrative authorities in individual localities to our cause ... and food supplies for the population”<sup>10</sup>, read the report of the Congress of the Jewish Committees of Lower Silesia, held in July 1945.

These examples show that the settlement of Jews in Lower Silesia engendered various problems. In order to launch a large-scale campaign aimed at putting the principles of the memorandum into effect, a congress of delegates of the Jewish Committees of Lower Silesia was convened on July 17, 1945. Its resolutions concerning the resettlement campaign announced “a registration of work places, farms and commercial enterprises ... the organization of State Repatriation Office agencies to accept Jewish repatriates .. the setting up of operational groups to prepare ground for settlement in new places ... the launching of vocational training for young

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<sup>7</sup> AJHI, Department of Productiveness of the CCPJ, call number 11, np. Report on an inspection made on 8.7.1945.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> AJHI, Department of Productiveness of the CCPJ, call number 11, np. Minutes of the Congress of delegates of the Jewish Committees of Lower Silesia, 17.7.1945.



people in industry and agriculture, the opening of boarding schools for young people ... and the taking over of farms”<sup>11</sup> by Jewish repatriates. Closer co-operation was also to be established with the authorities and the Central Committee of Polish Jews.

Many Jews believed that Lower Silesia offered the possibility of setting up a Jewish colony. It was proposed at a meeting of the Jewish Voivodship Committee in September 1945 to form a Jewish region in Lower Silesia. Let us remember that this was before thousands of Jews arrived in Lower Silesia from the USSR. In his reminiscences entitled *Grand Illusion*, Jakub Egi t, writing about his journey to Lower Silesia in May 1945, says that he was one of the authors of this concept. “My plan was to establish a Yiddish *Yishuv* in Lower Silesia”<sup>12</sup>. Let us stress once again that the circumstances augured success. The difficulties which emerged were part of the reality of post-war Poland and the general belief was that it would be possible to overcome them. This first period of the Jewish Voivodship Committee’s activity, until the beginning of mass repatriation, made it possible to draw up long-term plans which were an important argument in the discussion on the settlement of Jews in post-war Poland. Lower Silesia seemed to justify the hope that normal life was possible in Poland<sup>13</sup>.

The memorandum sent to the Ministry of Public Administration in June 1945 was backed by the supreme authorities of the Central Committee of Polish Jews (CCPJ), which asked the Ministry to agree to the proposals. In May and June a delegation of Lower Silesian Jews had two meetings with representatives of the CCPJ. In the CCPJ’s opinion of June 30, 1945, “the former camp inmates living in these areas have a real opportunity to start a sound, normal life. The CCPJ intends ... to send a delegation to reconnoitre the conditions and settle more Jews there (up to 20,000)”<sup>14</sup>. The CCPJ declared it was ready to provide food, financial, legal and medical assistance. The delegation sent to Lower Silesia by the CCPJ, composed of the Vice-Chairman of the CCPJ Szlomo Hirszenhorn and Paweł Zelicki (general secretary), stated in its report that “Lower Silesia is one of the richest and most beautiful regions in the territories recovered in the west. The districts in the south ... are, in particular, extremely rich and fertile. Fields under corn, beautiful farms on the highest agricultural level, lots of orchards and vegetable gardens, fully electrified houses and other devices ... rarely met

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> J. Egi t, *Grand Illusion*, Toronto 1991, p. 44.

<sup>13</sup> This was frequently emphasized by the Lower Silesian Jews whom I interviewed in Israel in 1991.

<sup>14</sup> Archives of Modern Records, Praesidium of the Council of Minister, Presidential Bureau, call number 5/17, p. 14.

in our country. The towns and urban housing estates are of the West European type; they are clean and neat, full of greenery and have been mostly deserted by Germans. In towns ... untouched by war there are many factories ... The CCPJ, which in its work to find employment for Jews has come across housing difficulties in the overpopulated towns in central Poland, has taken an interest in these areas because they offer great possibilities for settlement ... It should be pointed out that the Jews living in these localities (in Lower Silesia) feel quite well and safe, and encounter no difficulties ... or troubles. Relations with the Polish population are, on the whole, good, and the Germans, knowing that they will have to leave these territories, look resignedly at everything that surrounds them"<sup>15</sup>.

The report of the CCPJ stressed not only the material conditions in Lower Silesia but also the question of security, for, as has already been mentioned, disputes over Jewish property in other parts of Poland frequently led to murders and anti-Semitic excesses. Let us stress that the Poles in Lower Silesia were less susceptible to anti-Semitism. They were newcomers, like the Jews, and the material situation of persecuted Poles did not provoke the behaviours encountered in other parts of Poland.

The Polish Workers' Party (*PPR*) faction in the CCPJ regarded the establishment of a modern settlement of Polish Jews in Lower Silesia as an important argument against emigration. As early as June 12, 1945 the idea to transfer Jews to the west was discussed at a meeting of the Executive. In September 1946 Józef Gitler Barski wrote in a letter to the *PPR* Central Committee that "the settling of Jews in Lower Silesia requires undiminished support from the respective institutions, offices and the party. The Jewish settlement movement:

- a) is a positive factor in the general state plan to populate the Recovered Territories,
- b) it would help to make Jewish youth more productive,
- c) it will bring the Jews who are Polish citizens close together by entrusting them with concrete work ... Our comrades think that it is advisable to send the new wave of Jewish emigrants from the Soviet Union to Lower Silesia which offers possibilities for settlement and work"<sup>16</sup>.

A similar opinion was held by activists of the Polish Jews' Organizing Committee in Moscow. In reply to a letter of the Jewish Voivodship Committee of Dzierżoniów, they wrote: "... it is with great joy that we read your letter, and this joy is shared by all Polish Jews in the Soviet Union. Your letter has passed from hand to hand and we are thrilled ... not only

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<sup>15</sup> AJHI, Praesidium of the CCPJ, call number 303/1, p. 103.

<sup>16</sup> Archiwum Lewicy Polskiej (Archive of the Polish Left; henceforward referred to as *ALP*), Secretariat of the *PPR* Central Committee, call number 295 — VII — 149, p. 256.



because seven thousand Jews speak to us but also because there is mettle in each of your words... For us, Polish Jews in the Soviet Union, your information is very important and valuable. There are about 200,000 of us here ... All Polish citizens are ready to return to their motherland ... We will gladly come to Lower Silesia... Your plan is to build a 30,000–person–strong Jewish settlement... We will do our best to ensure the success of this plan”<sup>17</sup>. A similar attitude was taken by the PPR activists in the Organizing Committee of Polish Jews. During a conference in August 1945 they wrote in a resolution that the Jews who had been saved and repatriates from the USSR “should be sent to the west, where Jewish centres are being formed and where Jews can become pioneers of Polish statehood”<sup>18</sup>.

The proposals and opinions concerning the settlement of Jews in Lower Silesia met with a kindly reception and support of the Polish government. This was connected with a broader concept of populating the Western and Northern Territories. In June 1945, the Council of Ministers adopted a resolution “On the Intensification of the Resettlement Campaign”, which put repatriation and internal resettlement “within the framework of a national plan”<sup>19</sup>. The Jewish population constituted a small part of this plan, for the number of Jewish repatriates was estimated at about 200,000. Nevertheless, attitude to this question had to be formulated. Let us remember that the persons who were to decide which of the two concepts concerning Polish Jews could be implemented were in the Soviet Union. This is why the proposals which created conditions for the reconstruction of Jewish life in Poland were extremely important. Also important was the attitude of the Polish government, all the more so as the support which some of its representatives expressed in the summer of 1945 for a free emigration of Jews from Poland called into question the concept of Jewish settlement.

At the beginning of June 1945, the Ministry of Public Administration sent a letter to the government’s plenipotentiary in Lower Silesia in which it asked him to send Polish Jews “to work in those places in Lower Silesia where they had worked during the war and where, thanks to their familiarity with the local conditions, they could be employed to the benefit of the State. They should be given far–reaching assistance ... considering that after their martyrdom in German concentration camps they will staunchly uphold Polishness in the recovered territories”<sup>20</sup>. Delegations of Lower Silesian

<sup>17</sup> J. Egit, *Cu a Naje Lebn*, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> ALP, Polish Patriots’ Union, call number 216/67, p. 128.

<sup>19</sup> J. Czerniakiewicz, *Repatriacja ludności polskiej z ZSRR, 1944–1948 (Repatriation of Polish Population from the USSR, 1944–1948)*, Warszawa 1987, p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> AJHI, Department of Productiveness of the CCPJ, call number 11, np., Circular letter of 6.6.1945.

Jews met the Minister of Public Administration, Edward Ochab, in June; after reading the memorandum, the minister promised support and assistance in the construction of “a new life on this soil”<sup>21</sup>. During a meeting with representatives of the CCPJ, the supreme authorities of the Ministry of Public Administration also stated that “they favoured the idea of settling Jews in former German territories. East Prussia and Lower Silesia were proposed. It was Lower Silesia that was chosen”<sup>22</sup>. Minister Władysław Wolski, head of the State Repatriation Office who was responsible for repatriation in the Ministry of Public Administration, repeatedly expressed great interest in this question, especially in preparations for receiving repatriates from the Soviet Union.

## *II. The Activity of the Voivodship Committee in Lower Silesia June 1945–1946*

The Lower Silesian Jews’ above mentioned memorandum of June 1945 said: “there are now some 7,000 Jews in Lower Silesia ... When the war came to an end, there were about 15,000 Jews in this area. Many of them were foreign citizens ... and nearly all of these have already left Poland”<sup>23</sup>. According to a report of the *PPR* of June 1945, the number of Polish Jews in Lower Silesia was slightly lower, amounting to 6,000<sup>24</sup>.

Distribution of Jewish Population in Lower Silesia: July–August 1945

Locality	July	August
Bielawa	127	128
Dzierżoniów	1200	2350
Mieroszów	250	164
Wałbrzych	733	922
Pieszyce	470	591
Ludwikowice	437	466
Szczawno–Zdrój	80	
Głuszyca		180
Jelenia Góra		150
Kłodzko		140
Świdnica		20
Total	3297	5111

<sup>21</sup> J. Egit, *Cu a Naje Lebni*, op. cit., See also J. Egit, *Grand Illusion*, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>22</sup> AJHI, Department of Productiveness of the CCPJ, call number 11, np., meeting held on 17.7.1945, speech by Paweł Zeliński.

<sup>23</sup> AJHI, Department of Productiveness of the CCPJ, call number 11, np.

<sup>24</sup> State Voivodship Archives, *PPR*, call number 1–VI–2, p. 3. See also AJHI, Department of Productiveness of the CCPJ, call number 11, np., letter to the Government’s Plenipotentiary in Lower Silesia, 26.6.1945.



Sources: State Voivodship Archives, JVC, call number 1, p. 4 *ibidem*, call number 5, pp. 4,10;  
*ibidem*, call number 40, pp. 1–10;  
 Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, Department of Productiveness of the CCPJ, call number 9, report of July 1945;  
 Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, Department of Registers and Statistics, call number 569, np., report for July 1945.

These data give only a general idea of the distribution of Jewish population in this region. For lack of sources, it is impossible to precisely establish the number of Jews in Lower Silesia at that time. Let us remember that after registering, some Jews left for Central Poland, for the localities in which they had lived, or emigrated. Many moved from one town to another. Others, in particular the more prosperous Jews, did not register at all. Some registered several times, for registration meant they could obtain aid. Wrocław has not been taken into consideration in the table for the Jewish Committee there was set up by German Jews. In September 1945 there were already 10,000 Jews in Lower Silesia. Their number had increased “thanks mainly to those who came here from Central Poland and from various camps in the West”<sup>25</sup>. Four months later “16,000 persons” were registered, “including 790 children (up to the age of 14), 380 young people (aged 15–20), 11,200 adults (aged 20–45) and 300 persons aged 45–60”<sup>26</sup>. New Jewish centres came into being, e.g. in Legnica, where 470 Jews were registered (their number was estimated at about 1,000)<sup>27</sup>. The number of Jews in the already existing centres increased too. A report of January 1946 says that there were 18,210 Jews in Lower Silesia on January 1, 1946<sup>28</sup>.

During World War II, there were labour camps in this region, the concentration camp at Gross-Rosen and its branches scattered all over Lower Silesia. Among the prisoners of Gross-Rosen was “a large group of citizens of Jewish descent from European countries occupied by the *Reich*”<sup>29</sup>. The capitulation of Fortress Breslau and the conquest of Lower Silesia by the Red Army in May 1945 brought freedom to the camp inmates. Among them were Jews, citizens of Belgium, Germany, Holland, Austria, France, Czechoslovakia, the USSR, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Greece and Poland and also one person, Estera Wajngarten, whose national status was defined as: Palestine, Tel-Aviv<sup>30</sup>. After the liberation, the majority of

<sup>25</sup> J. Egit, *Cu, op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> State Voivodship Archives, JVC, call number 11, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> State Voivodship Archives, JVC, call number 5, p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> *Obozy hitlerowskie na ziemiach polskich 1939–1945, Informator encyklopedyczny (Nazi Camps in Polish Territories, 1939–1945. Encyclopaedic Directory)*, Warszawa 1979, p. 427.

<sup>30</sup> State Voivodship Archives, JVC, call number 23, p. 1.

Polish Jews decided to return to their homes; they looked for their families, friends and acquaintances, but mostly in vain. The chairman of the Jewish Voivodship Committee, Jakub Egit, wrote: "how disappointed were those lucky people who returned to their old homes. They found neither their near and dear ones nor friends, their homes were destroyed, they did not even find tombstones in the old cemeteries"<sup>31</sup>. But their companions with whom they had shared distress in the last few years were in Lower Silesia. To help the former campers, as the camp prisoners were called, a Jewish committee was set up at Dzierżoniów. Some of its activists were members of the Committee of Former Prisoners which existed in the area of the Dzierżoniów camp. These were: Szymon Bielecki, Jakub Rosenberg, Jakub Eisenberg and Mojżesz Linkowski. Jewish self-help committees were set up in other towns of the region. The first were established in localities where concentration and labour camps had existed. Between May and July 1945 such committees were set up at Dzierżoniów, Pieszyce, Bielawa, Wałbrzych, Ludwikowice, Mieroszków and Głuszyca<sup>32</sup>. In June 1945 a Jewish committee was established in Wrocław on the initiative of Major Kahane; its members were some 400 Germans Jews<sup>33</sup>. The Jewish Committee at Jelenia Góra also dealt with the affairs of German Jews.

I have already mentioned that the first committees were established in places where there were groups of Jewish population. "There were some 500 women" in the women's concentration camp at Ludwikowice "when it was liberated; the camp now has 450 women and 50 men who have joined their families ... They are all unemployed and live ... in barracks. The most urgent task of the future committee is to liquidate the camp and place the campers in private flats in neighbouring towns and villages. It is also necessary to examine how to draw these people into production, to put a letter box into service, register the inmates and launch Social Welfare"<sup>34</sup>. On July 3, 1945, when the Jewish committee at Ludwikowice had been active for two weeks, Mojżesz Linkowski reported on his tour of the region; he wrote: "Beautiful premises were put at the disposal of the committee. Many Jews who had been living in the camp have been accommodated in private flats. Food supplies are satisfactory"<sup>35</sup>. At the beginning of June a Jewish committee was set up in Wałbrzych, where some 100 Polish Jews lived.

<sup>31</sup> J. Egit, *Rok życia żydowskiego na Dolnym Śląsku, loc. cit.*

<sup>32</sup> State Voivodship Archives, JVC, call number 15, p. 1, see also AJHI, Department of Productiveness of the CCPJ, call number 9, np., letter from the JVC to the CCPJ, 14.7.1945.

<sup>33</sup> AJHI, Praesidium of the CCPJ, call number 303/1, p. 65. See also State Voivodship Archives, Municipal Office Wrocław, call number 131, p. 16.

<sup>34</sup> AJHI, Department of Productiveness of the CCPJ, call number 11, np., Report of 15.6.1945.

<sup>35</sup> State Voivodship Archives, JVC, call number 1, p. 5.



After registration, the committee started organizing work for its members. A tailor's shop was opened, some people found employment in a bakery, a dental clinic, a hotel, in the militia and the starost's office. The report on the first period of activity of the Jewish committee in Wałbrzych stressed the lack of financial resources and the unfriendly attitude of the authorities. At a meeting with representatives of the Jewish committee, the voivode "objected to an excessive concentration of Jews in one area. He has admitted Jews ... to all work places but only those whose looks are not strikingly Jewish. He explained that this was a question of the first difficult steps in the reconstruction of reborn Poland"<sup>36</sup>.

Jews also lived in smaller localities: Głuszyca, Mieroszów, Bielawa and Pieszyce. At Głuszyca, where field hospitals for Jews were situated, food supplies were good and there were possibilities of employing Jews in place of the German personnel. At Mieroszów, where some 200 Jews from Łódź lived, there were also jobs vacated by Germans, as in Głuszyca, but as the Productiveness Department's report of July 18, 1945 said: "these people must be treated with great reserve, for up to now they have not shown inclination to start productive work"<sup>37</sup>.

During that period the Jewish committees concentrated their work on nursing sick people and on productiveness. They encountered many difficulties not only because of the lack of financial resources and the unfriendly attitude of the authorities, but also because of the behaviour of the Jews themselves. However, this did not stop the work of the Jewish Voivodship Committee and in the second half of 1945 new Jewish agglomerations came into being in Kłodzko, Legnica, Świdnica and Nowa Ruda.

The committees were an absolute necessity. They had to organize medical attention and financial assistance for the emaciated Jews and find work and accommodation for them. The Dzierżoniów committee, which lacked financial resources for such large-scale activity, asked the Central Committee of Polish Jews for urgent help. In the second half of May 1945 the CCPJ sent Jakub Egit and Icchak Cukierman to Lower Silesia. At the end of May 1945 a delegation of Lower Silesian Jews called at the office of the CCPJ and said that "a large number of Jews who worked in camps has settled in Lower Silesia ... The delegation stated that these people had decided ... to remain there and set up a Jewish settlement, taking advantage of the fact that some Germans had run away from the Red Army. The Jews

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<sup>36</sup> AJHI, Department of Productiveness of the CCPJ, call number 11, np. Report on the establishment of the Jewish Committee in Wałbrzych, 13.6.1945. See also State Voivodship Archives, JVC, call number 1, p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> State Voivodship Archives, JVC, call number 5, p. 4.

have occupied flats and some workshops which belonged to Germans and began to settle down"<sup>38</sup>. In order to coordinate work, the First Voivodship Conference of Jewish Committees in Lower Silesia was held at Dzierżoniów on June 17, 1945. It was attended by 50 delegates from Wałbrzych, Pieszyce, Głuszyca, Ludwikowice, Bielawa and Dzierżoniów. The conference set up the Jewish Voivodship Committee for Lower Silesia and subordinated the existing committees to it; contact was established with the CCPJ, to which the Voivodship Committee was subordinated. Jakub Egit was elected chairman of the Committee and Mojżesz Linkowski became his deputy. The Committee also comprised the following members: Jakub Rosenberg, Szania Szejnberg, Adolf Haas, Jakub Eisenberg, Szymon Balicki and Hanka Lewin<sup>39</sup>. Jakub Egit, one of the participants in the conference, recalls it in his book: "The conference held its debates in one of the most beautiful buildings in the town ... in a solemn atmosphere, in honour of the Jews who had perished and did not live to see it". Captain Borosovov of the Red Army uttered very characteristic words: "You, Jews, are a strange people. I am one of those who liberated Jews imprisoned in camps. You were sick ... hungry and half dead, and you are now sitting here at this conference completely changed, your eyes aglow and are talking about schools, theatre and culture ... A strange nation. Such a nation will never perish"<sup>40</sup>. The conference adopted a memorandum on Jewish settlement in Lower Silesia, which was sent to Warsaw and was approved by the CCPJ and the Minister of Public Administration, Edward Ochab.

Questions of competence and subordination were resolved by the establishment of the Jewish Voivodship Committee in Lower Silesia. The problem of relations between the JVC in Dzierżoniów and the Jewish Committee in Wrocław (whose members were German Jews) continued to exist for some time. The dispute concerned the activity of the Wrocław committee and the contacts it maintained, independently of the JVC, with the Jewish committee of Zielona Góra. At a meeting of the CCPJ held in August 1945, Major Szlomo Hirszenhorn explained that the Wrocław committee was an independent district committee<sup>41</sup>. The problem was solved when German Jews left Wrocław.

<sup>38</sup> AJHI, Praesidium of the CCPJ, call number 303/1, p. 103.

<sup>39</sup> State Voivodship Archives, JVC, call number 1, p. 1. In July 1945 changes were made in the JVC authorities. Rosenberg became deputy chairman (and also head of the social welfare section), Hana Zauberman became secretary; Ignacy Kuczyński was to head the section for culture and propaganda, Adolf Haas the section of productiveness, Mojżesz Linkowski the organizational section, Szania Szejnberg the youth section. The JVC also employed Noe Erlich, Hanka Lewin, Eliasz Strasser, Anna Pufeles, Szaja Taterka, Juda Finkler, Mosze Reich. *Ibidem*, p. 23.

<sup>40</sup> J. Egit, *Cu, op. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> AJHI, Praesidium of the CCPJ, call number 303/1, p. 131.



The June 1945 conference of delegates of Jewish committees from Lower Silesia, which set up the Jewish Voivodship Committee, was a manifestation of Lower Silesian Jews who survived in this region; it put forward the idea of Jewish settlement, drew up its plans and worked out its concepts. A month later, on July 17, 1945, a congress of delegates of Lower Silesian Jewish committees was convened at Dzierżoniów. The congress was attended by 61 delegate from six centres<sup>42</sup> as well as by representatives of the CCPJ, the State Repatriation Office, the Ministry of Public Administration and the Jewish Committee of Warsaw. The congress set to prepare two campaigns which were to be carried out in Lower Silesia. One of them, the resettlement of Jews, was a long-term campaign; the other, participation of Jews in harvesting work was regarded as “an exam they will have to pass before society and the authorities”<sup>43</sup>. The harvesting campaign was the first mass campaign of the Jewish population in Lower Silesia. It was of great significance not only because it manifested the presence of Jews in this region but also because Jews joined in productive work. Participation in productive work was one of the most important questions and the favourite slogan of all organizations. Jakub Egit, chairman of the JVC, said at the July congress: “through mass participation in harvesting work we shall strengthen our well-earned right to eat bread on equal terms with the whole of Polish society”<sup>44</sup>. Jewish committees organized harvesting companies, popularized the aims of the campaign and established co-operation with representatives of local authorities. Non-working Jews were to be drawn into the campaign and those who shirked work were to be black-listed. Some non-working Jews escaped eviction (Wałbrzych) by taking part in the campaign. On July 16, 1945 a rally was convened at Dzierżoniów with the participation of local authorities, and appeal to the Jewish population in Lower Silesia was issued; “propaganda posters pasted up in the town called on people to volunteer for harvesting, for it was every citizen’s honourable duty to grasp the scythe and in this way rule out hunger and secure bread for the homeland and for each family. At 6 pm on July 20, 1945 a great concert was given by a Red Army ensemble in connection with the har-

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<sup>42</sup> Dzierżoniów was represented by Laufer, Rosenberg, Eisenberg, Kahane and Schneider; Pieszyce by Politański, Lewenstein, Sztajer, Rudzyn and Birmen; Bielawa by Szwarcbaum, Henigman, Braun and Grajcer; Wałbrzych by Wulkan, Ajzenberg, S. Frenkiel, J. Frenkiel and Dobrecki; Ludwikowice by Schachner, Lendner, Schiffer, Kronenberg, Weiss and Nussbaum. AJHI, Department of Productiveness of the CCPJ, call number 11, np., Minutes of the Congress of delegates of Lower Silesian Jewish Committees, 17.7.1945.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*.

vest”<sup>45</sup>. The Jewish population participated *en masse* in the harvesting work. The volunteers’ brigades set up in individual centres set to work at the end of July and the beginning of August. During the campaign trouble arose again over the attitude of local authorities. The Labour Office at Pieszyce appointed a German as head of the campaign and wanted to send a Jewish brigade together with demobilized Germans to a place where “working and living conditions were in all probability ... not organized. However, our people, realizing the importance of the harvesting campaign, volunteered to work on the spot, but they were expected to leave their homes and families and make a trip into the unknown; we thought this was beside the purpose and told them to go back home”<sup>46</sup>. At Dzierżoniów the deputy mayor refused to give food to the working people. The same happened in another Lower Silesian locality where some people fainted from hunger because the brigade had been working for a few days without food.

This first mass campaign revealed many problems connected with the settlement of Jews in this region. It showed support for Jewish committees as well as difficulties in the employment of Jews. During the harvesting campaign new disputes arose with the local authorities which were hostile to Jews. This was a problem which appeared already in May 1945. A report of the Department for the Affairs of the Jewish Population said that the state authorities in Silesia favoured the concept of Jewish settlement, the only exception being “the mayor of Wrocław ... who said ... that he could employ Jews only in the railway wagon factory, provided it is not carried away by Soviet authorities ... He explained his decision by difficulties in food supplies”<sup>47</sup>. Jews lodged many complaints about the German vice-mayor of Pieszyce, Nass, and the authorities of Wałbrzych, accusing them of conducting anti-Jewish propaganda and hampering the participation of Jews in the work of various institutions, e.g. in the Civic Qualification Commission for the town of Wałbrzych. The starost of Wałbrzych, Szewczyk, and the secretary of the Polish Workers’ Party, Chruściel, objected to the participation of Jewish committees in the qualification commission; replying to the accusations of the chairman of the Jewish committee, Chruściel said: “If the Jewish committee sends Jews to work in mines, we will speak about your representation”<sup>48</sup>. There were many such cases. This was an

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<sup>45</sup> AJHI, Department of Productiveness of the CCPI, call number 11, np. Report of 28.7.1945 made at the Committee of Former Prisoners of Rychbach Concentration Camps.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, Report of the Jewish Committee in Peterswald (Pieszyce), 23.7.1945–31.7.1945.

<sup>47</sup> Archives of Modern Records, National People’s Council, Praesidium of the Council of Ministers, Presidential Bureau, call number 137, p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> State Voivodship Archives, Urząd Wojewódzki Wrocław (henceforward referred as to UWW), call number VI–270, p. 6.



important problem, for the success of the settlement campaign frequently depended on the attitude of the authorities. It was stated at the congress of delegates of Jewish committees in July 1945 that “success of the settlement campaign depends on two things, the attitude of the administrative authorities in the individual localities ... and food supplies ... We often come across an indifferent or even hostile anti-Semitic attitude of mayors, starosts and officials ... Our work will be hampered as long as these despotic officials remain in office”<sup>49</sup>. Representatives of the CCPJ expressed a similar opinion in their letter to the government’s plenipotentiary for Lower Silesia, Voivode Piaskowski, in which they said that “it turned out during an inspection of Jewish centres in the Dzierżoniów, Wałbrzych and Kłodzko districts ... that the Jewish people living in these districts were still encountering many difficulties in settling down, in obtaining workshops ... flats ... in finding employment in state administration, factories, workshops ... on the land ... In many localities ... Germans are being employed in state administration and the Jews who apply for work are turned down. Jews live in fear of eviction, and attempts to evict them have in fact been made by the starost’s office (Dzierżoniów) ... The administrative authorities, especially junior officials, manifest openly anti-Semitic tendencies, which makes the life of the resident Jews unbearable”<sup>50</sup>. This was noticed by the Ministry of Public Administration, which dealt with Jewish affairs. A circular letter of June 1945 rebuked all those who “do not treat Jewish petitioners’ matters with due objectivity”<sup>51</sup>. Documents show that this was an essential problem for the Jewish population of Lower Silesia, hence the intercession from the central representation of the Jews and the Ministry of Public Administration.

Food supplies were another difficult problem. Reports of Jewish institutions cite countless examples of the difficult situation of Jews, which was inexplicable in Lower Silesia, for the existing possibilities were frequently not made use of. The above-mentioned report of representatives of the CCPJ on their tour of Lower Silesia also raised the question of food supplies: “the working people receive only 160 grams of bread a day, which is obviously insufficient and frightens people away from work ... In ... Ludwikowice Jewish women are living ... in abominable conditions in labour camp barracks while Germans have 4–5 room flats. The administrative authorities are doing nothing to put an end to this state of affairs”<sup>52</sup>. The CCPJ played an important role in promoting Jewish settlement in Lower

<sup>49</sup> AJHI, Department of Productiveness of the CCPJ, call number 11, np., Minutes of the Congress, Speech by Jakub Egit.

<sup>50</sup> State Voivodship Archives, *UWW*, call number VI-269, pp. 11, 12.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, call number XIII-1, p. 45.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, call number VI-269, p. 12.

Silesia. But even if the CCPJ backed this idea, its help was not adequate to finance the activity of Jewish committees in Lower Silesia. Already in the first months of its work, the Jewish Voivodship Committee assessed the CCPJ help as small and insignificant, and complained that the CCPJ had sent sick people to Lower Silesia without guaranteeing them aid<sup>53</sup>. The JVC was also irritated by the fact that small centres, e.g. Katowice, were awarded larger funds by the CCPJ. The CCPJ was severely criticized at a meeting of the JVC on July 27, 1945. It was stated at the meeting that “the help extended by the CCPJ is inadequate to launch and strengthen Jewish settlement ... the CCPJ’s method whereby help is given as a result of direct intercessions is inappropriate ... The visit of the CCPJ delegation has by no means helped to advance our work”<sup>54</sup>. The JVC announced it would endeavour to obtain funds from other sources, from local authorities and foreign centres. Three weeks later, Doctor Jakub Rosenberg of the JVC raised objections to the CCPJ’s activity at a meeting of the Praesidium of the CCPJ in Warsaw. In reply Salo Fiszgrund said that the CCPJ’s financial abilities were restricted for its budget had been cut from 7 million zlotys to 5 million, while the number of Jews waiting for assistance had increased. The Praesidium did not allow the JVC to look for help abroad, saying that it alone was authorized to do so, but promised to increase help for Lower Silesia by setting up a special settlement fund, increasing the JVC budget for September and granting loans to develop production<sup>55</sup>. Despite promises that the situation would be changed, complaints about inadequate CCPJ help continued. A conflict began to emerge between the chairman of the JVC and the CCPJ authorities, not only over help but also over personnel. In November 1945 chartered auditors Perlmutter and Besser checked the accounts of the JVC and the Jewish Committee at Wałbrzych and found many inaccuracies in book-keeping and mismanagement of funds. The inspection supplied the CCPJ and the JVC with pretexts for mutual accusations and also led to accusations within the JVC.

The reason for the conflicts between the JVC, the local authorities and the central Jewish institutions was that the JVC regarded problems of the Jewish population in Lower Silesia as a priority. It failed to notice the Polish authorities’ complicated situation in this region. In their thoughts and activities, representatives of the Jewish population were guided by the idea that the war events had given the Jews the right to work and live in these territories. It is true that Jewish applications were frequently rejected be-

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<sup>53</sup> State Voivodship Archives, JVC, call number 1, pp. 9, 17.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> AJHI, Praesidium of the CCPJ, call number 303/1, p. 130.



cause of ill-will and anti-Semitism, but lack of financial resources was another reason why help was restricted. It was expected that many problems would be solved after the expulsion of Germans. But before this happened, many persons were irritated by the fact that Germans were living in their flats and working. On the other hand, Jews did not always have adequate qualifications to take over factories and workshops from the Germans. Help from the CCPJ was restricted and this made work difficult. The influence exerted by various political parties also complicated the JVC activity. In Lower Silesia, as well as in other parts of Poland, Jewish political activity was conducted by the Jewish faction of the *PPR*, Zionist and religious parties and the Bund. It was not only the *PPR* faction but also the Bund, Poalej Syjon-Left, Poalej Syjon-Right, Hitachdud, Haszomer Hacair, Ichud and representatives of the League of Working Palestine that participated in the work of the JVC. Zionist parties ran *kibutzim* in Wałbrzych, Dzierżoniów and other places in Lower Silesia.

The *PPR* faction had 13 members in the JVC and its activists occupied the most important posts (Egit, Rosenberg). They headed the youth department (Józef Nieznanowski), the department of culture and propaganda (Ignacy Kuczyński), the economic department (Szymon Balicki) and the department of productiveness (Hersz Cebula)<sup>56</sup>. One of the reasons for conflicts between the *PPR* faction and the Zionists was that they held different views on Jewish life in post-war Poland. It should, however, be stressed that the conditions in Lower Silesia were specific and the arguments for departure from Poland were not so strong there as they were in the rest of Poland. But life was difficult there, too, and it was by no means certain that the concept of Jewish settlement would be a success; this is why the two opposite ideologies waged a bitter struggle for influence. At a conference of representatives of Jewish youth organizations in August 1945, Jakub Egit criticized Ichud's practices of sending children from the Pieszyce Children's Home abroad and dissuading Jews from participation in the harvesting campaign<sup>57</sup>. In July 1945, a dispute broke out between members of the League of Working Palestine in Dzierżoniów and the chairman of the JVC. The matter was serious enough to require examination by the CCPJ. On August 21, 1945 a description of events at Dzierżoniów was presented at a meeting of the CCPJ Praesidium. The dispute concerned the eviction of the Honik family (members of the League of Working Palestine) by Egit, who decided to evict the Honiks after hearing that they were to be arrested for

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<sup>56</sup> AJHI, CCPJ, Organizational Department of the CCPJ, call number 15, np. Accounts and Reports of the Central *PPR* Faction of the CCPJ.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*.

making an anti-government and anti-Soviet statement. When the matter had been examined, it turned out that the information on the planned arrest was false and that Egit's decision to expel the Honiks from Dzierżoniów was groundless. However, the dispute revealed that there was strong opposition to Egit, led by Józef Szklar (*PPR*), Cywia Lubetkin (Hechaluc Pionier) and Hersz Wasser (Bund), who demanded Egit's dismissal and the dissolution of the Dzierżoniów JVC. Fiszgrund, Heszenhorn (Bund) and Chaskiel Kameraz (*PPR*) came out in defence of Egit and the committee. Those taking part in the discussion stressed that "Rychbach (Dzierżoniów) is the only place where we find an outlet for our energy, and this is why we are so sensitive about it. The work at Rychbach is our future and this is why we do not allow it to be wrecked. Egit acted wrongly; he meant well, but this is not how things have turned out"<sup>58</sup>. The dispute with the League of Working Palestine showed that some CCPJ activists did not approve of Egit's conduct and reacted more strongly than was necessary. The party comrades of the JVC chairman also criticized the work of the committee. On August 26, 1945, Józef Nieznanowski, head of the JVC department for youth, wrote in a letter to Kameraz: "The Jewish Committee at Rychbach is asleep; it is squandering the enormous opportunities of drawing Jews into production ... The Department of Productiveness does not conduct any political work ... The Jewish Committee behaves as if it was helpless, as if nothing interested it ... The Jewish Committee is at present an uninfluential annex to Jewish life"<sup>59</sup>. There were disputes also within the JVC. In November 1945, Egit, replying to the accusation made by his deputy Rosenberg that he was acting single-handed, said that their co-operation had become impossible<sup>60</sup>. Relations between the *PPR* faction in the JVC and the local party authorities were not good because the *PPR* had no clear policy towards Polish Jews. It had not yet decided whether to support emigration or choose a policy corresponding to the aspirations of the *PPR* faction. Józef Gitler Barski wrote in a report on his tour of Lower Silesia in September 1945 that "a delegate of the *PPR* Voivodship Committee at Legnica said at a meeting ... that Jews would have to emigrate from Poland, for their presence in this country impedes the fight against reaction"<sup>61</sup>.

The activities of Jewish parties met with a varied reception among the Jewish settlers in Lower Silesia. It can be said on the basis of other sources that the Jews adopted a wait-and-see attitude, but many decided to take up

<sup>58</sup> AJHI, Praesidium of the CCPJ, call number 303/1, pp. 128, 129.

<sup>59</sup> AJHI, Organizational Department of the CCPJ, call number 15, np., Letter of 26.8.1945.

<sup>60</sup> State Voivodship Archives, JVC, call number 1, p. 34.

<sup>61</sup> *ALP*, *PPR*, Secretariat, call number 295-VII-149, p. 256.



regular work, if this was possible in their locality. However, it sometimes happened that settlers sent to a farm “ran away after looting it”<sup>62</sup>. A member of the JVC wrote in an August report for the PPR faction in Warsaw: “... nearly all Jews live from hand to mouth, they are not interested in the beautiful flats, comfortable furniture and expensive machines they have been given free; they are thinking of how best to sell all this and go either abroad or to another locality in Poland so as to be able to loot again”<sup>63</sup>. Reports of local authorities and police reports show that a large part of the Jewish population was engaged in black marketeering. Work dodging was a frequent phenomenon<sup>64</sup>. It is difficult to say what percentage of the Jewish population resolved to remain in Lower Silesia but there is no doubt that many Jews emigrated. In August 1945 the JVC explained its attitude to emigration, stating in a resolution: “Palestine cannot accept all European Jews at the moment; parallel to the construction of a Jewish state in Palestine, the collective life on Jews should be consolidated ... We will fight vigorously against politicians who advise illegal emigration... As soon as legal emigration becomes possible for the Jews in Poland, the Jewish committees ... will assume control over it”<sup>65</sup>. Illegal emigration was large even though it was criticized. Let us remember, however, that the recorded cases of emigrants stopped on the frontier concern Polish Jews in general. It cannot be established what percentage of the Jewish population left Lower Silesia illegally, for departures were not recorded in the Jewish committees’ statistics. The number of Jews in Lower Silesia was steadily increasing at that time. Some idea can be gained from the monthly reports of the Szklarska Poręba — Tuplice Frontier Guards. Over 100 Jews who wanted to cross the frontier illegally were stopped there in December 1945<sup>66</sup>.

The JVC did its best to counter the Jews’ desire to emigrate and oppose their inclination to regard the situation as temporary. In accordance with the programme of the CCPJ, stress was laid on productiveness, for it was believed that permanent work and steady earnings would promote stability. In June and July 1945 the JVC sent delegates to the localities inhabited by Jews not only to assess the economic situation but also to find out what housing and employment opportunities these localities offered.

<sup>62</sup> AJHI, Department of Productiveness of the CCPJ, call number 11, np., Report from Ludwikowice, 8.8.1945.

<sup>63</sup> AJHI, Organizational Department of the CCPJ, call number 15, np. Józef Nieznanowski’s letter of 26.8.1945 to Chaskiel Kameraz.

<sup>64</sup> Police Archives, Wrocław, Situational Reports of 1945, call number 146/10, pp. 42, 45. See also State Voivodship Archives, *UWW*, call number VI-269, p. 13.

<sup>65</sup> State Voivodship Archives, JVC, call number 1, p. 20.

<sup>66</sup> Frontier Guards’ Archives, Kętrzyn. Monthly report on operations, 2nd Detachment of Frontier Guards, 1945, call number 275/6, pp. 7, 11, 17, 26, 30, 42, 45, 53, 74, 119, 179.

In the first period of its activity the department of productiveness “encountered various obstacles ... this was ... a period of round-ups, when unemployed persons were sent to neighbouring towns”<sup>67</sup>. At the same time experts were sent to Lower Silesia from central and eastern Poland. Shops and some workshops which had belonged to Germans were being taken over. In accordance with an ordinance of the Polish Government’s plenipotentiary in Lower Silesia, Vice-Voivode Stefan Wengierow, Jews were to join in the process of making the country productive as quickly as possible; they were to be sent “to work according to their vocation ... to be placed ... on individual farms ... it is most advisable to direct Jews to work on state farms. It is wrong not to allow Polish citizens of Jewish nationality to fill posts in the administration only because of their nationality. Most far-reaching support should be given to the Jews who want to work honestly ... determined measures, including forced labour, should be taken against Jews who do not want to work”<sup>68</sup>. Despite these announcements, the authorities were not always willing to help Jews engage in production, and sometimes even made this difficult for them. It was stated in the July report of the Department of Productiveness that “productiveness has encountered serious difficulties from the authorities as regards the legalization of industrial certificates and confirmation of land ownership ... Defective nourishment ... is an urgent problem. People who live on starvation rations get demoralized and those who take work indicated by us become disappointed”<sup>69</sup>. The question of productiveness was dealt with by the Department of Productiveness and agricultural questions by the Agricultural Department. The Department of Productiveness consisted of five sections, those for industry and vocational training, small-scale industry and co-operatives, raw materials and implementation of production, land settlement (until the opening of the Agricultural Department) and the section dealing with repatriates. The department was headed by Adolf Haas. According to the data of this department, 28 enterprises and 5 agricultural colonies (with 600 workers) had been set up in Dzierżoniów by July 1945. Of the 125 Jews in Bielawa, 95 were employed; in Ludwikowice 25 per cent of the Jewish population was employed, and in Pieszyce 50 per cent<sup>70</sup>. These are quite high figures, especially if we take into account the moods among the Jewish population and the difficulties created by the authorities and the German

<sup>67</sup> State Voivodship Archives, JVC, call number 5, p. 19.

<sup>68</sup> Archives of Modern Records, Ministry of Public Administration, Norms of the Government’s Plenipotentiary for Lower Silesia, Instructions. Circular letters 1945–1946, call number 2416, p. 46.

<sup>69</sup> AJHI, Department of Productiveness of the CCPJ, call number 9, np. Report on the period 5.7.1945–14.7.1945, np.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*.



population. In some localities jobs “are inaccessible to Jews for the time being because German anti-Semites hold posts in offices and give employment to their own people. Non-working Jews do not get ration cards. In the last few days panic has arisen because of the local authorities’ ordinance to round up unemployed people in the streets ... and send them to work in Wrocław and other localities”<sup>71</sup>. All these problems hindered productivity but did not stop it. In September 1945, the fourth month of the JVC’s activity, 127 work places were registered in Dzierżoniów, 85 in Wałbrzych, 37 in Pieszyce and 30 in Bielawa. In all the localities where Jewish committees existed there were 34 work places employing over 3,000 Jews<sup>72</sup>. Tailoring and shirt-making shops predominated (97); there were also 34 agricultural holdings, 38 trade enterprises, 15 butcher shops as well as 2 dance schools, bakeries, hair-dressing saloons, mills, pharmacies, 4 co-operatives and also leather, locksmiths’, tinsmiths’, joiners’ and glaziers’ workshops. Productiveness was an important part of JVC activity. Although the funds earmarked for this purpose were inadequate, Lower Silesia occupied a special place in this process. At a conference on productiveness held in Warsaw in September 1945, Lower Silesia, alongside Łódź, was set as an example. Lower Silesia was represented at the conference by Jakub Egit and Ignacy Kuczyński, who presented the region’s achievements in productivity and the problems encountered during this work. They laid stress on low earnings, the problem of the German population and the inadequate help from the CCPJ. They also outlined plans for the future, stressing that employment in industry, vocational training and work with young people were the most important tasks of the Department of Productiveness<sup>73</sup>. According to the Productiveness Department’s data for the end of November 1945, the number of Jews employed in industry and various enterprises was quite high, amounting to about 1,500. A large number of Jews, 690 persons, were still engaged in handicrafts. The learned professions, trade and co-operatives employed the same number of people (120–165). More people (200) tilled the land<sup>74</sup>.

These statistics show that a part of the Jewish population had found work. This was an exceptional situation, for only in Lower Silesia was it

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*, call number 11, np. Reports concerning the JVC in Gdańsk and Lower Silesia, July–October 1945.

<sup>72</sup> ALP, PPR, Secretariat, call number 295–VII–149, p. 256. See also AJHI, Department of Productiveness of the CCPJ, call number 439, np. Figures concerning productiveness in individual towns.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*, call number 15, np. Minutes of the conference on productiveness, held on September 24, 1945.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibidem*, call number 12, np. Accounts, reports and minutes of meetings concerning Lower Silesia, Warsaw and Białystok. Report of 20.11.1945.

possible to take over deserted landed estates. One of the first actions of the JVC was the harvesting campaign already mentioned by us. In addition to offering employment, agricultural holdings played an important role in supplying the Jewish population with foodstuffs. The food products transmitted to the Jewish committees made it possible to ease the food crisis to some extent. There were many deserted farms in Lower Silesia. However, since many Jews had no qualifications to till the land, the idea was launched to set up a secondary agricultural school or agricultural courses. On September 30, 1945 the First Congress of Jewish Farmers was held in Wrocław. In a paper on the state and prospects of Jewish farming in Lower Silesia, Abraham Rosenman, head of the Department of Agriculture, said: "When they started settling in Lower Silesia, the Jews also took up work on the land, the most pioneering work, 120 Jews ... are working on 34 farms. This figure is steadily growing as the Germans are being ousted ... and will increase to 500. Jewish farms have 342 head of cattle, 95 horses, 30 sheep and over 400 fowl"<sup>75</sup>. The resolution adopted by the congress announced that a Jewish agricultural society would be set up to represent and defend the interests of Jewish farmers. The congress also pointed out that additional training should be organized for young farmers, and drew attention to the difficulties encountered by Jewish farmers and the possibilities of obtaining help.

The problems presented here show the important role played by productiveness in Lower Silesia. Employment in factories and in agriculture was the most important thing at that time. Less attention was paid to the co-operative movement. Attempts were made to restrict the employment of Jews in trade. The difficulties described above did not check productiveness. Employment statistics show that the number of working Jews was steadily increasing.

In addition to productiveness, the JVC also conducted educational and cultural work in Lower Silesia. It looked after Jewish children and young people. The lack of financial resources made it difficult to extend adequate help to all those needing it; nevertheless, already in the first months of its activity the JVC organized canteens and placed sick people in hospitals. In Pieszyce and Ludwikowice Children's Homes for 117 children were opened. The Department of Social Welfare was headed by Laufer and the Health Department, set up in July 1945, by Rosenberg. According to the JVC report of July 1945, the canteens run by Jewish committees dealt out 400 lunches a day at Dzierżoniów and Wałbrzych, 500 at Ludwikowice and 150 at Pieszyce. A hospital with 300 beds was kept at Głuszyca<sup>76</sup>. It was

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*, call number 11, np. Minutes ... Minutes of the First Congress of Jewish Farmers from Lower Silesia, 30.11.1945.



imperative to secure basic care for children in view of their war experiences and the high number of orphans. But attention was also paid to the organization of schools. Work on organizing a Jewish school for small children and a secondary school for teenagers started already in July 1945. Like productiveness, this work encountered various difficulties. For instance, there were plans to open a vocational school in Bielawa in August 1945. A building had been set aside for this purpose and support was promised by the mayor of Bielawa. However, the school inspector Kiciński and the deputy superintendent of the Wrocław School Region Krajewski forced the school to close down. Everything possible was done to prevent the opening of the school, only to mention such epithets as “schools should not be judaised”, “I’m not in favour of murdering Jews, but I would throw all of them out”, “Jews are parasites, there is no reason to open schools for them”<sup>77</sup>.

The JVC wanted to offer children and young people opportunities for versatile vocational, cultural and sports activities. The youth club set up at the JVC, headed by Szania Szejnberg, ran sports and entertainment sections as well as a reading room and training courses. This work was addressed to a small group, but its promoters realized that the institutions and club set up by them were a nucleus of larger activities which would embrace several thousand young Jews from the USSR. This was the ultimate aim of the cultural activities and the propaganda work connected with them. The Department of Culture and Propaganda was set up in July 1945. Its activity was aimed at popularizing the settlement of Jews in Lower Silesia. In its July report the department said that “productiveness and construction of a new life based on the principles of sound work and genuine culture are propagated at the meetings”<sup>78</sup>. The department announced that it would start publishing a periodical and open a people’s university, community centres, libraries, clubs and sports sections. It also organized official meetings and receptions; one can say that it was responsible for the presence of the JVC in public life. In August 1945, Onas Turkow, head of the Department of Culture of the CCPJ and chairman of the Union of Jewish Writers, Journalists and Artists in Poland, visited the Lower Silesian Jewish milieu. “The aim of his journey was to lay the foundations of cultural life in Lower Silesia”<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*, call number 9, np., Department of Productiveness of the JVC, Report for the CCPJ, 14.7.1945.

<sup>77</sup> State Voivodship Archives, JVC, call number 5, p. 11.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 17.

<sup>79</sup> AJHI, Department of Culture and Propaganda of the CCPJ, call number 129, np. Bulletins of the Jewish Press Agency of Łódź 1944–1945, Bulletin of August 1945.

Jewish religious associations started working in Lower Silesia, as they did in the whole of Poland. The first religious sections, e.g. the one set up at Wałbrzych, were of a private character. But soon religious associations were established in towns with larger groups of Jews. In August 1945 the Religious Association of Wrocław took over The White Stork synagogue in this town.

The activity of the JVC and religious associations was addressed to Jews who were Polish citizens, but there was also a large group of German Jews in Lower Silesia. Jewish committees for German Jews were established in Wrocław and Jelenia Góra. At the beginning there were conflicts between the JVC and German Jews' committees, for the latter did not yield to the authority of the JVC. The German Jews' committees and the Jewish committees subordinated to the JVC were entrusted with the task of defining and confirming the Jewishness of applicants. The certificate which entitled its holder to receive aid read: "On the basis of the identity card presented to us ... and the birth certificate ... we certify hereby that ... citizen ... is a Jew and as such was persecuted by national-socialist fascism"<sup>80</sup>. The certificate identified its holder as a citizen with full rights. It was also used as a passport. However, since the administrative and local authorities had serious doubts about German Jews, a conference was convened in June with the participation of the secretary general of the CCPJ, and director of the political department of the Ministry of Public Administration, Grabowski, to define the legal status of Jews who were formerly German citizens. "German Jews" were promised "equal rights with Polish Jews in every field and every respect"<sup>81</sup>. But despite initial settlements, the Jewish committees and some representatives of the authorities found it difficult to decide how German Jews should be treated. A difficult situation arose at Jelenia Góra, where "some German Jews ... have ambiguous documents or do not have them at all ... there are frequent cases of foreign Jews demanding the allocation of a shop or another enterprise"<sup>82</sup>.

These problems were presented at the Ministry of Public Administration by Voivode Piaskowski. But several months later, in October 1945, new doubts arose. The Security Office asked the Jewish Committee at Jelenia Góra to stop issuing certificates to German Jews. Baumgarten, head of the Public Security Office in Jelenia Góra, stated that at the roots of this decision was objection to "the Nuremberg laws ... we cannot allow half-Jews and quarter-Jews, to say nothing of Germans, to be members of your institution

<sup>80</sup> State Voivodship Archives, UWW, call number VI-27, p. 32.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*, call number VI-269, p. 9.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 3, 4.



and consequently ... we ask you to strike the names of such persons off your list and take away your certificates from them"<sup>83</sup>. As a result of this decision, German Jews were wrongfully recognized as Germans and were expropriated and expelled against their will. In some districts, e.g. that of Kłodzko, Jewish committees were forbidden to issue certificates to German Jews. Carla Wolf, a German Jewess who left Wrocław in September 1945, reminisces: "the atmosphere was oppressive and unfriendly; it was impossible to explain to every ... official that you were not German. After all, you only spoke German ... But if one remembers that the war had just come to an end and that this was a dreadful war for the Poles ... that Poland had suffered a lot at the hands of the Germans, one can understand this"<sup>84</sup>. German Jews left Poland in the second half of 1945 and at the beginning of 1946. Only single individuals decided to remain in Lower Silesia.

The Jewish affairs presented above and the activity of the JVC from May to December 1945 show that foundations had been laid for the settlement of Jews in Lower Silesia. We have mentioned the difficulties encountered in this process. To some extent they restricted the activity of the JVC, but they did not stop Jewish settlement in that region. The number of Jews in Lower Silesia kept growing despite emigration and various difficulties. The situation in Lower Silesia was specific, not only because there were flats and jobs there but also because it was safer there than in other parts of Poland. Foundations for the reception of Jews from the USSR were laid in 1945. The responsibility for this work rested on Polish Jews resettled from the east.

*(Translated by Janina Dorosz)*

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>84</sup> Carla Wolf's letter to Bożena Szaynok, December 1991.