

Jerzy Tomaszewski

POLISH DIPLOMATS AND THE FATE OF POLISH JEWS IN NAZI GERMANY*

In the second half of the 19th century mass emigration began from the Polish lands, then divided into three parts belonging to Austro-Hungary, Germany and Russia. The difficult conditions of life and the hope to find a better future elsewhere induced men and women to go abroad. The south provinces of the Polish lands—under the Habsburg rule—suffered the most severe underdevelopment. Poor villages, industry of no great importance, overpopulated towns offered scarce possibilities of work and earnings. Such conditions inspired many people to leave their homes and look for a job in other, more developed parts of Austro-Hungary. Later on they went abroad: to Germany, America and other countries. Among emigrants there were Poles and Ukrainians from the villages and Jews from shtetls'.¹

We have not sufficient data about the Jewish emigrants from the Polish territories. Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz remarked during the debates at the 11th Congress of the Polish Historians in

* This paper was presented at the conference "Poles and Jews. Myth and Reality in the Historical Context" held in March 1983 at the Columbia University, New York.

¹ For general data concerning the conditions of life in Galicia see I. Schiper, *Dzieje handlu żydowskiego na ziemiach polskich* [*The History of Jewish Commerce on the Polish Lands*], Warszawa 1937, pp. 442 ff. Schiper informs that Jews constituted near 60% among emigrants in the period 1881—1890 and 38%—in the years 1891—1900.

1974 that the statistical sources from Galicia inform about the language of emigrants only. The Jewish language was not recognized by the Austrian authorities and the Jews were registered in most cases as speaking the Polish language, about 10⁰/_o—with the German language, some others with the Ukrainian.² These people, belonging in most cases to the chassidic traditional local communities, were connected with Polish lands, some Polish traditions and the Polish language. These traditions were often maintained in their families and their ties with the abandoned homeland were not torn off.

The Jews were among emigrants from other parts of Poland too. Owing to the inadequacy of statistical data it would be difficult to give any strict figure. These migratory movement were however of minor importance than those from Galicia (Austrian part of Poland). According to the report of the Polish ambassador in Berlin, Józef Lipski, dated February 20, 1936, in Germany "the bulk of the Jews—Polish citizens comes from the former Austrian part of Poland".³

I do not intend to discuss the emigration of Polish Jews and their life in Germany.⁴ Suffice it to say that according to the international treaties the Jewish emigrants from Galicia after the First World War required the citizenship of the Polish Republic. The emigrants from the Russian part of Poland, under the stipulations of Polish-Soviet treaty from 1921, ought to have declared before April 1922, what citizenship (Polish, Russian or Ukrainian)

² *Mechanizmy polskich migracji zarobkowych* [Mechanisms of the Polish Employment-Seeking Emigration], ed. by C. Bobińska, Warszawa 1976, pp. 88—89.

³ J. Tomaszewski, *Raport dyplomatyczny o położeniu Żydów polskich w Niemczech na początku 1936 r.* [The Diplomatic Report Concerning the Situation of the Polish Jews in Germany at the Beginning of 1936]. "Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce" (later: BŻIH), 1978, No. 2, p. 104; the same in Jewish: *Diplomatisher raport wegn der lage fun poylishe Yidn in Daytchland in anhayb 1936 yor.* "Bleter far Geshichte," vol. XX (1981), pp. 141—157.

⁴ I had no possibility to find the book: S. Adler-Rudel, *Ostjuden in Deutschland (1880—1940)*, Tübingen 1959.

they choose.⁵ In consequence the people who declared nothing, after 1922 lost their right to have the Polish citizenship. From that time the Polish legation in Berlin (from November 1934—the embassy) was interested only in the fate of Jews that had the formal Polish citizenship, according to the international law. In this paper I shall discuss the attitude of Polish diplomats towards these people—the Polish citizens living in Germany, after national-socialists had established their rule.

Most of the diplomatic documents concerning the period before 1930 were lost during the Second World War. On the basis of those that have been saved we can suppose that before 1930 the Polish consulates in Germany had rather not so much to do with the problems concerning the Polish Jews. Most of them earned their bread as peddlars, shopkeepers, merchants, artisans, sometimes workers. The merchants maintained often the trade ties with their relatives living in Poland and imported some Polish goods. The documents inform about legal questions connected with their citizenship (the liability to the military service mainly). It was rather an exception when in 1923—1924 many Polish Jews were expelled from Bavaria. The Polish consulate in Munich and diplomats in Berlin and Warsaw protested and even some countermeasures to the German citizens in Poland were applied. Similar events happened at the beginning of 1927.⁶ They were connected with generally bad Polish-German relations.

It is difficult to ascertain when the unions of Polish Jews in Germany were initiated. Probable some of them were quite informal associations and existed before 1914, being a kind of mutual aid in a foreign country. One document informs that about 1925 the Union of Polish Jews in Bytom was organized. The Polish consulate in Opole explained some years later : “the Polish Jews were induced to set up their union because of economic reasons, too. They had to organize self-defence against the un-

⁵ *Dokumenty i materiały do historii stosunków polsko-radzieckich* [Documents and Materials on the History of Polish-Soviet Relations], vol. III, Warszawa 1964, document No. 275.

⁶ See documents in *Archiwum Akt Nowych* [Archives of Modern Records, later AAN], Konsulat RP w Monachium 125 and 126.

friendly attitude of German and Jewish-German shopkeepers and artisans".⁷

I have not seen in the Polish archives any document that would confirm more such unions to exist in the same period. We can suppose, however, that Polish Jews had their associations in some other towns. Their activity was rather viable guessing from the story of the Bytom union. The situation changed in the 1930s.

The economic burden of the Great Depression was especially heavy for the unpropertied lower middle class to which most part of the Polish Jews belonged. They were classified with disregard and prejudice as "Ostjuden"—East-European Jews—and were disliked not only by many Germans but by German Jews too. Only a part of them became integrated with the German environment. Besides in that time national socialists were rapidly gaining a support of many Germans. This was a strong threat to all the Jews in Germany. In such a situation the Centralverband deutscher Staatsbürger jüdische Glaubens [Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith] formed with the Zionist Federation a joint committee for the parliamentary election in 1930 and tried to resist the growing wave of radical nationalism.⁸

Documents from the same period of time inform about the organizing of unions of Polish Jews in Bytom, Zabrze and Gliwice.⁹ The union in Bytom joined an all-German Arbeitsgemeinschaft von Ostjuden in Berlin.¹⁰ Certainly there were other similar unions. The Polish envoy Alfred Wysocki in February 1933 instructed the consulates that in the face of arising clubs of Polish Jews "it is necessary to endeavour that the Jews themselves shall evaluate the importance of the organizatory work from their point of view"; the consulates had not to involve themselves

⁷ AAN, Konsulat RP w Opolu 122, p. 6 (Polish Consulate in Opole to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 7, 1931).

⁸ L. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933—45*, London 1977, pp. 215—216 ; K. Drobich, R. Goguel W. Müller, unter Mitwirkung von H. Dohle, *Juden unterm Hakenkreuz*, Berlin 1972, pp. 51 ff.

⁹ AAN, Konsulat RP w Opolu 122, pp. 5, 25

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

officially but were to be friendly towards these initiatives.¹¹ The Polish authorities were interested in that these unions included only the Polish citizens and not other groups of the East-European Jews. Therefore the consulate in Opole intervened—with a positive effect—against the membership of the Bytom union in *Arbeitsgemeinschaft von Ostjuden*.¹²

According to the census of June 4, 1933, there were in Germany about 500,000 people of Jewish faith, among them about 56,000 of Polish citizens.¹³ Another estimation based on information received from the Union of Polish Jews in Germany—of 1936—gave a figure of 70 000.¹⁴ Adolf Hitler and his collaborators considered all these men—as well as other Jews—to be the worse kind of human race, destructive to the interests of the German nation.

The Nazi organized assaults on Jews were carried on even before Hitler took over the chancellor's office. The events were carefully observed by the Polish diplomats; in the internal struggle going on in Germany the Jewish question however, was only a part of general conflict. The future could be easily predicted after an unique in the civilized world resolution adopted by the Prussian Landtag (local parliament). On June 24, 1932, the majority (national socialists with some deputies from other extreme nationalist groups) voted the motion to the Reichstag to confiscate the whole property of the East-European Jews who had arrived to Germany after August 1, 1914.¹⁵ The resolution had no consequences since Reichstag did not discuss this question. Nevertheless it roused the Polish Jews to anxiety.

In March 1933 the real danger approached. Persecutions of Jews became an everyday event. The police did not intervene. Among victims there were German citizens as well as the citizens of other countries. The diplomats were obliged to defend them.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 34—135.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 67—68 (a letter from June 6, 1937).

¹³ J. Tomaszewski, *Raport...*, p. 104.

¹⁴ AAN, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych (later MSZ) 4634, p. 98 (report of Stefan Odrowąż-Wysocki from February 25, 1936).

¹⁵ AAN, Ambasada RP w Berlinie 290, pp. 1—4 (report of the Polish Consulate in Berlin July 9, 1932).

From the beginning of March 1933 the Polish consulates and the officials of the Polish legation reported about beating and robbing Polish Jews. The documents preserved in archives, however, rich in dramatic accounts do not give the full picture of events. The Polish envoy informed Warsaw on March 16, 1932: "The Jews of non-German citizenship, totally terrorized [...] only in some cases asked the consulates for help. In some cases the victims when interrogated by the consular officials refused to give their names for the formal record and often asked the consulate not to intervene with the German authorities in fright of new repressive measures".¹⁶ Of course, it made the duty of consulates and legation to be a difficult one. Only in some cases it was possible to intervene through *Auswärtiges Amt* and other offices against the terror afflicting the Polish citizens. Anyway we can find in the archives many documents, records, letters and aide-mémoires concerning the fate of Polish Jews. In most cases the answers of German authorities were delayed and formal.

The mass terror in Germany—not only against Jews—aroused general indignation in other countries. The newspapers all over the world informed about the events, in some countries a boycott of German products began. The same was in Poland. The Nazi authorities declared that this international indignation was maliciously and without reason organized by the Jews and demanded that the Jewish citizens in Germany would counteract the news about cruelties. As a repressive measure a boycott of Jewish shops in Germany was declared. On this day—April 1, 1933, many Jews (among them Polish citizens) became victims of Nazi terror.¹⁷ The Polish consulates intervened and in some cases it was possible to rescue the Polish citizens and lift the boycott of some shops.

The Polish diplomats raised this question in several conversations with their German interlocutors. Wysocki intervened through *Auswärtiges Amt* four times in March (11, 18, 23 and 28). On March 31 the head of West Section in the Polish Ministry of

¹⁶ AAN, Ambasada RP w Berlinie 863, p. 98.

¹⁷ J. Tomaszewski, *1 kwietnia 1933 r. w Rzeszy Niemieckiej w raportach polskich Konsulatów oraz Poselstwa* [April 1, 1933, in *German Reich Reflected in the Reports of Polish Consulates and Legation*], BZIH (in print).

Foreign Affairs Józef Lipski (some months later nominated an envoy to Berlin), during the conversation with the German envoy to Warsaw Hans Adolph von Moltke quoted 119 cases of beating Polish citizens, several cases of arrest and robbery (these were only the well documented cases and not the full number). Moltke tried to explain the reasons and hinted at the possibility of expulsion of all the East-European Jews. He added that in Poland there were anti-Jewish movements too. These arguments were met with the immediate and somewhat malicious answer of Lipski who declared that in Poland such movements were suppressed by the authorities and condemned by the government party whereas in Germany the ruling party was inspiring violence. Lipski at the same time warned against expulsion and hinted at a strong Polish reaction.¹⁸

The same question was raised by Wysocki in his conversation with Hitler on May 2, 1933.¹⁹ Some days later minister Józef Beck instructed the consulates and legation in Germany "not to break off the help for Polish citizens of Jewish nationality in Reich and to intervene—as until now—through the central and local authorities".²⁰

It is necessary to emphasize that in 1933 the Polish diplomats were in a convenient position against their German interlocutors. That time state of Polish-German relations allowed various means of pressure to be used. This pressure could be even an useful argument in the possible future conversations on the most important questions of interest to both countries. At the beginning of April 1933 undersecretary of state for foreign affairs Jan Szembek asked the Ministry of Home Affairs "to gather as soon as possible strict data concerning the German citizens that live in Poland [...] in case of the necessity to induce the counter-measures".²¹ At the same time Nazi authorities inspired some

¹⁸ AAN, Ambasada RP w Berlinie 793, pp. 79—82 (record of a conversation on March 31, 1933).

¹⁹ *Diariusz i teki Jana Szembeka 1935—1945 [Diary and Papers of Jan Szembek, 1935—1945]*, vol. I, Ed. by T. Komarnicki, London 1964, pp. 55—56.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

²¹ AAN, Ambasada w Berlinie 793, pp. 76—77 (letter from April 3, 1933).

outrages against the German citizens of Polish nationality which broadened the pattern of Polish protests.

From the Polish documents it is clear that in April 1933 the Polish government perceived the most dangerous aspect of the Nazi policy. Many Polish citizens living in Germany had to possess a formal licence to perform their profession. Shopkeepers and peddlars had to act in conformity with various and changing local regulations. The Polish consulates reported about a growing number of facts when the Polish citizens were deprived of their professional licences or were discriminated in other form. One of the Polish officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared in conversation with a secretary of German legation: "Polish government can not tolerate that such a large number of people is deprived of means of living, through violence and terror, and have to seek for shelter and help in Poland".²²

This was a very important question, may be the most important one from the point of view of the Polish government. Poland had an enormous mass of unemployed and a vast overpopulation in agriculture. The Polish authorities after 1918 tried to support an immense emigration hoping to solve—at least partly—the burning social problems. The emigration was hindered after 1930 as a result of the policy of USA and other countries, which added a new burden to the economic and social troubles of the Polish Republic. The prospect of reentering Poland by more than 50 000 people deprived of all their property and dependent on charity was really alarming.

The question of Polish citizens in Reich was only one of many difficult problems in Polish-German relations. Poland could not resign of her duties towards her citizens. At the same time government tried to find a solution of a far more important question of the Polish-German frontier and imminent danger from the West.

Polish policy in the 1930s was discussed in many more or less documented studies and it is not necessary to raise this question again. The German-Polish negotiations in Autumn 1933 and January 1934 concerning some kind of mutual arrangement of the conflicts were of the main importance. The rationality—or the

²² *Ibidem*, p. 84 (record from April 12, 1933).

reverse—of German-Polish declaration from January 1934 has to be measured with the criteria concerning the general aims of the Polish policy and its real possibilities. When the Polish government cherishing illusions as to the future decided to sign this document it was impossible to carry on too strong a pressure in other questions. Though the danger of gradual expulsion of Polish Jews from Germany was perceived, though the government did not want to left its own citizens without help, all activity in this field was, from 1934 on, not so open to the public as during the previous year. This concerned not only Jews with the Polish passports but the Poles—citizens of Reich too. In next years their interests were subordinated to the general goals of the Polish foreign policy. In fact Poles living in Germany were sacrificed and the German government deprived them of many civil rights. One can condemn such an attitude but another policy would not greater real support to the victims of Nazi authorities and would threaten with sharp worsening of the Polish-German relations.

In spite of this, in the files of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs we can find many documents concerning the fate of Polish Jews in Germany. Polish diplomats carefully recorded legal and illegal discrimination and violence and tried to help many people in need. In some questions the Nazi government attempted to conciliate the Polish diplomats. In the second half of 1933 the cases of open violence against the Polish Jews were recorded not so often as before. The Polish consulates had less reasons to intervene. This did not afflict the general goals of the German policy but changed the methods of coercion. The essence of these changes was expressed by the consulate in Essen on March 16, 1934 : "The situation of Polish Jews on the territory of consulate's competence has significantly but only apparently improved. The outrages of Nazi detachments, sometimes of the police, and often of the population, ceased but one can perceive some consistent method to push the Jews—Polish citizens out of Reich with apparently legal and economic means".²³ The Jews were deprived of their trade licences, the German marchants were secretly ordered not to buy anything from Jews, the police formulated bogus ac-

²³ AAN, Ambasada RP w Berlinie 869, p. 21

cusations and when the consulate helped to establish innocence of the victim—there were cases of secret and illegal expulsion from Germany.

The report stressed that the Germans of Jewish faith were unfriendly towards the Polish Jews; the other countries (especially Belgium, France, Great Britain, Netherland and Yugoslavia) did not agree to give them visas.

The growing pressure induced the Polish Jews to develop their unions. Clubs and local associations began to consolidate under the name of Union of Polish Jews [Związek Żydów Polskich] with addition of the name of town. In November 1935 these local unions organized a general Union of Polish Jews in Germany. The Polish Embassy behaved with restraint because this Union admitted to membership persons without Polish citizenship. When in autumn 1936 the Union changed its name into Federation of Jews—Polish Citizens in Germany (Federacja Żydów Obywateli Polskich w Niemczech) and modified the rules the cooperation with the Polish consulates and embassy became possible.²⁴

Constant interventions of Polish consulates and diplomats influenced favourably the situation of Polish Jews in Germany. The Nazi government did not want to risk a conflict with Poland in this question. Maybe this was the reason that at the beginning of 1936 the British government was interested in the activity of Polish representatives. In reply the Polish Embassy informed its British counterpart: "You are certainly well aware of the relatively very considerable number of Polish citizens of Jewish origin domiciliated in Germany. Their number accounts for the fact that the problem of the best defence of their interests has arisen for us since quite a long time and was frequently and very meticulously studied by our Consulates as well as by Embassy. The result of this has been the establishment of a quite definite practice, which consists in a through study of each particular case brought to our knowledge of material losses or

²⁴ Documents see AAN, Konsulat RP w Opolu, p. 45 (Union of Polish Jews in Bytom to the Polish Consulate, January 23, 1936), p. 47—48 (Consulate in Berlin to Consulate in Opole February 8, 1936), pp. 67—68 (Consulate in Berlin to Ministry of Foreign Affairs June 4, 1937) and other.

personal injuries inflicted to Polish citizens as consequence of their Jewish origin. In each particular case where we established that such losses or injuries have been unduly suffered by one of our citizens, we don't fail to join to our protest a claim for damages".²⁵ After studying many documents left in archives I can confirm this statement.

It is true that the Polish Jews suffered similar persecutions as the German Jews. It was especially difficult—often impossible—to counteract the effects of the racial legislation; the most known were the so called Nuremberg Laws of September 1935. Many other violations were counteracted more effectively. There were even cases when the consular officials visited the concentration camps and achieved release of victims.

Some people thought that the Nuremberg Laws stabilized the conditions of Jewish life in Germany and nothing worse could be expected. The Olympiad in Berlin in 1936 induced the German government to reduce the most cruel repressions. Probably this induced the Polish ambassador Józef Lipski to end his report on the conditions of life of Polish Jews in Germany dated February 20, 1936 with the words: "From the above said it follows that the situation of Polish Jews is relatively (taking into account the general trend) much more favourable than one could suppose from the echo of the Jewish opinion. In spite of this, having in mind the hitherto consistency of the present regime in pursuing its theses, especially in internal affairs, we can and have to take into account the worsening of the conditions of life of the Jewish element in Germany. Because of this the situation of Polish Jews cannot acquire the growing trend and the stabilizing of their present assets ought to be the only goal".²⁶

The end of 1936 proved that these words were too optimistic. The new wave of violence brought new apprehensions. In some reports we read words quite different from the traditional official style of these documents. Consul Waclaw Brzezia-Russocki wrote from Szczecin on November 14, 1936: "With genuine pride the present rulers of Germania can look on the demolished synagogues

²⁵ AAN, Ambasada RP w Berlinie 871, p. 95.

²⁶ J. Tomaszewski, *Raport...*, p. 109.

and cemetery monuments as on the well done 'deutsche Wertarbeit' which would not ashamed their forefathers described by Tacitus. It appears that they are the only nation which in spite of the direct contact with Rome revealed the extraordinary immunity to civilization".²⁷

At the beginning of 1936, a special delegate of the Foreign Office Stefan Odrowąż-Wysocki studied the situation of Polish Jews in Germany and discussed in the embassy the future policy in this question. He concluded in his report presented in Warsaw: "In our discussions we arrived at the conclusion that the persistent defence of interests of the Polish citizens is necessary and has to be realised in such a way as the state would achieve the maximum advantage. The fight at weak positions or in the questions which can be important for singular persons or even some groups but which are of no importance for the state, ought to be renounced in cases when they can cause damage to all the Polish Jews in Germany or disturb the political atmosphere for the Embassy's work".²⁸

These conclusions were based on the above mentioned rather too optimistic view on the possibility of some stabilization in the Nazi policy towards Jews. The next year changed this optimism. Various forms of discrimination influenced heavily the Polish Jews depriving them of their sources of maintenance. The German police expelled some Jews to Poland. Interventions were absolutely unsuccessful.²⁹ The situation even worsened at the end of 1937. In some cases there were the countermeasures undertaken in Germany connected with the expulsion from Poland of German citizens accused of transgressing the Polish law. Several economic arrangements aimed to ruin the Jewish traders. The consulate in Lipsk reported quite pessimistic on March 3, 1938: "In fact the conditions of life for Jews in Germany are continuously worsening. The Germans consistently and systematically put all sorts of difficulties on the way of earning and acquiring the means of

²⁷ J. Tomaszewski, "Noc kryształowa" w relacjach polskich konsulatów [The "Kristallnacht" in Reports of the Polish Consulates], BZIH, 1980, No. 2—3, p. 161.

²⁸ AAN, MSZ 4634, p. 119.

²⁹ Documents see AAN, Ambasada RP w Berlinie 871 and 873.

subsistence for their own and foreign Jews. Now they are doing this on the quiet, silently and with cold blood destroy the Jewish property [...]”.³⁰ It became clear that there was no possibility of rescuing the position of Polish Jews in Germany.

Poland faced the danger of the mass inflow of her pauperized citizens immediately after Hitler had been nominated to the chancellor's office. The Polish consulates informed in 1933 that many Polish Jews wanted to return to Poland. The reports discussed the possibilities of some financial help for them or of such an organization of this migration so as to secure some capital necessary to begin a new business.³¹

It seems, however, that at that time rather a small number of Polish Jews decided to return to Poland. They were aware of the bad economic conditions of the country and tried to defend their property in Germany. Besides, it was not so easy to obtain from the German authorities a permission to take back any money; the Nazi government did not want to diminish the gold reserves of the Reichsbank. Lucy Dawidowicz quotes in her book the figures concerning the Jewish emigration from Germany which reached in 1933 some 37 000 persons, suggesting that half of emigrants returned to Poland and Czechoslovakia.³² The Polish sources do not reveal any substantial re-emigration from Germany in the period 1933—1936 so it seems that her supposition is unfounded. According to the Central Statistical Office in Warsaw the number of re-emigrants (not only Jews) reached 11 000 in 1937 and 56 400 in 1938.³³ These figures are not exact. The reports of Polish consulates in 1937 and to the greater extent in 1938 record a growing number of cases of illegal expulsion (it was called *przerzucanie*—“moving” or “throwing”; the people were transported to the frontier by night, possibly in an abandoned place, in forest, and ordered to cross over to the other side) to Poland.

³⁰ AAN, Ambasada RP w Berlinie 875, pp. 208—209.

³¹ AAN, Ambasada RP w Berlinie 865, p. 43 (Consulate in Munich to Ministry of Foreign Affairs April 1933); AAN, Ambasada RP w Berlinie 866, p. 116 (Consulate in Frankfurt to Legation, September 9, 1933).

³² L. Dawidowicz, *The War...*, pp. 219—220.

³³ *Mały Rocznik Statystyczny* [*The Concise Statistical Yearbook*], Warszawa 1935, p. 29; *Mały Rocznik Statystyczny*, Warszawa 1939, p. 52.

These re-emigrants probably were not registered in statistical sources. All figures are therefore a mere approximation. According to the opinion of the Union of Polish Jews in June 1938 the number of Polish Jews in Reich was 50 000—55 000. Till the end of October same 5000 emigrated to Poland and the same number to other countries.³⁴

The Polish authorities were more and more afraid of the possibility that all these people would return to Poland with no capital and no possibility to earn their livelihood. In Poland—in spite of somewhat better market conditions after 1935—there was a significant unemployment and the overpopulation in agriculture was growing. The shopkeepers and artisans often lived in even worse conditions than the workers and peasants did. The Jews returning in small number, in many cases depended on the charity of Jewish communes. The mass return of Nazi victims from Germany offered rather sad prospects.

An additional problem was connected with the changes in the ruling camp in Poland after Józef Piłsudski's death in 1935 and under the new constitution of the same year. The new electoral law almost nullified the significance of the support of national minorities' deputies in the Sejm [Parliament]. On the other side the government tried to win the support at least of some strata of the Polish society. The democratic and especially left wing groups strongly opposed the new constitution. Socialists and followers of the Peasant Party were in opposition. It would be impossible to gain their support without rejecting the authoritarian regime. The right wing of nationalist forces could be gained for the dictatorial system but they accused the ruling group of philosemitism (after the May coup of 1926 some significant Jewish parties supported Piłsudski) and raised a strong anti-Jewish propaganda associated even with occasional assaults upon Jews. This propaganda aimed to undermine the influence of the ruling group among the lower middle class. Some kind of compromise with these political trends was possible at the cost of changes in the minority policy. The government could not, how-

³⁴ AAN, Ambasada RP w Berlinie 875, p. 31 (internal memorial from December 13, 1938).

ever,—and did not want—to imitate the Nazi policy the more so because there was no unity among its members in the question of internal policy. At the same time it tried to win the support of the so called “nationally minded” strata of the Polish society. The politicians condemned the assaults upon Jews but in the same time declared their backing to economic rivalry that was aimed at the national minorities, especially at Jews.³⁵

Some politicians advocated emigration programme for the minorities. At the beginning of 1936 this became an official policy of the government. On April 20, 1936 the head of the consular department in Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Wiktor Tomir Drymer, informed the consulates: “A significant intensification of the Jewish emigration from Poland is no doubt in accordance with the policy of the Polish Government. The general economic crisis hampered now solving the Jewish question at home by the Polish Government. This question lies in the unsound economic structure of the Polish Jewry”.³⁶ Therefore the Polish delegates to the League of Nations in October 1936 supported the idea of creation of a Jewish national state in Palestine. This concurred with the programme of some Jewish politicians. The Polish government was giving some financial aid to Włodzimierz Żabotyński and approved the secret military training of Irgun Tsevai Leumi in Poland.³⁷

³⁵ *Poland and the Coming of the Second World War. The Diplomatic Papers of A. J. Drexel Biddle, Jr. United States Ambassador to Poland 1937—1939.* Edited with an Introduction by P. V. Cannistero, E. D. Wynot Jr., T. P. Kowaleff, Columbus, 1968, Ohio State University, p. 276 ff. Biddle wrote on December 22, 1938: “I now discern that the present surge of anti-Semitism is motivated in most cases, except in the case of the inherently anti-Semitic ENDEK party, more by a desire to force the Jewish problem here into the arena of international consideration than by an acute sense of religious hatred. [...] there is a certain element in these [i.e. government—JT] circles who are inclined to play up the Jewish question for reasons of internal political tactics — namely to enlist the support of the anti-Semitic nationalist element”.

³⁶ AAN, Konsulat RP w Nowym Jorku 152, p. 1.

³⁷ *Papers and Memoirs of Józef Lipski, Ambassador of Poland. Diplomat in Berlin 1933—1939.* Ed. by W. Jędrzejewicz New York and London, 1968, pp. 411—412.

In such a situation a consent to an influx of Polish Jews from Germany could be politically troublesome and opposed the declared aims of the Polish government. The changes in the Polish internal policy weakened at the same time the position of the Polish diplomats in their talks with the Nazi representatives. The Germans knew perfectly well that the Polish government tried to speed up the emigration of Jews from Poland. It is true that the both governments had different reasons for their policy (racism was generally condemned in Poland, except some few fascist groups) and that it was impossible to implement in Poland methods similar to the Nazi ones. The representatives of the Polish government, however, could find some common points with the national socialists. In such context one can understand a passage from the report written by Lipski on September 20, 1938 referring to the words of Hitler : “[. . .] he has in mind an idea for settling the Jewish problem by way of emigration to the colonies in accordance with an understanding with Poland, Hungary, and possibly also Rumania (at which point I told him that if he finds such a solution we will erect him a beautiful monument in Warsaw)”.³⁹ After the Holocaust these words acquired quite a new meaning and a ghastly one, contrary to the intention of the ambassador.

The changing situation induced the Polish government to find a new way of hindering the Jewish re-emigration. On March 31, 1938 the Sejm passed a bill allowing to revoke the Polish citizenship of persons who being abroad lost their ties with Poland. The bill was used against the Polish soldiers who supported the republican government in the Spanish civil war. It could also be used against the Polish Jews living in Germany.

The formal argument was that many Jews had lost all the ties with Poland and did not even know the Polish language, so that their Polish citizenship was a mere formality. The Polish Republic did not want to accept an influx of people alien to the country the more so because many other European countries refused to admit the German émigrés.

These arguments were partly true. Some Polish Jews were born in Germany and only neglect of formalities caused them

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 411.

not to apply for the German citizenship. After 1933 it was too late to do so, besides it could only diminish prospects for any help.³⁹ However, the documents also reveal quite contrary cases of Jews who cultivated the tradition of Polish descent. The unions of Polish Jews secured the Polish newspapers for their members.⁴⁰ The Union of Polish Jews in Bytom declared on March 12, 1936: "The affection of the Polish Jew for his motherland was immense even before, because he is connected with her with tradition, with commonly experienced times of happiness and disaster, and with the blood shed in the fight for her freedom".⁴¹ These were no empty words. Among the Jews living in Germany there were the people decorated because of their illicit activity for Poland's independence before 1914.

The arguments raised in public were, however, not the most important ones from the point of view of the Polish authorities. They tried to stop the re-emigration of people without any property and without prospect to earn their bread in Poland. Lipski informed, for instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on September 6, 1938 that he had sent to Warsaw the documents concerning Jews who had lost their trade licences, asking to revoke their citizenship as soon as possible; the economic reasons for this step were clear.⁴² The consulate in Szczecin informed on September 22, 1938 that it was impossible to apply the bill from March 31 to some persons of merit but their re-emigration would be undesirable because of poverty.⁴³

The rapid action of Polish authorities was necessary because in April 1938 the German government ordered registration of all Jewish property.⁴⁴ It was expected that this is the first step towards a general confiscation of these assets.

The legal procedure according to the bill from March 31 was

³⁹ K. Drobich, R. Goguel, W. Müller, *Juden...*, p. 186.

⁴⁰ AAN, Konsulat RP w Opolu 122, pp. 15, 18 (letters from December 15, 1931 and May 12, 1932).

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 50—51.

⁴² AAN, Ambasada RP w Berlinie 875, p. 260.

⁴³ AAN, Konsulat RP w Szczecinie 196, p. 23.

⁴⁴ Polish consulates collected the copies of these records filled by the Polish citizens. They are now in AAN.

complicated. In the second half of 1938 the Polish consulates prepared proposals to renounce the Polish citizenship in 4000 cases but only 500—600 cases were decided.⁴⁵ So it occurred that this method of stopping the Jewish immigration to Poland was rather unrealistic.

Probably this was the reason for a decree of the Minister of Home Affairs to be issued that ordered an extraordinary control of Polish foreign passports. The decree issued on October 6 and published on October 15 was to come into effect on October 29. Passports were to receive a stamp "verified according to the decree of October 6, 1938". The consulate would be able to refuse the annotation in cases in which a revocation of citizenship was possible. Thus after October 29 such persons could not cross the Polish frontier.⁴⁶

The Germans were afraid of the possibility that the decree was intended to stop the Jewish re-emigration to Poland. The apprehensions were well founded. Waclaw Jędrzejewicz, the editor of Lipski's papers, stated that "[...] this problem could involve many thousands of Jews, formally Polish citizens, who, often having no connection with Poland whatsoever, could not obtain from the consuls the annotation indispensable for crossing the Polish frontier."⁴⁷ Some time earlier other measures against the inflow of Jews from Germany were introduced by Switzerland.⁴⁸ May be this was the reason why the German government reacted very sharply and protested in Warsaw. On October 26 Moltke informed Szembek that the Germans were preparing a mass expulsion of Jews before the critical day October 29.⁴⁹ The news had upset the Polish authorities. There were some differences in opinion among the politicians. On October 27 Beck informed

⁴⁵ AAN, Ambasada RP w Berlinie 875, p. 31 (memorial from December 13, 1938).

⁴⁶ Decree was published in *Diariusz i teki Jana Szembeka 1935—1945*, vol. IV, ed. J. Z a r a ń s k i. London 1972, p. 447.

⁴⁷ *Papers and Memoirs of Józef Lipski*, p. 461.

⁴⁸ U. D. A d a m, *Judenpolitik im Dritten Reich*, Königstein/Ts.—Düsseldorf, 1979, pp. 199—200.

⁴⁹ This conversation and the next ones were recorded by Szembek. see *Diariusz i teki*, vol. IV, pp. 331—334.

Szembek that the decree of October 6 "was unpleasant for him from the very beginning" but it was impossible to renounce it under the German pressure. He proposed at the same time to undertake countermeasures and to expell German citizens from Poland. In fact some preparations began, as Drymmer informed the next day. They were not, however, introduced; may be Lipski's opinion prevailed who on October 29 warned of the danger of the new wave of expulsions from Germany—this time it would be the Polish miners working in Germany.

The decree was probably an initiative of the Ministry of Home Affairs which did not expect the mass expelling of Polish Jews from Germany and had prepared nothing to manage the new situation. The Nazi authorities, which tried to deprive the Jews of all their property and to get rid of them, took the opportunity created so carelessly by the Polish government. In the night on October 28 some thousands of Polish Jews were arrested and the police transported them to the Polish frontier. The next day they were forced to cross the frontier. They were deprived of their whole property including money. According to the Polish diplomats about 13 000 persons were then expelled. USA Ambassador to Poland A.J.D. Biddle reported 15 000. One can find other numbers too, 17 000 and 20 000.⁵⁰ Probably the exact number was not known at all. Biddle informed Washington: "From all accounts, German treatment of those unfortunate people was nothing short of brutal. On the other hand, the Polish government went to great lengths in an effort to extend humane treatment under trying circumstances".⁵¹

The reality was more complex. Jews were forced to cross the frontier near a little town Zbąszyń where there was nothing prepared for their accomodation. They have even to spend some time without any shelter between the German and Polish lines because the local guards had not allowed them to enter the Polish territory. We have no documents explaining what was in the meantime going on in Warsaw. The question was resolved

⁵⁰ AAN, Ambasada RP w Berlinie 875, p. 31; see also *Poland and the Coming...*, pp. 252—253.

⁵¹ *Poland and the Coming...*, p. 252.

owing to decisions of the deputy chief of Poznań voivodeship, Jan Łepkowski, who without authorization ordered to let the victims into Poland. Most of Jews went to their relatives, some thousands remained in Zbąszyń. The local community (mainly Polish, there were only 7 or 8 Jewish families) helped during the first and most difficult days with food and shelter. But it was a difficult task to find jobs for so many people in Poland in 1938. The necessary help was offered by Joint and other Jewish organizations, and the victims were later on placed in various towns owing to the possibilities delivered by many Jewish local communities.⁵²

Those who possessed the annotation in their passports according to the decree of October 6, 1938, were in a better position. They had full civic rights and some of them tried in 1939 to rescue what was left from their property in Germany. Others without the necessary annotation acquired a provisional status. Their legal position was not cleared out and even on August 2, 1939 the local state authorities in Gorlice informed the town administration that the documents of the persons listed in this latter "had to be deposited at the office until the central state authorities resolve the question of the refugees from Germany".⁵³

Under the influence of the news coming from Germany and Poland on November 7, 1938, Hershel Grynszpan, son of a family expelled from Germany on this tragic October night, wounded heavily a German diplomat in Paris.⁵⁴ The man died some days later. The desperate act of the young man offered a good argument for the mass retaliation organized by the Nazis against Jews, known under the name "Kristallnacht".⁵⁵ The Jews were robbed, beaten, murdered, synagogues burned. Among the victims there were the Polish Jews too.

⁵² The story of Zbąszyń camp and the tragic fate of its inhabitants see E. Ringelblum, *Zbonshin*, "Bleter far Geshichte," vol. XIX, 1980; Z. Mitzner, *Inferno w Zbąszyniu* [*Hell in Zbąszyń*], in: *Polskie drogi. Wybór reportaży z lat międzywojennych*, Warszawa 1962.

⁵³ The document in possession of Szymon Rudnicki (Warsaw).

⁵⁴ See F. K. Kaul, *Der Fall des Herschel Grynszpan*. Berlin 1965; U. D. Adam, *Judenpolitik...*, pp. 206—207.

⁵⁵ See L. Dawidowicz, *The War...*; J. Tomaszewski, "Noc kryształowa"..., as well as many others.

The possibility of a Polish retaliation by expulsion of the German citizens was probably a serious threat for the German government. On the other side, the Polish government postponed the critical day of controlling the passports until November 15 and the representatives of both governments commenced negotiations on November 2 to solve questions connected with the expelled Jews.⁵⁴ No more mass expulsion was organized.

The events took place in the period when the Polish-German relations worsened. After the Anschluss and annexation of the Czech borderlands the German diplomats began to formulate new claims about Gdańsk, the direct communication to Ostpreussen and about entering the Anticomintern pact by Poland. In exchange they offered to Poland some profits in the Soviet Ukraine. The Polish diplomats tried to delay the answer, at last refused.⁵⁷ This ended the apparent friendly relations that developed after January 1934. In face of this situation the fate of expelled people was of minor importance.

At the end of 1938 the Polish Embassy in Berlin prepared a project of future undertakings concerning the Polish Jews. There were no doubts that they had no chance of rescuing their positions in Germany. An anonymous author of a memorial estimated the number of Polish Jews in Germany at the end of 1938 at about 25 000—30 000 persons.⁵⁸ He proposed to enter into negotiations with Germany to solve the question of Jews—Polish citizens in Reich. The best solution would be to obtain the privileged position for Polish Jews (of course only as compared with the German citizens of Jewish nationality). At the same time the Polish authorities ought to prepare themselves to take measures against a possible compulsory inflow of Jews to Poland. The whole project was at that time belated and the document revealed only the helplessness of the Polish diplomats. The only thing to do was to try to defend some economic interests of the expelled

⁵⁴ *Poland and the Coming...*, p. 253 ; *Papers and Memoirs of Józef Lipski...*, pp. 461—462.

⁵⁷ M. Wojciechowski, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1933—1938 [Polish-German Relations, 1933—1938]*, Poznań 1965, pp. 524 ff.

⁵⁸ AAN, Ambasada w Berlinie 875, pp. 31—39.

Jews. On January 24, 1939 a provisional German-Polish agreement was concluded. Jews expelled in October could return for the time being to Germany in a strictly regulated manner. They received the possibility to liquidate their financial affairs and after an allowed time they would have to return to Poland.⁵⁹ The compulsory situation of the victims gave no chance of full withdrawal of their money. Moreover, a complicated system of Polish-German financial relations afflicted the possibility of receiving even the curtailed capital in Poland. In fact the Polish government could not successfully defend the rights of the Polish citizens in that time.

Though under the stipulations of this arrangement the Polish Jews—in strictly limited number—were returning to Germany to get their affairs in order, in summer 1939 a new danger arose. Biddle noted on June 9, 1939 : “Jewish leaders here informed me that during the past three days 80 Jews have been chased from Germany over the German-Polish border. Although most of them had no papers, the Polish authorities at Zbąszyń took pity and permitted them to enter Poland. According to my sforementioned informants, about 4,000 Jews of Polish origin living in Germany recently received orders to evacuate Germany. My informants understood that the Polish government had warned Berlin that it would have recourse to retaliatory measures should mass expulsion of Jews of Polish origin take place in Germany. My informants added their estimate that there were about 20,000 Jews of Polish origin currently inhabiting Germany. Some of these had passports in order, others had no papers”.⁶⁰

The near future was to bring quite new events and the diplomatic negotiations, threats and other methods used in the peace time were abandoned. Some of the Jews expelled from Germany managed to go abroad. The other remained in Poland and met the same fate as all Polish Jews under the Nazi rule.

⁵⁹ *Papers and Memoirs of Józef Lipski...*, pp. 461—462, 469. Documents see AAN, Konsulat RP w Hamburgu 4.

⁶⁰ *Poland and the Coming...*, p. 335.