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## JEWISH ISSUES PRESENTED IN THE ACADEMIC PRESS 1918–1939

Jewish issues in the times of the Second Polish Republic have without doubt been discussed broadly by historians over the past few years. There are many studies concerning the attitude of parties and political groups towards the Jewish question. The image of Jewish life in different regions of Poland in the interwar period has been sketched at length.<sup>1</sup>

However, the attitude of Polish students towards the Jewish question has not been discussed sufficiently. Without question, the issue has been noted in the research concerning student political activism by Andrzej Pilch, whose monographs include chapters discussing the attitude of Polish students towards the Jews in Poland.<sup>2</sup> However, it has been presented as one of many threads. Anti-Semitic postulates concerning the academic ground formulated by the right wing have been mentioned in the works of, among others, P. Biliński, O. Bergman, S. Kilian, G. Radomski, Sz. Rudnicki and M. Sobczak.<sup>3</sup> A. Landau-Czajka has discussed sociologically the journalistic response to such problems as *numerus clausus* or *getto ławkowe* (“ghetto benches” – segregation at universities) in one chapter of her work.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, R. Modras develops the issue in a chapter of his book; however, he presents only the point of view of the Catholic press.<sup>5</sup> D. Libionka used similar sources in analyzing in one of his articles the attitude of the periodical *Odrodzenie* towards the Jewish

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<sup>1</sup> See A. Pakentreger, *Żydzi w Kaliszu w latach 1918–1939*, Warszawa 1988; I. Kowalski, *Mniejszość żydowska w województwie poznańskim w latach 1919–1939*, *Kronika Wielkopolska* 1995, no. 4; G. Zalewska, *Ludność żydowska Warszawy w okresie międzywojennym*, Warszawa 1996; W. Wierzbieniec, *Żydzi w województwie łwowskim w okresie międzywojennym*, Rzeszów 2003; J. Szilinga (ed.), *Gminy wyznaniowe żydowskie w województwie pomorskim w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym (1920–1939)*, Toruń 2005; A. Marolewski, *Żydzi w Toruniu w okresie międzywojennym*, Toruń 2005; A. Wróbel, *Żydzi w Gdyni w latach 1926–1936*, Toruń 2005; K. Samsonowska, *Wyznaniowe gminy żydowskie i ich społeczności w województwie krakowskim (1918–1939)*, Kraków 2005.

<sup>2</sup> A. Pilch, *Studencki ruch polityczny w Polsce w latach 1932–1939*, Kraków 1972; *id.*, *Rzeczpospolita Akademicka. Studenci i polityka 1918–1933*, Kraków 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Sz. Rudnicki, *Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny. Geneza i działalność*, Warszawa 1985; S. Kilian, *Mysł edukacyjna w ND w latach 1918–1939*, Kraków 1997; O. Bergmann, *Narodowa Demokracja wobec problematyki żydowskiej w latach 1918–1929*, Poznań 1998; M. Sobczak, *Stosunek ND do kwestii żydowskiej w Polsce w latach 1918–1939*, Wrocław 1998; P. Biliński, *Władysław Konopczyński. Historyk i polityk II Rzeczypospolitej (1880–1952)*, Warszawa 1999; Sz. Rudnicki, *Parlamentarzyści żydowscy w II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 2004.

<sup>4</sup> A. Landau-Czajka, *W jednym stali domu... Koncepcje rozwiązania kwestii żydowskiej w publicystyce polskiej lat 1933–1939*, Warszawa 1998.

<sup>5</sup> R. Modras, *Kościół katolicki i antysemityzm w Polsce w latach 1933–1939*, Kraków 2004.

question.<sup>6</sup> S. Gajewski has discussed the attitude of Catholic academic organizations towards the issue in one of his articles, also presenting press reports.<sup>7</sup> D. Mycielska's study cannot be omitted, as it depicts the political attitude of Polish professors towards the conflict between Poles and Jews on academic grounds.<sup>8</sup>

All of the works listed above treat the topic globally, i.e. as concerning all the academic centers of the Second Polish Republic. There are also works that present the issue with reference to one particular academic city. In this field, the pioneering research of M. Natkowska presents the situation in Warsaw.<sup>9</sup> Some of the information presented by Natkowska can be found in a volume of collected studies edited by A. Garlicki.<sup>10</sup> The situation in Krakow is discussed by Pilch.<sup>11</sup> Valuable information concerning, for example, the conflict between Poles and Jews at the Jagiellonian University, is presented in studies by J. Dybiec and M. Kulczykowski,<sup>12</sup> while the situation at the Stefan Batory University in Wilno (now Vilnius) is described by J. Wołkonowski.<sup>13</sup> It is complemented by Z. Opacki's article, which concentrates on the attitude of some of the professors towards the anti-Semitic riots incited by right-wing youth.<sup>14</sup> Similar information concerning the Faculty of Polish Philology of this university is available in the work of T. Dalecka.<sup>15</sup> The present state of knowledge about the situation in Lwów (now Lviv) is enriched by the works of Z. Popławski and J. Draus.<sup>16</sup> W. Wojtkiewicz-Rok has dealt with the application of *numerus clausus* in the Faculty of Medicine of the Jan Kazimierz University.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>6</sup> D. Libionka, „Kwestia żydowska” – myślenie za pomocą clichés, *Odrodzenie 1935–1939*. Przyczynek do historii antysemityzmu w Polsce, *Dzieje Najnowsze* 1995, no. 3, 31–46; *ib.*, Kwestia żydowska w prasie katolickiej w Polsce w latach trzydziestych XX wieku, *Dzieje Najnowsze* 1999, no. 1, 119–123; *ib.*, Obcy, wrodzy, niebezpieczni – obraz Żyda i „kwestii żydowskiej” w prasie inteligencji katolickiej lat trzydziestych w Polsce, *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 2002, no. 3, 318–338.

<sup>7</sup> S. Gajewski, Katolickie organizacje akademickie wobec kwestii żydowskiej w okresie II Rzeczypospolitej, *Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej w Rzeszowie, Seria społeczno-pedagogiczna i historyczna: Historia* 4, Rzeszów 1994.

<sup>8</sup> D. Mycielska, Postawy polityczne profesorów wyższych uczelni w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym, in: R. Czepulis-Rastenis (ed.), *Inteligencja polska XIX i XX wieku*, *Studia* – 4, Warszawa 1985, 320–323.

<sup>9</sup> M. Natkowska, *Numerus clausus, getto ławkowe, numerus nullus, „paragraf aryjski”*. Antysemityzm na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim 1931–1939, Warszawa 1999.

<sup>10</sup> A. Garlicki (ed.), *Dzieje Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 1915–1939*, Warszawa 1982.

<sup>11</sup> A. Pilch, *Studenci Krakowa w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej, ich ideowe, polityczne i społeczne zaangażowanie*, Kraków 2004.

<sup>12</sup> J. Dybiec, *Uniwersytet Jagielloński 1918–1939*, Kraków 2000; M. Kulczykowski, *Żydzi – studenci Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego w okresie międzywojennym*, Kraków 2004.

<sup>13</sup> J. Wołkonowski, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w Wilnie i na Wileńszczyźnie 1919–1939*, Białystok 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Z. Opacki, Postawy profesorów Uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego w Wilnie wobec antysemityzmu na uczelni. M. Zdziechowski, M. Kridl, in: W. Moscovien, I. Fijałkowska-Janiak (eds.), *Jews and Slavs*, vol. 11: *Jewish-Polish and Jewish-Russian Contacts*, Jerusalem–Gdańsk 2003.

<sup>15</sup> T. Dalecka, *Dzieje polonistyki wileńskiej 1919–1939*, Kraków 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Z. Poławski, *Dzieje Politechniki Lwowskiej 1844–1945*, Wrocław 1993; J. Draus, *Uniwersytet Jana Kazimierza we Lwowie 1918–1946. Portret kresowej uczelni*, Kraków 2007.

<sup>17</sup> W. Wojtkiewicz-Rok, *Rola Wydziału Lekarskiego UJK w kształtowaniu polskiego modelu nauczania medycyny. Studia medyczne UJK w latach 1920–1939*, Wrocław 1996.

The above review of works makes it clear that the attitude of the generation of intelligentsia studying in independent Poland towards the Jewish question has not been the subject of particular research or been comprehensively analyzed. Even though the so-called “Jewish question” has been discussed in the works mentioned above, it is presented only in the view of the academic relations between Poles and Jews. Apart from some remarks included in Pilch’s work, nobody has been interested in such issues as the image of the Jew existing among the students or their solutions to the “Jewish problem.” It must not be forgotten that they were supposed to become the future governing and opinion-forming elite. They were supposed to take over the leadership of a country that had regained independence after 123 years of captivity.

The aim of my Ph.D. dissertation, prepared at the Faculty of History of the Jagiellonian University, was to, at least partially, fill in the gaps in this field of research. As the basic source for the dissertation, a large collection of the student press from that period was chosen, as at that time the press was fully developed and became an important tool for presenting ideas and molding attitudes.<sup>18</sup> The basic source was accepted, even though it was clear that the image of the presented events could be distorted, since the press was an easy tool of political struggle and manipulation. However, if different periodicals are confronted with each other, the possibility of obtaining a true reflection of the situation remains.

The division of the student movement, and then of the press, according to ideological and political identification, i.e. nationalist, Catholic-nationalist, Christian, peasant, socialist, communist and pro-governmental or national (even though the term was in use only after May 1926) was first adapted by Pilch and consequently followed in the project. Thanks to those who have conducted similar research, other types of periodicals, i.e. sports or cultural ones, were set apart. The conclusions concerning the Jewish academic press drawn by Pilch were also crucial to my dissertation.

After reading thousands of references concerning the Jewish question presented in the academic press, one can draw the conclusion that the issue was of the greatest importance to students from the interwar period. However, the intensity of the interest was varied and depended upon the most significant factor, i.e. the ideological and political identification of a given periodical. It can be concluded that it was mainly the press of political and ideological organizations which took the floor; articles included in the student periodicals of other categories were rare. There were complex articles, feature articles, information in the form of reports or news, or reviews of various works concerning Jews. The nationalist press eagerly used poetic forms. There were many polemic articles.

Undoubtedly, the academic nationalist press was the most significant to deal with the Jewish question. Everybody who became familiar with it would share the grief of A. Hall, who once said that “if one looks through old issues of the nationalist pre-war press (...), *Myśl Narodowa* or *Gazeta Warszawska*, one may easily feel ashamed and embarrassed.”<sup>19</sup> The feeling of embarrassment increases when we take into consideration the fact that the press discussed was edited by and directed at “that part of the

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<sup>18</sup> A. Paczkowski, *Prasa polska w latach 1918–1939*, Warszawa 1980.

<sup>19</sup> A. Hall, *Dziedzictwo Narodowej Demokracji*, London 1985, 39.

society” supposed to become the most important opinion-forming one, i.e. to students aspiring to become the elite. Unfortunately, the image of right-wing students is disadvantageous. The image of the Jew was vilified and anti-Semitic arguments were superficial, as they were rooted in the traditional and stereotypical anti-Semitic prejudices enriched by some new pseudoscientific theories. The Jewish issue was presented by the right-wing press as a worldwide conspiracy. Daniel Pipes, an American historian and the author of *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes from*, has noticed that the conviction that the goal of one particular group (here, the Jews) is power that can be gained through a plot, treated as the main driving force in history, is the basic element of conspiracy theories. There is nothing accidental or senseless in the development of history. The ideas that a Jew can be “a banker” and “a communist” as well, or that “lack of discipline is a kind of discipline indeed,” since the Jews have been deprived of central power, yet they have had control over the world from hiding, are inherent factors typical of viewing the world as ruled by an “anonymous superpower.” They were also typical of the academic right-wing press from the interwar period. Moreover, it is noticeable that the youth did not have any knowledge about what they were talking so often and so eagerly about. While writing about the alleged Jewish connections with freemasonry and communism, they quoted willingly such “classic” works as those of Stanisław Trzeciak or Roman Dmowski, which speak of ignorance hidden under the mask of “education.” The language of the commentary was rather poor. Irena Szmaj-Kamińska pays attention to the fact that the linguistic mechanism of duplicating some expressions which took the form of stabilized ideas ready to use, i.e. “Jewish invasion” or “Jewish method,” was widespread and concerned also the right-wing press. The kind of rhyme used, which can hardly be counted as poetry of a high quality, proves that the authors did not use sophisticated language to communicate with their readers. What is worrying as well is the evolution of the press in formulating increasingly radical anti-Semitic slogans encouraging the introduction of various restrictions on academic grounds, but also in social, economic and political fields. The journalistic campaign against scholars who “dared” to have different point of view on the Jewish question was morally disqualifying, especially as it would be difficult to find even one dissimilar opinion presented in the papers. It is significant that many of the published articles were not anonymous. Furthermore, they were often signed by the leading right-wing activists, i.e. W. Wasiutyński, Z. Stypułkowski, M. Reutt, Z. Rychter, J. Rembliński, B. Świdorski, J. Bielatowicz or J. Giertych. We should state clearly that the postulates concerning the Jewish issue were typical of all the right-wing groups and present in the papers as well. Some of them were particularly anti-Semitic, e.g. *Wszechpolak*, the number of whose articles concerning the Jewish issue reached almost 300 within three years. The significance of the ideas presented in the articles was remarkable, as the circulation of this periodical was up to 3000–4000 copies. A similar role was played by periodicals such as *Akademik*, *Awangarda*, *Akademik Polski*, *Alma Mater*, *Czuwamy*, *Głos*, *Głos Akademicki*, *Młodzi*, or those published under the auspices of the corporation. All of them treated the Jewish question as one of the most important political topics, even though they presented only one point of view. “Nulla dies sine littera iudaica” – this could be quoted after Emil Sommerstein, a Member of Parliament of the fifth term who

addressed the other members discussing continuously the Jewish question, although not being able to reach any conclusions.<sup>20</sup>

A similar problem concerns the national and Catholic stream's press, which distanced itself from radicalism and the actions of *Endecja* youth, but did not decide to condemn them in a decisive way. Also, the image of the Jew on their pages was an exact copy of the opinions spread by the rightist press; here the voices calling for "racial purity" and "unjewishing" of Polish life occurred as well. Yet the fact cannot be ignored that, in contrast to the nationalist press, there was some place for different opinions. After all, it was in the Catholic *Pax* that Antoni Gołubiew asked the question "What makes us different from ONR?" while F. Mirzyński presented "two sides of the current conflict" (taking into consideration the problem of the "bench ghetto"), not "the only right" side, as was done by rightist academics.<sup>21</sup> *Odrodzenie*, however, was elaborating on the motives for which the organization did not support "the bench plebiscite" in Lwów. Henryk Dembiński, still in his "pre-leftist" period, presented in *Wilcze zęby* numerous arguments opposing the *numerus clausus*.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, the general conclusion must lead to the statement that, in spite of reluctance for unconditional support of the anti-Semitic policy of *Młodzież Wszechpolska*, there was no voice of marked condemnation. They would rather concentrate on searching for justification for the anti-Semitic attitudes. In retrospect, one of the well-known commentators of that stream, Stanisław Stomma, admits that "Anti-Semitism was a disgraceful phenomenon, casting a shadow on that, in spite of all defects and warps, creative and valuable historical period".<sup>23</sup> One might agree here with Leszek Kołakowski: "those mild anti-Semites grow anti-Semites armed with knuckle-dusters, knives; passive and restrained anti-Semites create organizers of pogroms. (...) Toleration of anti-Semitism in today's weak symptoms becomes toleration of tomorrow's pogroms. (...)"<sup>24</sup>

The question whether the press of the national and Catholic stream, by its ambiguous attitude of "mild anti-Semitism," did not "grow" it in a more violent form, seems to be justified.

The attitude of the national faction towards this issue is a complicated matter. As has been mentioned a few times in this article, it was a group focusing various circles joined together only by recognition of Józef Piłsudski's authority. Therefore opinions about the issue were extremely differentiated. The results of the discussion survey carried out in *Dekady. Tygodnik Akademicki* in 1934–1939 may serve here as an illustration, as the votes represented the whole range of attitudes towards the Jewish question: starting with votes supportive of assimilation, through the fascination with

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<sup>20</sup> According to A. Landau-Czajka, Z. Landau, *Posłowie polscy w Sejmie 1935–1939 o kwestii żydowskiej*, in: *Rozdział wspólnej historii. Studia z dziejów Żydów w Polsce ofiarowane prof. Jerzemu Tomaszewskiemu w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, Warszawa 2001, 211–223.

<sup>21</sup> A. Gołubiew, *Co nas dzieli od ONR?*, *PAX*, R. IV(1 VII 1936), no. 9, p. 2; F. Mirzyński, *Dwie strony aktualnego konfliktu*, *PAX*, R. V (1–28 II 1937), no. 3–4, p. 2

<sup>22</sup> H. Dembiński, *Czem jest numerus clausus? Rzecz o tragicomicznych wynikach chochlika*, *Wilcze zęby*, no. 3, 10 I 1932, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> S. Stomma, *Pościg za nadzieją*, Paryż 1991, p. 47.

<sup>24</sup> L. Kołakowski, *Antysemici – pięć tez nienowych i przestroga*, in: W. Władyka, *Na czołówece. Prasa w październiku 1956 roku*, Warszawa 1998, 266–277.

Zionism, to the approval of boycott or accusing Jews of sympathies for subversive ideas.

However, the stream which can be called “middle-of-the road” expressed opinions representative for the group as a whole. The identification of “the Jewish question” in the 1920s was, for this faction, a reaction to rivals from the national faction constantly bringing it up. In that period, when the journalistic commentaries concentrated on proportional norms or the exclusion of Jews from academic organizations, student supporters of Józef Piłsudski declared themselves opponents of these slogans, presenting their motives in many articles. In the following period, when anti-Semitic slogans at the academic level were becoming harsher, the youth of this faction called them “the autumn maneuvers,” indicating in many articles what they considered the true motives of those events to be. Commentators from this group could not hide their indignation when “knuckle-dusters” and “revolvers” forced their way into universities; this was the reason for strong reactions to the bolder actions of Młodzież Wszechpolska. One of the methods, used quite commonly, was discrediting this organization by showing the sophistry of anti-Semitic slogans. Obviously, defense of Jews was not the only aim, to a large extent it was a pragmatic matter, a chance of gaining support at the cost of political rivals.

The press of this stream showed much less interest in the divagations about the essence of “being a Jew” and “omnipresent” influences of this nation in Polish life that were so characteristic of the right-wing faction. If anyone spoke out, he did it only to ridicule the image of the world entrapped by the Jewish influences created by rightist magazines. *Trybuna* and *Gazeta Artystów* excelled at that. We should not omit the fact that anti-Semitic “blunders” occurred here as well – for instance the statement of L. Stachórski judging Jews as the largest group among the deserters, or the opinion of a certain Kresowiec from *Bunt Młodych*, who saw in Jews the main propagators of communism. Searching for a constructive idea for the regulation of the burning Jewish question united the middle-of-the road stream. According to the press material, the solution was Zionism or possibly, emigrationism. These catchphrases were taken seriously; the frequent and quite exact popularization of T. Herzl’s idea among the readers can serve as evidence here. M. Birenbaum did so “as a guest” on the pages of *Przemiany*, but also Stachórski expressed his opinion about the matter. The conservative part of the youth concentrated on reports from K. Pruszyński’s journey to Palestine. The newspapers of this faction joined together in the criticism of methods that were becoming common towards the Jewish population in Nazi Germany. The joining factor was also the skepticism towards “home” methods of “unjewishizing” social and economic life, methods amounting to the struggle for the infamous “stand,” or introduction of Aryan articles into the statutes of various organizations. In the 1930s, the rising wave of anti-Semitism brought about a polarization of opinions. Some national newspapers came dangerously close to the disgraceful trend of rightist journalism mentioned previously. Without any doubt, unrivalled in this area remained *Akademik*. *Tygodnik*, about which Pilch wrote: “its publishers decided to ultimately oppress such hostile elements as Marxism, Jews and Masonry in the academic area

(...).”<sup>25</sup> A similar evolution took place in *Strzelec*; evidence is given by extremely anti-Semitic statements placed in *Prawdzie w oczy*, where T. Barski led the way. The political volt of that circle was not welcomed by the right wing with enthusiasm; it was rather accompanied by reluctance caused by the fear that such an important element from the right-wing political program might be appropriated. It is difficult to classify to any of these groups the attitude of *Legion Młodych*. Anti-Semitic statements came from to the leading activists of that organization as well; in a certain period the press of *Legion Młodych* created the famous slogan constituting the creed of that option: “Anti-Semitism of action.” Certain enunciations about the “bench ghetto” also seem ambiguous. However, the articles of their papers did not adopt the rhetoric presented on the right wing of the national faction. Therefore, *Legion Młodych* should probably be placed in the stream which I called middle-of-the-road.

On the other hand, the 1930s brought a separation of the left wing in the national faction. It was created by separatist organizations: ZPMD – *Lewica* and LM – *Frakcja*. Their press bodies were moving onto socialist positions, criticizing both the attitude of the right wing towards the Jewish question and the vision presented by most papers of the national faction.

The left-wing movement represented by the press of the socialist and communist youth opposed the anti-Jewish claims in a decisive manner. The leading slogan of the right-wing faction about “overproduction of intellectuals,” created to win supporters of proportional norms, was perceived by the left-wing students as a propaganda maneuver. The evidence, according to them, was the disastrous social and economic state of the country. This state needed the intervention and action of the educated people.

The left wing linked the “autumn maneuvers” (called here, in a more precise way, “pogroms”) with another tuition payment due in November; the bourgeois rightist youth turned at that time to the populist slogan “Beat the Jew” to divert the attention of indigent youth from the most crucial thing: the struggle against the exploitation system. In the communist press, the voices of criticism could be noticed not only towards the right wing and the ruling Reform but also towards ZNMP and PPS – for (in the communists’ opinion) too mild methods of fighting in the defense of Jews, especially in the situation after the so-called Vilnius incidents. There was no difference in the attitude towards the “bench ghetto” problem between the mentioned groups. The left-wing press condemned it unanimously, seeing in the attempts of establishing it the elements of fascism in Polish political life. The authority of scholars who fought for Jewish students’ rights, tarnished by the rightist press, was also defended here.

The solution of the Jewish problem in Poland, according to the left wing, was not Zionism, as this was identified with Jewish nationalism. It was not the only objection raised against the idea. It was also accused of a utopian nature – the vision of the departure of the indigent Jewish masses to “Erec” would certainly turn out to be a mirage. People were anxious that the increased amount of Jews (even those richer ones) emigrating to Palestine would become the source of a new “imperialistic” war.

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<sup>25</sup> A. Pilch, *Prasa studencka w Polsce 1918–1939. Zarys historyczny. Bibliografia*, in: *Zeszyty Naukowe UJ* 1001, Kraków 1990, 39.

What, then, was the optimal solution? For the left wing it was a common struggle, together with the Jewish workers released from the influence of the orthodox and bourgeois circles, for the realization of revolutionary ideals, which were to destroy national differences.

The peasant youth seldom took the floor in the matter in question. Short pieces of information scattered in the few papers of this group show that the Jewish population was perceived frequently as a rival and competitor in many aspects of social or economic life. Getting close to the youth of the national camp, members of the peasant party opted for resolving the Jewish question by emigration carried out in a reasonable manner.

Writing about anti-Semitism as an attitude typical of the abovementioned group of Polish interwar students one cannot ignore the fact that in the Europe of that time Poland was not a “Jew-eating enclave” – unfortunately, anti-Semitism was the determinant of activities for many societies. This was confirmed not only by Polish press reports but also by Jewish ones, which continued to inform successively about the worsening situation of the Diaspora in almost all countries of the continent. Moreover, one cannot ignore the fact that the social and political reality of that time, with its hard experience from the partitions, and increased antagonism in conjunction with hardships of post-war reality, was conducive to the shaping of nationalist attitudes saturated with hostility towards foreign national groups that were located within the Polish borders.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of that fact, we should ask about the consequences of the anti-Semitic propaganda spread by the major part of the academic press. Certainly, from the methodological point of view, it is impossible to establish exactly the influence of the press publications on the student readers. However, without any doubt, by creating a demonic image of the Jew – the only and omnipresent enemy – they contributed to some kind of “narcosis” of Polish society towards the real danger – the Soviet Union and the Third Reich. Czesław Miłosz expressed this accurately, writing that “Polish anti-Semitic obsessions reached psychosis, and in the late 1930s almost insanity, making it impossible to clearly realize the danger of war.”<sup>27</sup> We should accept with distress and humility the possibility that propaganda was able to have an impact on the attitude of Polish people during the Holocaust. The exhortations of *Wszepolak* in 1938 to lock Jews in ghettos, separate them from Poles with barbed wire, although at that time they could not raise the horrifying vision of concentration camps, death factories and crematory chimneys, antagonized both national groups living next to each other, took away the Jewish sense of security and roused the demons of extremism. The truth also demands that one more thing be mentioned. For many anti-Semitic leaders of the pre-war intelligentsia the Holocaust was a kind of catharsis inducing them to revise their attitude towards Jews – to defend them even at the cost of their own lives. It is worth recalling Jan Mosdorf or Jan Brzeski.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. J.J. Terej, *Idee, mity, realia. Szkice dziejów Narodowej Demokracji*, Warszawa 1971; E. Gellner, *Narody i nacjonalizm*, Warszawa 1991.

<sup>27</sup> Miłosz cited in M. Janion, Spór o antysemityzm, in: *Kontrapunkt. Magazyn Kulturalny Tygodnika Powszechnego*, no. 7 (45), 29 X 2000, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Jan Mosdorf – the leader of Młodzież Wszechpolska and ONR, during the Second World War as a prisoner of Pawiak and Auschwitz, he was an active member of a camp conspiracy, helping many Jewish



To keep the necessary proportions in the discussion of the issue, the floor was given to the Jewish academic press, in which about 800 articles connected with the subject were found. This press was no less varied than the Polish one; it was divided to the same extent. The Zionists had their eyes fixed on a massive and, in their opinion, visionary idea of rebuilding the national home in Palestine; till that time they wanted to be treated in the Diaspora countries in an equal way. Socialist-Zionists also intended to build their future homeland in Palestine, but on the basis of a model adopted “from the most perfect world, the USSR.” Assimilators, whose political program was passing away, did not lose their hope for the agreement with Polish society. Jewish students, leaning towards leftist ideals, assumed that the solution was the agreement with the Polish Left, agreement above national divisions.

In spite of these differences, when the right wing started to preach their anti-Semitic slogans, those factions formed a common front of protest in the name of observance of the elementary rights of Jewish academics and Jews in general. However, it was not homogeneous – there were many differences in opinions about the methods of the fight and its sense at all. Relations with Polish academic organizations that could play the role of potential allies in the struggle were not going well. This caused much disappointment among the Jewish academics, because they were left alone with the problem, the more so because the reliable factors did not guarantee their full safety. Therefore a bitterness appeared in the press, sometimes turning into accusations towards Polish students (sometimes deeply unjust), the sense of purposelessness in undertaking educational efforts in Poland and the interest in studying abroad. In the face of “anti-Semitic grumbles” in Europe the Zionist press more and more often suggested that the place where Jewish academics should aim was Mount Scopus, with the Hebrew University.

A sad reflection emerges after comparing the Jewish academic press to material in the Polish student press. This reflection is expressed well by the words of Andrzej Szczypiorski: “both communities, Jewish and Polish, were stepping into Hitler’s occupation separated from each other. This distance, strengthened deliberately with the occupant’s policy, led to a situation in which the two communities were dying separately.”<sup>29</sup>

In the light of the above remarks it is justifiable to claim that for a considerable section of students in interwar Poland anti-Semitism was the indicator of action, or at least the subject of their interest. It certainly cannot soothe the national consciousness. This would be the right place to cite the opinion of Antony Polonsky, claiming that

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prisoners to get to a hospital block instead of a gas chamber. Shot by Germans in 1943; Jan Brzeski – one of the leaders of Młodzież Wszechpolska at the Jagiellonian University, chief of *Bratnia Pomoc Medyków*, he was seen as a co-organizer of “the autumn maneuver”, during the Second World War helped the Jews for which he was honored: Pilch, *Studenci...*, *op.cit.*, 156.

<sup>29</sup> A. Szczypiorski quoted in M. Kula, *Uparta sprawa: żydowska? polska? ludzka?*, Kraków 2004, 248.

Overcoming our own past is always a very important matter. We must try to see it the way as it was in reality, unadorned and without any myths (...). The problem arises when no one wants to talk about it. Then the silence itself should be put down to our blame (...).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Cited in M. Domagalska, *Antysemityzm dla inteligencji? Kwestia żydowska w publicystyce Adolfa Nowaczyńskiego na łamach „Myśli Narodowej” (1921–1931) i „Prosto z mostu” (1935–1939): na tle porównawczym*, Warszawa 2004, 285.