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THE WAR FOR THE STAGE. THE FATE OF THE JEWISH THEATRE IN WROCŁAW, 1949–68

The Zionists proclaimed that it was wrong to raise money to build a theatre while Jewish blood was being spilt in Palestine. [...] In whispered propaganda it was proclaimed that every penny spent on the theatre was a penny thrown away, because there would be no Jews in Poland anyway, and the theatre would be nationalised, and the Jews would not get anything from it.¹

One can start with the undeniable statement that the building – which had been rebuilt by Jews, with the support (at least initially and officially) from the party – from 1947 to May 1968, in most documents produced by the party (PPR/PZPR²), the local administration (MRN³), by the local social organisation (WKŻ/TSKŻ⁴) and the political police

¹ Archiwum Akt Nowych, Spuścizna Szymona Zachariasza (Central Archives of Modern Records, Legacy of Szymon Zachariasz; hereinafter: AAN, SSZ), 476/26, Report on the activity of the PPR Faction at the CKŻP in Wrocław for the period from 1 May 1948 to 15 November 1948, p. 259.

² *Polska Partia Robotnicza* (the Polish Workers' Party; hereinafter: PPR), from 1948 *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza* (the Polish United Workers' Party; hereinafter: PZPR).

³ *Miejska rada narodowa* (the Municipal National Council, an administrative organ of the Communist Party; hereinafter: MRN).

⁴ *Wojewódzki Komitet Żydowski* (Provincial Jewish Committee; hereinafter: WKŻ), from 1950 *Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów* (the Social-Cultural Society for Jews; hereinafter: TSKŻ).

(UBP/SB⁵), functioned as the Estera Rachela Kamińska Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre (*Dolnośląski Teatr Żydowski im. Estery Racheli Kamińskiej*), which was renamed the Esther Rachela Kamińska House of Culture in the 1950s.

One can also treat its story as a play in three acts. Both the performance as a whole and each of the acts took place in difficult conditions. The background was the then current needs of various social groups, and the political interests of the Polish and Jewish parties,⁶ the emotions of ethnic groups and the desires of the minorities,

⁵ *Urzędy Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego* (Offices of Public Security; hereinafter: UBP), replaced in 1954 by the *Slużba Bezpieczeństwa* (the Security Service; hereinafter: SB), the 'secret police' of the Polish Communist state, operated 1956–90.

⁶ The most important Jewish institution, operating in the years 1945–50, was the Central Committee of Jews in Poland and its voivodeship, poviats and city committees. Their political face was determined by the number of Jewish members in the political parties which composed it. Almost all the political parties contained on the committees were continuations of those which had operated in the interwar period; the PPR faction was an exception. The authorities of the committees were created on the basis of the so-called party key. According to this principle, the most numerous were the representatives of the PPR faction (6 members), followed by *Ikhud* (4), the Bund (4), *Poalei Siyon-Prawica* (3), *Poalei Siyon-Lewica* (3), and *Ha-shomer Ha-tzair* (1). The main role, according to the assumptions of the PPR group, was to be played by its representatives acting in committees as the Faction of the Polish Workers' Party. The Polish Communists were favourable to the activities of Jewish organisations, most likely counting on their support. By accepting the operation of so many parties in such a small group, they saw no threat to their political interests. Apart from that section of the political scene which was officially controlled by the Communists, the Zionist movement developed from below, and in a very dynamic manner. The number of supporters of Zionist ideas was proportional to the number of members of these parties. Over time, their ranks shrank systematically; not, however, as the result of massive Communist propaganda calling on them to join the PPR, but rather because of the mass emigration of Jews. In contrast to the Zionists, the activities of the PPR neither increased the popularity of this party nor made the faction the only one with the exclusive right to represent the interests of the Jewish population. The maintenance of the Jewish community in Poland was of the greatest importance to the Communists from the PPR faction. On the one hand, the basis for this group's views was the planned political transformation, and on the other, their vision for the future of Jews in Poland, which was intended to be a counterweight to the manifestoes of the Zionist parties. The activities of the PPR faction were guided by very practical concerns, if only because its existence within the structures of the Polish Workers' Party was dependent on the presence of Jews in Poland. Hence, its efforts to rebuild the community's life went hand in hand with the creation of cultural, educational, social and economic institutions. The faction tried to oppose the influence of the Zionists, and in doing so formed the 'backbone' of the most important Jewish institution in post-war Poland – the CKŻP. The Jewish parties – the Zionists and the Bund – regardless of their political differences, both supported the systemic changes in post-war Poland, albeit to some extent for pragmatic rather than ideological reasons. This was probably the only common point among the Jewish organisations, because apart from their positive attitude to the systemic transformations, they were more divided than united – above all, regarding their views on the future of the Jews. The Zionists' political programmes spoke clearly of the need to build a Jewish state in Palestine, whereas the faction's Communists and the Bund's socialists saw a need to rebuild the Jewish diaspora in Poland after the Holocaust. For more, see B. Szaynok, *Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku 1945–1950*, Wrocław 2000; A. Grabski, *Działalność komunistów wśród Żydów w Polsce 1944–1949*, Warszawa 2004, pp. 45, 60, 310; A. Cała, H. Węgrzynek, G. Zalewska, *Historia i kultura Żydów polskich. Słownik*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 42–44; J. Adelson, 'W Polsce zwanej ludową', in *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce*, ed. J. Tomaszewski, Warszawa 1993, pp. 433–50.

all with universal cultural ideas embedded in them. The performance had many directors on both Jewish and Polish sides, and also a particular character, because its protagonist was the building of a Jewish theatre company.

Act One

On 17 July 1945, Dzierżoniów, Lower Silesia, played host to a Conference of Jewish Committees which had been established in these areas just after the end of the war. It was attended by representatives of the Jewish communities of Dzierżoniów, Bielawa, Pieszce, Ludwikowice Kłodzkie, Wałbrzych and Głuszyca.⁷ At that time, a Provincial Jewish Committee was established. With the support of the Ministry of Public Administration in mind, a draft petition was prepared, in which it was postulated that 20,000 surviving Polish Jews should be resettled in Lower Silesia. The petition contained a justification for the creation of a new Jewish settlement in these areas:

The Jews, who – in a well-known, tragic and bestial way – have been deprived of their loved ones, want to forget about the tragedy they have experienced and start a new, creative life in an environment of people who are mutually friendly and able to understand each other [...]. It is not surprising, then, that the Jews are driven to form homogeneous clusters with the same spiritual interests. The transfer of Jews, who have been deprived of the chance to do productive work in other districts, to a centre offering them material and cultural survival, is an imperative of the well-understood interests of the nation and of humanity.⁸

A representative of the Red Army, Cpt. Borosov, said at the time: “You are a strange people, you Jews. I am one of those who liberated Jews from the camps. You were sick, [...] hungry, almost dead, and here you are sitting here today at this conference with beaming eyes, completely changed, talking about schools, theatre, culture. [...] A strange nation. Such a nation will never be destroyed”⁹

⁷ Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego (Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw; hereinafter: AŻIH), Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce (the Central Committee of Jews in Poland; hereinafter: CKŻP), Department of Productivity, 11, Protocol of the Congress of Delegates of the Jewish Committees of Lower Silesia, 17 July 1945, unpaginated.

⁸ Ibid., Memorial on the settlement of Jews in Lower Silesia, 23 June 1945, unpaginated.

⁹ J. Egit, *Tsu a naye lebn*, Wrocław 1947, p. 15 (quoted in Szaynok, *Ludność żydowska*, p. 30).

Cultural activities were always of great importance to the Jewish people. Their rich pre-war traditions influenced the creation of Jewish life after the war. The subject of a broadly understood culture was an element that appeared many times during the meetings of Jewish committees in Lower Silesia. In stormy discussions, the idea of establishing a Jewish theatre was frequently raised.¹⁰ After the Second World War, Lower Silesia became the cradle of this idea to some extent. The first initiatives were born in these lands. As early as mid-1945, the first theatre troupe was established in Dzierżoniów; a few months later, twelve Jewish actors from this centre asked the Central Committee of Jews in Poland for financial support for their initiative: the creation of a permanent Jewish theatre.¹¹ Soon after that, Jews in Wrocław started their theatre activity.¹² In mid-1946, during the Congress of Jewish Stage Artists in Łódź, the Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre (*Dolnośląski Teatr Żydowski* [DTŻ], *Nidershlezier Yidisher Teater*) was established. The Jewish Theatre in Łódź was also established at the same congress.¹³

The DTŻ tried to reach all the places in Lower Silesia with Jewish populations. Originally, in the years 1946–48, the theatrical repertoire, the ensemble's plans and the actors' ambitions could only be realised thanks to use of trucks belonging

¹⁰ Selected literature and studies devoted to Jewish culture in post-war Poland, with particular emphasis on Lower Silesia: A. Kałużna, 'Teatr żydowski na Dolnym Śląsku w latach 1945–1968', doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of Prof. Marcin Wodziński, Wrocław 2015 (I would like to thank Ms. Kałużna for sharing her work, and for her valuable suggestions regarding the creation and operation of the Jewish theatre in Lower Silesia); K. Pudło, *Życie kulturalne dolnośląskiego skupiska żydowskiego (1945–1985)*, *Kultura Dolnośląska* 1985, no. 3/4; *Teatr żydowski w Polsce: materiały z międzynarodowej konferencji naukowej*, Warszawa, 18–21 października 1993, ed. A. Kuligowska-Korzeniewska, M. Leyko, Łódź 1998; Szaynok, *Ludność żydowska*, pp. 76–8, 117–21, 187–89; M. Szydysz, *Spółeczność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku w świetle działalności Towarzystwa Społeczno-Kulturalnego Żydów w Polsce w latach 1950–1989*, Warszawa 2019. For more about Jewish culture in post-war Poland, see G. Berendt, *Życie żydowskie w Polsce w latach 1950–1956*, Gdańsk 2006, pp. 214–55; Adelson, 'W Polsce zwanej ludową'; Cała, Węgrzynek, Zalewska, *Historia i kultura Żydów polskich*; J. Nalewajko-Kulikow, M. Ruta, 'Kultura jidysz po II wojnie światowej', in *Następstwa zagłady Żydów. Polska 1945–2010*, ed. F. Tych, M. Adamczyk-Garbowska, Lublin 2011, pp. 283–303; R. Piątkowska, 'Żydowskie życie artystyczne po Zagładzie', in *Następstwa zagłady Żydów*, pp. 339–58; J. Tyszkiewicz, 'Lata 1949–1955. Polityka władz wobec mniejszości narodowych', in *Dolny Śląsk. Monografia historyczna*, ed. W. Wrzesiński, Wrocław 2006; L. Ziątkowski, *Dzieje Żydów we Wrocławiu*, Wrocław 2000.

¹¹ AŻIH, Presidium of CKŻP, 303/I/7, Minutes of the 49th session of the CKŻP Plenum held on 27 December 1945, p. 190.

¹² S. Bronsztejn, *Z dziejów ludności żydowskiej na Dolnym Śląsku po II wojnie światowej*, Wrocław 1993, p. 76.

¹³ A. Kałużna, 'Teatr żydowski na Dolnym Śląsku', <http://dolnoslaskosc.pl/teatr-zydowski-na-dolnym-slasku,316.html>, accessed 11 April 2018.

to the WKŻ, which were not suitable for such purposes. The *Centrala Spółdzielni Wytwórczych 'Solidarność'*¹⁴ came forward to confront these problems, funding a bus for the DTŻ which was specially adapted to its needs.¹⁵ However, these were only temporary attempts to solve the difficulties that the theatre company had to deal with: the lack of a permanent seat in the form of a theatre building. In addition, there was a shortage of housing for actors. That is probably why Jakub Egit, chairman of the Provincial Jewish Committee in Wrocław,¹⁶ who was aware that half-measures could not resolve the existing problems, demanded in the pages of *Nowe Życie* at the beginning of 1947: "The Jewish Theatre in Lower Silesia must be strengthened. A Jewish theatre studio must absolutely be created".¹⁷ Seeking support, the Wrocław branch of the WKŻ described the aim of building the theatre in a letter to the CKŻP¹⁸ of July 1947: "Apart from the theatre hall, this building will also house rooms intended for a studio for sculptors and artists, painters, a rehearsal room for artists and others. In a word, the building in question will host all cultural associations, such as writers, artists, painters, etc. The theatre hall will also be adapted to cinema screenings".¹⁹

It was during this period that the WKŻ made efforts to obtain the use of a building in which the team of the Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre could operate and fulfil its mission. Initially these measures were ineffective, because due to the destruction that had affected Wrocław – a city that was slowly becoming the centre of the Jewish population in Lower Silesia – the authorities were unwilling to assign undamaged buildings. That is probably why, when the WKŻ asked the Wrocław Municipal National Council in the first half of 1947 for the use of a property located at 28 Świdnicka Street, the council considered this request

¹⁴ The 'Solidarity' Manufacturing Cooperatives Head Office, a Communist-founded association of Jewish organisations operating between 1946 and 1949, intended to counteract negative stereotypes of Jews in Poland.

¹⁵ Kałużna, 'Teatr żydowski', pp. 80–81.

¹⁶ Until mid-1946, when the resettlement of the German population began (including German citizens of Jewish nationality), the WKŻ had its seat in Dzierżoniów.

¹⁷ J. Egit, *O nową kulturę żydowską*, *Nowe Życie* 1947, no. 10, p. 3.

¹⁸ *Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce* (Central Committee of Jews in Poland), a body giving political representation to Jews in Poland, operated 1944–50.

¹⁹ AŻIH, General correspondence (outgoing and incoming) from WKŻ in Wrocław (July–October 1947), 303/I/122, Letter from the WKŻ in Wrocław to the CKŻP in Warsaw, 31 July 1947, pp. 160–61.

justified and assigned them the site, because the building of the former German *Kammer Lichtspiele* cinema located there was in ruins.

Other factors also had a significant impact on the WKŻ/DTŻ's aspirations. Perhaps the WKŻ made the effort to get this building in the belief that lifting it from the ruins would be a kind of psychotherapy, a remedy for trauma after the Holocaust, while at the same time serving as an element uniting the Jewish community in Lower Silesia. It would also become a symbol of the reconstruction of the Jewish nation. Jakub Egit, the WKŻ's chairman, justified the existence of the theatre during a meeting: "The majority of Polish Jewry is in Lower Silesia, most of the Jewish institutions are located there. Jews work together with Poles in mines, factories and state institutions. It is imperative that the word of our nation, the word of Jewish culture, reaches them. Who better than the theatre can fulfil this?"²⁰ The words about the most important tasks facing the Wrocław branch of the PPR in the field of cultural life also alluded to this. It was considered necessary to create "a high-level Jewish dramatic theatre in the near future".²¹ This probably, at least to some extent, explains the great activity of the PPR's Wrocław branch in its efforts to construct a theatre building in the capital of Lower Silesia. This necessity was also to be justified by economic reasons. It was assessed that the costs of the DTŻ's activities carried out so far (endless travels and performances, renting space, maintaining the team supporting the theatre company) were too high, and the benefits would primarily, if not exclusively, be of a spiritual dimension.

Renovation and construction work was scheduled to begin almost immediately after the rights to the plot in the very centre of Wrocław were obtained, in September 1947. Work was expected to be finished by December of that year. However, the WKŻ's ambitious plans came into conflict with the post-war realities: legal, organisational and financial problems, as well as the shortage of building materials (at that time not only criminal looters, but also the state administration treated Lower Silesia – a region whose Polishness could not be guaranteed – as an excellent

²⁰ AŻIH, CKŻP, 61, Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium of WKŻ in Wrocław, 1 February 1947, unpagged.

²¹ AAN, SSZ, 476/22, Information on the situation of the Jewish population in Poland and the activities of the Polish Workers' Party, 1947, p. 10.

repository of materials for the reconstruction of the capital). This is evidenced by the 'theatrical' documentation from that period.

The cost estimate prepared for the renovation and construction provided for their completion and the furnishing of the theatre building to the amount of around 15 million zloty. The Lower Silesian WKŻ was to some extent prepared for such expenses. In the summer of 1947, it was reported in a letter to the CKŻP that the WKŻ had about 20 per cent of the financial resources provided for in the estimated expenses at its disposal. It asked the Central Committee for support, arguing that the help was necessary to "carry out such important and necessary work for our society as obtaining the theatre building".²² So much for the official version (which was more in line with the hopes than the actual capabilities of the WKŻ). Very quickly, as soon as the renovation works started, it appeared that there was not enough money. They needed to be very determined to complete the project, since Jakub Egit allowed himself to manage the activities 'manually', including direct interference in financial matters: money which the CKŻP had granted to help orphaned children was instead allocated – without the knowledge or consent of the headquarters – to the needs of the theatre.²³ This revealed the organisational weakness of the CKŻP/WKŻ, which was the most important Jewish institution in Poland. The money was not returned to the orphans, and Egit did not suffer any consequences, but the problem remained. The confrontation of the plans with the realities forced the Jewish organisations to alter the former.

The decision-making power was in Warsaw. During a single CKŻP meeting – in mid-1948, a time when the issue of the theatre building was left open – many of the participants were inclined to look for a different solution to their troubles. Dawid Sfar²⁴ proposed abandoning the construction works altogether, explaining that from the economic point of view "instead of a large theatre building" it would

²² AŻIH, General correspondence (outgoing and incoming) from WKŻ in Wrocław (July–October 1947), 303/I/122, Letter of the WKŻ in Wrocław to the CKŻP in Warsaw, 31 July 1947, pp. 160–61.

²³ Kałużna, 'Teatr żydowski', p. 93.

²⁴ Dawid Sfar (1903–81), poet, writer and critic writing in Yiddish, publisher, translator. Activist in various left-wing parties: the KPP, the PPR (PPR faction), the PZPR. During the Second World War, he stayed in the USSR, where he served as secretary of the Organising Committee of Polish Jews in the USSR. In 1946 he returned to Poland. Until 1950, he was a member of the CKŻP and chairman of the Jewish Society of Culture and Art. In 1950–56 he was a member of the TSKŻ's Board of Directors. After 1956, he was involved in cultural activities. In 1969, he emigrated to Israel (http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Sfar_Dawid, accessed 13 October 2018).

more profitable to use “a series of small, well-equipped theatre buildings in Lower Silesia that could be rented”.²⁵ Others (Grzegorz [Hersz] Smolar²⁶ and Anatol Wertheim²⁷) argued that the best solution for the needs of actors would be to create a Cooperative ‘Jewish Theatre’, which, moreover, would function on the same basis as before, that is as a travelling theatre. Salo Fiszgrund²⁸ thought that the best alternative was to establish a Society of Friends of the Jewish Theatre, which would financially support the traveling theatre. Ida Kamińska’s view was different;²⁹ she consistently held the position that a theatre company must have its own building.³⁰

Meanwhile, the WKŻ found another solution, namely a collection campaign initiated at the beginning of 1948 by the local PPR, but conducted under the banner of the WKŻ. At first, it did not bring the expected results. A second approach to the same activities, with more *élan* and conducted on a larger scale, took place in the second half of the year.³¹ Jewish Communists organised “dozens of meetings,

²⁵ AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium of the CKŻP (7 April-29 May 1948), 303/I/27, Minutes of the Presidium’s session with the Theatre Council and representatives of the Union of Jewish Stage Artists, 10 May 1948, p. 104.

²⁶ Grzegorz (Hersz) Smolar (1905–93), journalist, writer, Communist activist. During the Second World War, he took part in the resistance movement in the German-occupied territories. In 1946 he returned to Poland. In the years 1946–50, on behalf of the Polish United Workers’ Party faction (then the PZPR group), he was the head of the Culture and Propaganda Department at the CKŻP and a member of the Presidium of the CKŻP. Chairman of the TSKŻ (1950–62), editor-in-chief of *Folks Shtime* (1950–67). In 1971, he emigrated to France, and from there to Israel ([http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Smolar_Grzegorz_\[Hersz_Hirsz\]](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Smolar_Grzegorz_[Hersz_Hirsz]), accessed 13 October 2018).

²⁷ Anatol Wertheim (1910–96), lawyer, Communist and social activist. He fought as a partisan during the war. After the war, secretary of the WKŻ in Łódź, member of the CKŻP, activist of the PPR/PZPR. From 1960 in Israel, from 1979 in Canada (Grabski, *Działalność komunistów*, p. 108; see also <https://www.geni.com/people/Anatol-Wertheim/6000000003014867751>, accessed 14 October 2018).

²⁸ Solo Fiszgrund (1893–1971), politician, activist in the Bund, then the PZPR; during the Second World War, he was a participant in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Warsaw Rising. After the war, a notable activist, first in the CKŻP and then the TSKŻ. After 1968, he emigrated to Israel (<https://sztetl.org.pl/pl/biogramy/2591-fiszgrund-salo>, accessed 14 October 2018).

²⁹ Ida Kamińska (1899–1980), actress and theatre director. During the Second World War, she was in the USSR. After returning to Poland in 1947, she worked in Jewish theatres in Łódź and Wrocław. From 1955, she headed the State Jewish Theatre in Warsaw. She appeared in several films; in 1967, she was nominated for the Oscar Award for best actress in a leading role in the Czechoslovak film *The Shop on Main Street*. In 1968, after the anti-Jewish campaign, she emigrated to the US (http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Kaminska_Ida, accessed 14 October 2018).

³⁰ AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium of the CKŻP (7 April – 29 May 1948), 303/I/27, Minutes of the Presidium session with the Theatre Council and representatives of the Union of Jewish Stage Artists, 10 May 1948, pp. 103, 105.

³¹ ‘Akcja zbiorkowa na budowę gmachu teatru żydowskiego’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 3 September 1948, no. 73/488, p. 4; see also ‘Osiągnięcia ludności żydowskiej na Dolnym Śląsku’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 13 July 1948, no. 58/433, p. 1.

rallies, councils, conferences, press propaganda, individual actions (visiting apartments), posters³²,³² under the influence of the changes taking place throughout the country and events on the international arena; this meant that these actions had a primarily political dimension, while culture was – unofficially, of course – treated as a secondary thing.³³ The image of a Jewish society united by the ‘theatrical’ idea was brought to function in public circulation. The WKŻ’s announcement was: “We have decided to start a broad fundraising campaign. We are convinced that no one will shirk the noble duty of enabling the normal development of our cultural life, by creating a Jewish Community Centre in Lower Silesia.”³⁴

For outsiders, such a statement could indeed appear as proof of the internal unity of the Jewish community. How confusing these appearances could be is indicated by documents produced by the Wrocław PPR for the internal circulation

³² AAN, SSZ, 476/21, Report from the PZPR group of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, 25 April 1949, p. 74.

³³ The years 1947–49 were a period of changes taking place in the country (elections to the Sejm in 1947, ‘unification’ of the party) and important events on the international arena (including the UN declaration, and then the establishment of the state of Israel). The activity of the Jewish political parties was dependent on the Polish Workers’ Party, which resulted in the changes in the balance of political forces taking place in 1947–49. The following groups were competing on the national stage: the PPR, the PPS and the PSL. On the Jewish scene, the number of political parties (including the Bund, Ikhud, Poalei Siyon -*Lewica*, Poalei Siyon-*Prawica*, *Hitakhdut*, *Ha-shomer Ha-tzair*, *Mizrachi*) was disproportionately large in relation to the small number of Jews, especially after the mass emigration of Jews from the second half of 1946 to January 1947. In 1947, activists from the PPR Faction simulated cooperation with other Jewish groups, although in reality they considered the existence of so many Jewish parties an anomaly. They explained that neither the social structure nor the economic state of affairs in the country provided a basis for this. The priority in the faction’s activities was to be the changes in the state, the transition from temporary and makeshift arrangements to the restructuring of the committees. Although officially there was talk of cooperation with the Zionists, in practice the Communists’ overriding goal was to take full power over the committees, and thus bring the entire Jewish society under their control (for more, see AAN, SSZ, 476/22, Information on the Jewish situation in Poland and the activities of PPR, pp. 8–9). All the Zionist parties declared their support for the political changes in Poland. This was evidenced by their participation in the referendum, and in the elections to the Sejm. This activity did not pose an obstacle to them carrying out their mission, namely preparing Jews for emigration and building the state of Israel. Although Jewish committees and political parties operated until 1950, the actual end of this apparent autonomy came at the end of 1948. The full subordination and subsequent liquidation of the Jewish institutions was only a consequence of the program implemented by the PPR, which made the Polish state more similar to the USSR (for more, see the State Archives in Wrocław [hereinafter: AP Wr], KW PPR, 48, Resolution of the National Meeting of PPR activists among the working Jewish population, pp. 114–23; Szaynok, *Ludność żydowska*, pp. 170–82).

³⁴ The National Library, Department of Documents on Social Life, Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre, Appeal of the Building Committee (Kałużna, ‘Teatr żydowski’, p. 94).

of the party. Popularity – as the Communists reported – would come from their activities among “workers, poor craftsmen and partly small merchants”.³⁵ On the opposite side were ‘them’ – their alleged ‘opponents’ and ‘enemies’. So they went on to write: “The action to build the theatre revealed the hostile class face of Jewish merchants and factory owners”.³⁶ In another report, they not only admitted that such actions “were purely political class actions”, but also singled out those who did not contribute to them. They pointed to the enemy – the Zionist movement – stressing that “there is class struggle within the Jewish community”.³⁷ This is what the words quoted in the introduction allude to.

Jewish Communists had to work hard to sustain this narrative. The ‘theatrical action’ coincided with fundraising for ‘fighting Palestine’.³⁸ In this way, it can be treated as another chapter in the political struggle for Jewish souls. This conflict saw

³⁵ AAN, SSZ, 476/26, Report on the activities of the Polish Workers’ Party Faction at the CKŻP in Wrocław for the period from 1 May 1948 to 15 November 1948, pp. 258–59.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

³⁷ AAN, SSZ, 476/21, Information from the PZPR group of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, 25 April 1949, p. 74.

³⁸ At the turn of 1948, all Jewish parties organised demonstrations by Jews in support of the creation of the state of Israel. The ‘Fund for Aid to Fighting Palestine’ (*Giyus*), conducted under the aegis of the CKŻP, was particularly wide-ranging. The CKŻP’s chairman, Dr. Adolf Berman, emphasised the importance of these activities: “The action to help Palestine will be a political test for the CKŻP, and we must not compromise ourselves”. Jews were called upon to help the Yishuv, and public collections were organised. There were some misunderstandings in Lower Silesia. Stefan Grajek, who was present at a meeting of the WKŻ in Wrocław, stated that instead of preparing action for Fighting Palestine, the local committee collected money for the Jewish theatre in Wrocław. Szymon Zachariasz then stated that the Wrocław JCC should “immediately withdraw from its false position on the postponement of action in favour of Fighting Palestine. The month from 15 February to 15 March is being devoted to this action throughout the country, and Lower Silesia cannot be an exception”. (AŻIH, CKŻP, 303/IX, Minutes of the Presidium meeting of 16 February 1948, p. 108; see also AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium of CKŻP, 5 January – 31 March 1948, 303/I/26, Minutes of the 13th session of the Presidium of 9 February 1948, p. 108; ‘Akcja pomocy walczącej Palestynie na Dolnym Śląsku’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 11 March 1948, no. 25/401, p. 2). Circumstances forced the PPR faction to both support the *Giyus* action and actively participate in it (L. Głuchowski, A. Polonsky, ‘Forty Years After’, *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry* 1968, vol. 21 (after *Plotkies* 2008, no. 38); J. Orlicki, *Szkice z dziejów stosunków polsko-żydowskich. 1918–1949*, Szczecin 1983, p. 203). The reason for this was the awareness that this action was universal, and that most Jews considered it a duty to their people. Reluctance or passivity threatened the faction’s activists with a loss of influence in the Jewish community and marginalisation from it. In a report from that period, Jewish Communists proudly wrote: “Our solidarity with anti-imperialist Palestine was expressed not only in declarations at rallies. [...] It found its expression in the action for Fighting Palestine. At all workplaces, the PPR workers were the first to take up the collection campaign and duly managed it”. (AAN, SSN, 26/476, Report on the activities of the PPR faction at the CKŻP for the period 1 October 1947 – 1 May 1948, p. 224).

a clash between the concepts of the Jewish Communists on one side and the Zionists on the other. They concerned a fundamental issue: whether the future of the Jewish population was to be built in Poland or in the Middle East (Palestine/Israel). For the Jewish Communists it was also a test of strength: they wanted to confirm their influence and popularity in the Jewish community, while at the same time strengthening their credibility in the eyes of the Polish Communists, because they were supposed to act as a 'conveyor belt' linking the Jewish population with the new, Polish, Communist reality.

Almost a year after the start of renovation and construction work, and after a series of meetings organised throughout Lower Silesia, Aleksander Wulfowicz³⁹ wrote to Szymon Zachariasz:⁴⁰ "We believe that we will complete the campaign with full success, that the sum of 15 million złoty will be exceeded".⁴¹ A few months later it was already a *fait accompli*. At a meeting of the PZPR unit⁴² at the WKŻ in Wrocław, Szymon Intrator⁴³ proudly reported that he had managed to collect a total of 16 million zloty, up to a third of which had come from Wrocław itself.⁴⁴

³⁹ Aleksander Wulfowicz, activist of the PPR faction, member of the Polish United Workers' Party, in 1946–50 member of the WKŻ in Wrocław, from 1950 the ZG TSKŻ in Warsaw, from 1953 an instructor of the ZG TSKŻ in Lower Silesia. In the 1950s, he was a councillor in the Provincial National Council (Berendt, *Życie żydowskie w Polsce*, pp. 121, 144, 146; also Szydzisz, *Spoleczność żydowska*, pp. 66, 96).

⁴⁰ Szymon Zachariasz (1900–1970), Communist activist, member of the KPP, PPR and PZPR. During the Second World War in the USSR. After returning to Poland in 1945, he became a representative of the PPR faction in the Presidium of the CKŻP, while at the same time being an employee of the Organisational Department of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (thereafter the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party) and the chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Solidarity Cooperative Headquarters. In 1950–6 he was employed in the Department of Party History; from 1956 he was a researcher and member of the Management Board of the Jewish Historical Institute. From 1964, a member of the Central Party Control Committee ([http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Zachariasz_Szymon_\(Noach\)](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Zachariasz_Szymon_(Noach)), accessed 15 October 2018).

⁴¹ AAN, SSZ, 476/22, Wulfowicz's letter to Zachariasz, 14 July 1948, p. 107.

⁴² As a result of the unification and centralisation of political and social movements in Poland (see the unification of the Polish Workers' Party and the Polish Socialist Party), the former Jewish Faction of the Polish Workers' Party, which had been associated with the PPR and operated within the structures of the CKŻP and its subordinate Jewish committees, began to function in January 1949 as the PZPR group at the CKŻP (WKŻ and KŻ).

⁴³ Szymon Intrator, an activist of the PPR faction/PZPR group, in 1946–50 was at the WKŻ in Wrocław; he represented the CKŻP in concluding contracts with the contractors renovating the Jewish theatre building (AŻIH, CKŻP, Department of Culture and Propaganda, 303/XIII, Summary of construction costs of the E.R. Kamińska theatre in Wrocław on 7 May 1949, unpagged).

⁴⁴ AAN, SSZ, 476/26, Protocol no. 3 from the meeting of the PZPR-WKŻ group in Wrocław on 3 February 1949, p. 280.

In addition, part of the money for the renovated and reconstructed building was to be granted by the CKŻP.⁴⁵

Despite the struggle with the lack of funds, there was no shortage of people to work and believe in carrying out the plans. However, this meant that their implementation began with a false start, because before the head of Construction Supervision in Wrocław had issued a permit to start the work, it had in fact already started.⁴⁶ The WKŻ had acted in too much haste. This is probably why the contractors warned from the beginning that meeting the deadline would be a problem, citing the careless nature of the plans as the reason. It soon turned out that the construction work was being supervised by a person without the appropriate permissions. It was only a matter of time before the administrative suspension of the work.⁴⁷ This problem was presented in the following way at a meeting of the Presidium of the CKŻ: “[Engineer Feliks] has apparently come to the conclusion that he is not the right man to conduct this construction, and so he has not been interested in the construction for several days”.⁴⁸ In the meantime, it turned out that the same contractors (Feliks, Koliński, Rowiński), although so powerless in the face of the projects themselves and their implementation, had had no such trouble demolishing some of the former cinema buildings – perhaps because they had already found some rubble collectors.⁴⁹ The representative of the WKŻ, Lewi, made an unambiguous assessment of the situation: “The matter of the theatre”, he stated at the meeting of the Presidium of the WKŻ, “is on a very bad path”.⁵⁰ This was partly also because all activities were decided by the Warsaw headquarters (CKŻP), and the Wrocław branch of the WKŻ was only acting as an intermediary. The agreements with the existing contractors were terminated,

⁴⁵ AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium of CKŻP (5 January-31 March 1949), 303/I/31, Protocol 7 of the meeting of the Presidium of the CKŻP of 1 February 1949, p. 55.

⁴⁶ Kałużna, ‘Teatr żydowski’, p. 85.

⁴⁷ AŻIH, General correspondence (outgoing and incoming) from the WKŻ in Wrocław (October-December 1947, January 1948), 303/I/123, Extract from the minutes of Presidium meeting no. 86 of 20 October 1947, p. 142.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Extract from minutes no. 88 of the Presidium meeting of 23 October 1947, p. 143.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Journal of the WKŻ in Wrocław to engineer Jan Feliks, 30 October 1947, p. 148.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Extract from minutes no. 87 of the Presidium meeting of 22 October 1947, p. 140.

and the search for companies that would implement the planned reconstruction of the building on Świdnicka Street took a few more months.⁵¹

The deadline for putting the theatre building into service was postponed several times.⁵² This was, at least in part, because of the desire to use the opening ceremony in the political struggle, a consequence of the decisions taken at the end of February 1949 during the National Congress of Jewish Committees and social organisations to thoroughly reorganise the composition of the CKŻP and its subordinate regional centres. Thus, in preparation for the inauguration of the theatre, special conferences with the Jewish community were held in Lower Silesia. The Jewish Press Agency (*ŻAP*) reported then that all these meetings “were characterised by the clarity of the wording contained in the papers, criticism and self-criticism, and a strict specification of the tasks of the reorganised Committees”.⁵³ Finally, the opening date was set for the start of April 1949. A provincial conference of the Lower Silesian Jewish committees was scheduled for this time in the theatre building.⁵⁴ On the eve of the inauguration, the *Biuletyn ŻAP* summarised the completion of renovation and construction works as follows: “The Jewish community in Lower Silesia has, at great effort, expenditure and dedication, under the favourable conditions of people’s democracy, achieved a feat which the three-million-plus-strong Jewish population had been unable to do in interwar Poland [*w Polsce sanacyjnej*]”.⁵⁵ This message was a nod to the new reality, clearly expressing his faith in the strength, future and durability of the Jewish diaspora in Lower Silesia. The theatre building was supposed to be irrefutable proof of this.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*; see also *ibid.*, Extract from minutes no. 89 of the Presidium meeting of 27 October 1947, p. 142.

⁵² ‘Wkrótce otwarcie teatru żydowskiego w nowym gmachu’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 7 January 1949, no. 2; ‘Przewodniczący wrocławskiej Rady Narodowej zwiedza instytucje i spółdzielnie żydowskie’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 28 January 1949, no. 8/488, p. 3.

⁵³ ‘Komitety Żydowskie realizują uchwały Krajowego Zjazdu’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 23 March 1949, no. 27/507, p. 1; Grabski, *Działalność komunistów*, pp. 307–10; ‘Rezolucja Krajowego Zjazdu Komitetów Żydowskich i organizacji społecznych’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 11 March 1949, no. 23/503 (supplement), pp. 190–94.

⁵⁴ ‘Konferencje wojewódzkie we Wrocławiu, Katowicach i Szczecinie’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 5 April 1949, no. 31/511, p. 3.

⁵⁵ ‘Otwarcie Teatru Żydowskiego we Wrocławiu nastąpi 2 kwietnia br.’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 30 March 1949, no. 29/509, p. 6.

Act Two

The official opening of the theatre building, after an eighteen-month delay, was finally held on 2 April 1949. As reported by the Jewish Press Agency, “The ceremony was attended by representatives of the government, scientific and artistic spheres, and labour leaders”.⁵⁶ A special ceremonial meeting of the convention was held that evening, during which a resolution was adopted to give the newly built building the name of Estera Rachela Kamińska.⁵⁷ All the reports emphasised that the opening of a Jewish cultural institution in Wrocław was “evidence of the development of progressive Jewish national culture”.⁵⁸ Jakub Egit reported live from the scene: “From its opening, the theatre was filled to the brim every day for nine days. On one day we gave a performance for the Polish community. We owe all this to the new reorganisation of the Committees”.⁵⁹ Legally and definitively, the building was put into use in December this year, because only then was the construction work assessed and, in the last resort, accepted by the inspection committee. The pre-war cinema, which had been rebuilt and thoroughly reconstructed, became not only the seat of the theatre, but also a House of Culture and the centre of Jewish cultural life in the Recovered Territories.

The Jewish theatre building in Wrocław began to live its own life, literally, because from the moment when it was put into use, the Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre functioned as an independent administrative body. This was the result of the efforts of the Jewish Communists involved in building the Jewish Theatre

⁵⁶ AAN, SSZ, 476/21, Information from the PZPR team of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, 25 April, 1949, pp. 73–4; ‘Komitety Żydowskie realizują uchwał Krajowego Zjazdu’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 5 April 1949, no. 31/510, p. 3.

⁵⁷ AAN, SSZ, 476/26, Report on the activities of the PZPR group at the WKŻ in Wrocław for the period from 15 January 1949 to 20 April 1949, p. 288. Estera Rachela Kamińska (1870–1925) was an outstanding theatrical actress, and founder of the Jewish theatre in Warsaw, called the ‘mother of Jewish theatre’. She performed on stages in Europe and the US. In the years 1949–56, her name was given to the Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre in Wrocław (from 1956 the House of Culture) and from 1955 the State Jewish Theatre in Warsaw ([http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Kaminska_Ester_Rachel_z_domu_Halpern_\(Helpern_Hailpern\)](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Kaminska_Ester_Rachel_z_domu_Halpern_(Helpern_Hailpern)), accessed 16 October 2018).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Protocol no. 8 from the meeting of the PZPR group at the WKŻ on 12 April 1949; also AAN, SSZ, 476/21, pp. 73–74. Report from the PZPR group of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, 25 April 1949.

⁵⁹ AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium, Plenum and Executive Office of the CKŻP (5 April – 30 June 1949), 303/I/32, Protocol of the 21st session of the CKŻP Presidium of 13 April 1949, p. 13.

in the capital of Lower Silesia. It was they who justified the theatre building's creation at the initiative of Jews, as a result of their actions, with money donated by Jewish institutions and collected in the Jewish community. This was at least partly due to the awareness that the CKŻP, as a social institution, could not own real estate or derive any benefits from it. This was probably the reason why the DTŻ was created as an independent institution – an enterprise managing a building built by the Jewish community. This was to protect the building from being taken over by the municipal authorities.

Simultaneously, as soon as the renovation and construction work began in Wrocław, more or less open disputes began to arise between the actors' associations of the Jewish theatres in Wrocław and Łódź. The strength of the former resulted from the size of the Lower Silesian diaspora, the latter from its traditions, and partly also from the conviction that the proximity of the capital would exert a gravitational pull on Jewish artists. At the same time, the Jewish New Theatre was being constructed in Łódź. The management, actors and 'socio-political activists' involved in the matter posed fundamental questions about which of the theatres had a greater right to represent Jewish culture in socialist Poland, which of them deserved state support, and which should be self-sufficient. Although the representatives of these centres expressed their views on the basis of various positions (supporters of having the 'headquarters' in Wrocław or in Łódź), they agreed on one thing: they believed that Jewish theatre must be nationalised, judging it as a condition for support from the authorities.⁶⁰ They were aware that the handful of survivors could not afford to ensure the theatre's self-determination and self-sufficiency. Jewish artists saw nationalisation as the only means of enabling their continued work.

The justification for the relationship between the Jewish theatre and the people's government was pragmatism. For the theatre, the government was to serve as a guarantor of its existence. For the authorities, theatre – seen more objectively than subjectively – was intended to be a testimony of its openness to the problems of the Jewish national minority in post-war Poland, and thus improve its image in the eyes of international public opinion. Thus, when *Biuletyn ŻAP* published a short report on the nationalisation of Jewish theatres in Poland, all the interested

⁶⁰ AAN, SSZ, 476/26, Protocol no. 1 from the meeting of the PZPR-WKŻ group in Wrocław of 20 January 1949, pp. 274–75.

parties – both directors and actors – recognised it as the fruit of their previous labours. The terse item was limited to a statement of facts: “The Ministry of Culture and Art informed the CKŻP that in connection with the ongoing nationalisation of theatres, they would be included in the state system as of 1 January 1950”.⁶¹ The Central Committee of the CKŻP summed up the results of the efforts made so far: “We have finally solved the problem of Jewish institutions. All [...] will be transferred to the state budget from 1950”. It also emphasised that in “ideological and political [terms, they are] managed by the State”.⁶² These words were repeated to the Lower Silesian voivode Józef Szłapczyński, who earlier, during a conference convened on the occasion of the upcoming Congress of the Jewish Cultural Society (in fact, in the building of the theatre that had just been commissioned), said on 5 October 1949: “An ideal example of how the People’s Government is responding to the Jewish population in Poland and its cultural needs is the nationalisation of Jewish schools and theatres”.⁶³ Thereafter, the CKŻP began to reorganise the theatre groups’ activities.

Under the influence of ongoing Stalinisation in Poland, with its derivative in the form of the Communist authorities’ centralisation and control of all areas of life, the process of ‘unifying’ the Jewish theatre groups was initiated. This was to serve as proof that the Jewish artists were joining the movement of revolutionary political and social changes in post-war Poland. However, in practice, the theatre companies had a serious problem with achieving that – and not just because of ideology, as they were made up of many people with leftist views. The problem was rather one of particularism. The centralisation process was definitely not suited to them. Originally, the team of actors from Wrocław was more open to the path leading to ‘unification’, at least at the end of the 1940s. The initiative had come from the CKŻP: the Lower Silesian troupe was to perform temporarily in Łódź, and the Łódź troupe in Wrocław. The purpose of such

⁶¹ ‘W sprawie upaństwowienia teatrów żydowskich w Polsce’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 18 May 1949, no. 42/522, p. 1.

⁶² AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium and Executive Office of the CKŻP (7–31 October 1949), 303/I/34, Protocol of the 54th Plenary session of the CKŻP Presidium of 18 November 1949, p. 25.

⁶³ ‘Przygotowania do Krajowego Zjazdu Żydowskiego Towarzystwa Kultury’, *Biuletyn ŻAP*, 10 October 1949, no. 77/557, pp. 1–2.

a reorganisation (which the Wrocław actors had proposed much earlier, back in 1947) was very practical: the enriched repertoire was intended to entice viewers back to the theatre. “The Wrocław theatrical group, despite having the prospect of its new building, has agreed to the proposed change”, as it was explained at the time.⁶⁴ However, the Łódź artists’ unwillingness to participate in the exchange meant that the idea was abandoned, so it was necessary to keep both troupes in their current locations. It was also stipulated that more funds should be allocated to the theatre in Wrocław⁶⁵ – Dawid Sfarid supported this solution in 1949. Like all those interested in the issue of the theatre, he spoke of the necessity of its nationalisation, emphasising: “[The theatre] should act as a centralised organism with a uniform artistic direction”.⁶⁶ He saw no contradiction in the functioning of two separate institutions “in Łódź and in Lower Silesia”, calling them ‘branches’. However, soon after, in the summer of 1949, the Presidium of the CKŻP revised its ideas about the future of the theatre. They proposed the creation of special commissions, one for ‘unification’ and one for ‘repertoire’. As well as representatives of actors from the theatres in Lower Silesia and Łódź, these bodies were to be composed of representatives of the CKŻP, and the aim of their activity was (apart from the terms used in the names) to avoid further conflicts. Meier Melman⁶⁷ emphasised that “both collectives [would be] unified” in the near future, with common administrations, bookkeeping and transport: “There cannot be two separate groups, we must be united”.⁶⁸ Julian Łazebnik,

⁶⁴ AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium of CKŻP (1 September – 22 December 1947), 303/I/22, Protocol of the 82nd meetings of the Presidium of 16 October 1947, p. 71.

⁶⁵ AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium of the CKŻP (7 April – 29 May 1948), 303/I/27, Minutes of the Presidium session with the Theatre Council and representatives of the Union of Jewish Stage Artists, 10 May 1948, p. 105.

⁶⁶ AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium, Plenum and Executive Office of the CKŻP (5 April–30 June 1949), 303/I/32, Report of the Presidium of the CKŻP for the period March–May 1949, p. 88.

⁶⁷ Meir Melman (1900–78), actor, lawyer, husband of Ida Kamińska. He spent the Second World War in the USSR. After returning to Poland in 1946, he joined Jewish theatres in Łódź and Warsaw. He was *inter alia* the second chairman of the professional association of Jewish actors in Poland and the administrative director of the State Jewish Theatre in Warsaw. In 1968 he emigrated to the US ([http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Melman_Marian_\(Meir\)](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Melman_Marian_(Meir)), accessed 16 October 2018).

⁶⁸ AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium and Executive Office of the CKŻP (5 July – 23 September 1949), 303/I/33, Protocol of the 42nd meeting of the CKŻP Presidium of 25 August 1949, p. 33.

who was present at the meeting, saw the matter differently.⁶⁹ He considered the ‘conciliatory’ proposals made by his comrades as half-measures, and summed up the discussion thus: “The friction between the teams must end. There will be a state theatre now, and these things must stop.”⁷⁰

The fact that the nationalisation and merger of the two theatres would not solve the problems they faced became obvious from the very beginning in January 1950. “Our situation is specific”, said Julian Łazebnik at the time: “There is one theatre and two workshops. There is little understanding of the collective work of these two divisions. We imagined that citizen Melman and citizen Szafer would cooperate with each other, that they would take care of the theatre together as if it were a uniform organism.”⁷¹ How fragile this system was is evidenced by the recurring organisational problems. The meaning of ‘unification’ was undermined by Ida Kamińska. She knew about the independence of the DTŻ, and assessed it very critically. During a CKŻP meeting, she expressed indignation at the news that a team of actors from Łódź had to pay for access to a theatre stage in Wrocław. Less than two weeks after its launch, she stated: “We are not making the situation difficult, if you have to travel to see performances, we will do so gladly. We pay for journeys and we go. It is an abnormal phenomenon that when we perform in Wrocław, we pay more for the theatre than we would pay for the city theatres”. The source of these problems was the independence of the theatre building in Wrocław. However, it turned out that the matter had another underlying cause when Ida Kamińska summed up her speech as follows: “We are against leaving Łódź. [...] We are constructing a large theatre building in Łódź, and this circumstance should be taken into account.”⁷²

⁶⁹ Julian Łazebnik (1904–81), Communist activist. In 1939, he took part in the September campaign. During the Second World War he was in the USSR and was active in the Union of Polish Artists and Designers. In 1946 he returned to Poland. General Secretary of the CKŻP. In the 1950s, a member of the ZG TSKŻ, he worked as a censor (Grabski, *Działalność komunistów*, p. 308).

⁷⁰ AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium and Executive Office of the CKŻP (5 July – 23 September 1949), 303/I/33, Protocol of the 42nd meeting of the CKŻP Presidium of 25 August 1949, p. 34.

⁷¹ Archiwum Towarzystwa Społeczno-Kulturalnego Żydów w Warszawie (Archives of the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Warsaw; hereinafter: ATSKŻ Wa), Minutes from 9 January 1950 to 29 December 1950, 8/12, Minutes of the CKŻP meeting with representatives of the PTŻ on 18 January 1950, unpagged.

⁷² AŻIH, Minutes of the sessions of the Presidium, Plenum and Executive Office of the CKŻP (5 April – 30 June 1949), 303/I/32, p. 62, Minutes of the second session of the CKŻP plenum of 16 May 1949.

In the context of all the disputes around the issue of theatre at the turn of the 1950s, one fundamental decision remained untaken: where the centre of Jewish cultural life should be located. On 1 January 1950, the Jewish theatres in Poland (i.e. the Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre and the Łódź Jewish Theatre) were nationalised and (at least by definition) merged, by the decision of the Minister of Culture Stefan Dybowski. From then on, they functioned as the State Jewish Theatres (PTŻ). This event changed the status of Jewish theatre in Poland. From that moment on, it was in a state of legal unification with the Polish theatre. From then on, it was provided with state financing for its activities, and all its employees acquired equal rights with the employees of the Polish theatre.⁷³ Ida Kamińska became the director of PTŻ; its artistic director was Meir Melman, and the main director was Jakub Rotbaum.⁷⁴

The nationalisation of Jewish theatres became a *fait accompli*, but the following years (1951–55) did not see the desired results: improving relations between the theatre centres in Łódź and Wrocław, transforming actors into a so-called collective, or an a decision on where the PTŻ would permanently operate. The opposite was true, in fact. Even at the end of 1950, the question of settling the seat of the PTŻ remained unresolved.⁷⁵ It is true that Melman treated the Wrocław theatre centre as an unnecessary ballast, but he also had to take into account the opinion of his comrades from the CKŻP/TSKŻ.⁷⁶ For their part, they

⁷³ Kałużna, 'Teatr żydowski', p. 174.

⁷⁴ Jakub Rotbaum (1901–94), film and theatre director, visual artist. During the Second World War he was in the US. In 1949 he returned to Poland, joined the Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre in Wrocław, and from 1952 to 1962 he was artistic director of the State Dramatic Theatres in Wrocław. In 1968 he left the Polish Theatre in Wrocław. From then on, he directed at the Estera Rachela Kamińska State Jewish Theatre in Warsaw ([http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Rotbaum_\[Rotbojm\]_Jakub_\[Jankew\]](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Rotbaum_[Rotbojm]_Jakub_[Jankew]), accessed 16 October 2018); see also *25 years of the Jewish state theatre in the Polish People's Republic*, Wrocław 1975, pp. 15–16.

⁷⁵ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes from 9 January 1950 to 29 December 1950, 8/12, Minutes of the Presidium meeting of 23 December 1950; see also *ibid.*, Minutes of the meeting of the TSKŻ Presidium of 29 December 1950, unpagged.

⁷⁶ At the turn of 1949, the independence of the CKŻP and its subordinate regional committees became more and more illusory. Even during the Congress of the Jewish Cultural Society in Wrocław in October 1949, Jewish activists of the PZPR had put forward the idea of uniting the existing Jewish organisations, and a year later (29 October 1950) they carried it out. The CKŻP was merged with the ŻTK, and a new organisation, the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (*Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce*), began to function. The establishment of the TSKŻ completed the liquidation of all the Jewish community's independent initiatives. It was in the party's interest to create a centre that would serve to consolidate 'socialist values' among the Jewish population; the TSKŻ was assigned this role. For more, see Szydzisz, *Spoleczność żydowska*, pp. 53–55.

said: “In view of the specific Jewish conditions, one should focus on two stages, because on one stage small Jewish groups will be overlooked”.⁷⁷ This argument persisted for a few more months. In 1951, thanks to the efforts of the PTŻ’s management, the main seat was moved to Łódź. That year, the State Jewish Theatres changed their name to ‘the State Jewish Theatre with its seat in Łódź’.⁷⁸ Officially, the Wrocław troupe was now subordinate to the management of PTŻ in Łódź, although in practice it functioned as an autonomous unit.

Perhaps the conflicts were a permanent element in the ‘rhythm of life’ of the Jewish theatres at the time. Both troupes, Wrocław and Łódź, revealed yet more determination during the two-day session of the Presidium of the TSKŻ and the PTŻ in January 1952. Members of the TSKŻ’s Board of Directors tried to tone down the atmosphere and express their dissatisfaction with the situation in the PTŻ with more general comments. Smolar treated the matter ideologically. He stated that it had not yet been possible to create a “cemented collective”, and Michał Mirski⁷⁹ stressed that there were “symptoms of internal decay” within the PTŻ.⁸⁰ The wave of real criticism, however, came from representatives of the Wrocław theatre. Actor Majzler “accused Kamińska and Melman of keeping the theatre to themselves”; director Izaak Turkow⁸¹ believed that instead of consolidating the Jewish team, they were “flirting with the Polish theatre”,⁸² and Jakub Rotbaum openly accused the theatre management of manipulation and taking actions aimed at creating a camp for its supporters.⁸³

⁷⁷ ATSKŻ Wa, Protocols from 9 January 1950 to 29 December 1950, 8/12, Minutes of the meeting of the TSKŻ Presidium of 29 December 1950, unpagued.

⁷⁸ Kałużna, ‘Teatr żydowski’, p. 196.

⁷⁹ Michał Mirski (1902–94), Communist activist, member of the KPP, prisoner in Bereza Kartuska; during the Second World War he was in the USSR; in 1945–9 chairman of the Provincial Jewish Committee in Łódź; in the fifties and sixties, worked in the editorial office of *Nowe Drogi*; an émigré from 1968 (Grabski, *Działalność komunistów*, p. 68).

⁸⁰ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes from 2 January 1952 to 29 December 1952, 8/14, Minutes of the Presidium meeting with the participation of representatives of the Polish Society of Jews on 28 January 1952, unpagued.

⁸¹ Izaak Turkow (1906–70), actor, writer, journalist, theatre historian. In 1946–50, he published the weekly *Nidershlezje* in Yiddish. Until the mid-1950s, he was associated with the State Jewish Theatre; in 1957, he emigrated to Israel ([http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Turkow_Icchak_\(Izaak\)](http://www.jhi.pl/psj/Turkow_Icchak_(Izaak)), accessed 16 October 2018).

⁸² ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes from 2 January 1952 to 29 December 1952, 8/14, Minutes of the Presidium meeting with the participation of the PTŻ group of 29 January 1952, unpagued.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium, with the participation of representatives of the PTŻ group of 28 January 1952.

Of all the unknowns, one thing was obvious: that the conflict was ongoing, and was now moving into a new stage. The threats from the TSKŻ's Board of Directors could do little to help: "If there are indeed symptoms of cliques [arising] in the theatre, administrative measures will have to be taken against them".⁸⁴ Only Hersz Smolar tried to see something positive in such a complicated situation: "These statements indicate the high level of the speakers, and so the crisis that the theatre is experiencing is a crisis of growth".⁸⁵ Ida Kamińska herself did not hold back, probably deciding that the best form of defence was attack. Contrary to the opinion of the majority, she stated that the situation was coming back under control.⁸⁶ At that time, from the position of the PTŻ management, she was able to say this because the PTŻ had just won the battle of the theatre's seat; the 'headquarters' was established in Łódź, as a result of the decision taken by the General Directorate of Theatres (GDT). However, as the future showed, this was only a short-term victory. The PTŻ management was satisfied with this state of affairs, but the actors associated with the Wrocław theatre centre and the representatives of the TSKŻ's Board of Directors who were willing to support Wrocław's aspirations felt differently. This is indicated by the topic of the headquarters, which is repeated many times in the discussions. The Jewish directors, Izaak Turkow⁸⁷ and Jakub Rotbaum, still treated the question of the seat as an open one.⁸⁸

Since the inception of the theatres in Wrocław and Łódź, some activists realised that the real problem lay not in the repertoire, personal antagonisms or conflicts over the location of the so-called base, but simply in the threat of losing the building. That is why, from the moment of nationalisation and unification of the PTŻ, the need to keep the theatre building in Wrocław in the possession of CKZP/TSKŻ recurred so often in the discussions.⁸⁹ The argument over the seat of the Wrocław theatre was a derivative of the disputes between the Łódź theatre

⁸⁴ Ibid., Minutes of the Theatre Council meeting of 17 June 1952.

⁸⁵ Ibid., Minutes of the Presidium meeting with the participation of the PTŻ team of 29 January 1952.

⁸⁶ Ibid., Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium with the participation of representatives of the PTŻ group of 28 January 1952.

⁸⁷ Ibid., A similar interpretation in the speech by M. Mirski; see *ibid.*, Minutes of the Theatre Council meeting of 13 June, 1952.

⁸⁸ Ibid., Minutes from 5 January 1953 to 9 June 1953. First half of the year, 8/14, Protocol of the National Congress of TSKŻ on 21 & 22 March 1953, unpaginated.

⁸⁹ Ibid., Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium of 23 August 1951.

group and the local TSKŻ branch with the authorities in the first half of the 1950s. The theatre building in Łódź was managed by PTŻ/TSKŻ. The problem, however, was that from the very beginning – from the moment it was put into use in 1949 – the theatrical stage in the New Theatre building was also being used by a Polish group called Teatr Nowy. This is probably why the representatives of the ZG TSKŻ were concerned about the future of the building, and from the first months of 1951 they tried to find a ‘judgement of Solomon’ for the situation, that is one that would allow the Jewish organisations (PTŻ/TSKŻ) to administer the building in Łódź, which had been built with Jewish funds, while at the same time maintaining good relations with the Polish cultural institutions (by renting the stage to the Teatr Nowy troupe).⁹⁰

A few months later it turned out that neither the pressure from the PTŻ/TSKŻ nor Łazebnik’s suggestions had contributed much to the matter: the situation of the Jewish stage in Łódź was not resolved in favour of the Jewish organisations; in fact, quite the opposite happened. This was indicated by an unequivocal order from the General Directorate of Theatres “to move the PTŻ base from Łódź to Wrocław”.⁹¹ The GDT representative, Dobrowolski, who was present at a specially organised meeting on this matter, justified the decision as follows: “The issue of the theatre’s base is related to the issue of the place where the most people are, and in this respect the most places to be served are in Lower Silesia”.⁹² In return, he promised financial assistance from the ‘higher authorities’ for the creation of the main PTŻ centre in Wrocław, and guaranteed that there would always be a place for PTŻ to perform at the Teatr Nowy in Łódź. At the end, he recalled that “the theatre in Wrocław was also built by the Jewish community”⁹³ and was still being used by Jewish institutions.

The headquarters of the Jewish theatre was relocated from Łódź to Wrocław in the second half of 1953. The PTŻ director, Ida Kamińska, suggested, probably with some exaggeration, that the blame for this was borne by ‘the Wrocław conspirators’.

⁹⁰ Ibid., Meeting of the Presidium of 19 February 1951.

⁹¹ Ibid., Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium of 29 November 1951.

⁹² Ibid., Minutes of the Presidium meeting with the participation of representatives of the PTŻ and the General Directorate of 11 December 1951.

⁹³ Ibid., Minutes of the Presidium meeting with the participation of representatives of the PTŻ and the General Directorate of 11 December 1951.

Supported by the Polish Communists and TSKŻ ZG, their goal was not only to move the headquarters to Wrocław, but above all to deprive Kamińska and Melman of any influence on the theatre.⁹⁴ Her conspiracy theories, at least in part, confirm the content of the discussions devoted to the theatre at the TSKŻ Presidium which were repeated in the first half of the 1950s. The activists from Wrocław admitted at that time that they did not have such an extensive workshop as their colleagues in Łódź. Jakub Wasserstrum⁹⁵ agreed with this statement, but he believed that regardless of this, it was necessary and necessary to maintain the “base of the creative work of the PTŻ in Wrocław”.⁹⁶ If any problems arose – as he himself admitted – the matter could reach the Council of Ministers. The last idea was confirmed by Ida Kamińska herself, who in her memoirs described the subject of locating the theatre’s base in Wrocław as follows: “The Ministry of Culture picked up on this idea because they wanted to make room for the Teatr Nowy team in the building in Łódź, as it had had great artistic achievements. TSKŻ wanted to do the ministry a favour, and presented the argument that more Jews live in Lower Silesia (whose capital is Wrocław)”.⁹⁷ The move was unplanned, and that is why the theatre significantly exceeded its budget that year, despite the thorough implementation of the plan. The transport of equipment, decor, costumes, and so on consumed a large sum, and blew a hole in the PTŻ’s budget.

At least some of the people involved in the Jewish theatre issue gave an accurate diagnosis, claiming that the PTŻ’s move to Wrocław, as forced through by the GDT, should be treated as the first step on the way to ‘Polish forces’ taking over the Teatr Nowy building in Łódź. This was indicated by further moves and pressure from the government. In mid-1954, the Łódź Municipal National Council made ‘a request’ of the PTŻ/TSKŻ to make the building of the Teatr Nowy available to another Polish ensemble, the Opera Studio.⁹⁸ Soon after, GDT ordered the PTŻ management to “hand

⁹⁴ Kamińska, *Moje życie, mój teatr*, Warszawa 1995, p. 211.

⁹⁵ Jakub Wasserstrum (1905–93), an activist of the KPP in the interwar period. During the Second World War in the USSR. In 1946 he returned to Poland. Head of the Propaganda Department at WKŻ in Wrocław. PPR/PZPR instructor. In 1950–3 he headed the TSKŻ in Wrocław, from 1953 he was a member of the TSKŻ Board. In 1969, he emigrated to Israel, and in 1976 to Sweden (A. Grabski, *Działalność komunistów*, p. 70).

⁹⁶ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes from 8 January 1951 to 31 December 1951, 8/13, Minutes of the Presidium meeting of 23 August 1951, unpagged.

⁹⁷ I. Kamińska, *Moje życie*, p. 211.

⁹⁸ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes from 4 January 1954 to 28 December 1954, 8/16, Protocol no. 46 of the Presidium meeting of 19 June 1954, unpagged.

over the administration of the theatre in Łódź to the Teatr Nowy”.⁹⁹ The takeover of the facility was complemented by a frontal attack by representatives of the Łódź RN and the head of the GDT on the PTŻ/TSKŻ during a meeting of the Presidium of TSKŻ in January 1955. Apart from all the arguments presented earlier (a small Jewish community, financial problems, the low number of performances by the Jewish theatre company), their demand was also supported – as they explained – by the central authorities (both party and government). The Polish side recognised that the Teatr Nowy issue was ‘of a delicate nature’. It was argued, therefore, that taking over a building ‘built with funds from the Jewish community’ could ‘provoke unwanted comments’. That is why it was suggested to the Jewish interlocutors that any initiative explaining withdrawal from the ‘New Theatre’ should officially come from their side: “The conclusion [...] must be understood by the Society, and there must be help in implementing it”.¹⁰⁰ On this occasion, and certainly not by chance, it was once again reminded that the Jews already had ‘their own’ theatre building in Wrocław. The overwhelming majority of Jewish interlocutors were against any ‘surrender’, though, especially in this form and under such pressure. In practice, this did not change much, as the conclusion closing the meeting stated that the PTŻ would eventually “abandon the Teatr Nowy stage”. All the members of the ZG TSKŻ attending the meeting signed it. In return, the Łódź Municipal National Council promised to help the local branch of the TSKŻ to obtain some club rooms, and the GDT to implement the plans made by Kamińska and Melman:¹⁰¹ namely, the final merger of the theatre companies from Lower Silesia and Łódź, and the transfer of the PTŻ to Warsaw.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Ibid., Minutes of the Presidium meeting of 31 August 1954.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Minutes of meetings from 7 January 1955 to 13 December 1955, 8/17, Protocol no. 6 of the Presidium meeting of 26 January 1955, unpaginated.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Minutes of meetings from 7 January 1955 to 13 December 1955, 8/17, Protocol no. 6 of the Presidium meeting of 26 January 1955. The members of the Management Board of TSKŻ were present at the meeting: Smolar, Sfar, Zachariasz, Wasserstrum, Gurwicz, Łazebnik, Cieszyński, Felhendler, Fiszgrund, Heller, Goldfinger, Olicki, Korman. Representatives of the Łódź branch of TSKŻ: Web i Kramarz.

¹⁰² K. Pudło, ‘Zarys życia zbiorowego ludności żydowskiej na Dolnym Śląsku (1950–1989)’, *Sprawy Narodowościowe* 1989, no. 1 (4), p. 102. Several months later, in 1956, the TSKŻ’s representatives in Łódź, Libo and Rogoziński, explained the loss of the New Theatre building as follows: “We do not need this building for our work, but due to its commissioning, certain nationalistic moods have arisen. We cannot separate ourselves from the general population of the city, and refuse to donate the building to the theatre and opera just because we paid for its construction” (ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes of meetings for the period from 2 January 1956 to 27 December 1956, 8/18, Minutes of the TSKŻ’s 3rd National Congress on 15–16 April 1956, unpaginated).

The change of seat of the PTŻ was at least in part a proof of the commitment – and more importantly – the effectiveness of Ida Kamińska. She pointed out that the PTŻ under her was more independent than the TSKŻ under the government – a body which, moreover, was still seen by some members of the latter as abusive. It was stated that things were still going wrong in the theatre: “The theatre has its own policy, it is detached from the Society. We have no influence on its travels or its repertoire”.¹⁰³ Dawid Sfarid assessed the situation differently: “Recognising the merits of the Jewish theatre and its high ideological and artistic level, our government has decided to move its base to the capital. This is a promotion that makes all Jewish society proud”. Aware that this was the beginning of the road leading from the unification of the PTŻ, he added: “The more clearly we put the matter in place, at the beginning, the more correctly we will be able to resolve it in the future”.¹⁰⁴ Kamińska once again did not hold back during this discussion: “The theatre has the impression that the Society is treating it with a certain envy”.¹⁰⁵ And then she listed the mistakes – financial, organisational and programmatic – made by ‘authoritative individuals’ from the TSKŻ. This discussion only lacked... a rational assessment of the situation. And although everyone knew about it, it was only behind the scenes of the TSKŻ’s final Plenum in Wrocław that one of the delegates dared to say: “Many things are being done in our propaganda for purely representational purposes. One example of this is the relocation of the seat of the Jewish theatre to Warsaw, while the Jewish population is mostly concentrated in Lower Silesia”.¹⁰⁶

The case of the building in Wrocław arose in parallel with the loss of the building of the Teatr Nowy in Łódź and the relocation of the PTŻ to Warsaw. This combination of events forced the TSKŻ to initiate efforts to do more than just administer or use the building for its statutory activities. As Smolar put it at the end of 1955: “We have no proof that we are the owners of the theatre building, so we must become them in reality”.¹⁰⁷ In practice, the activists of the Society – both those from Warsaw and those

¹⁰³ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes of meetings for the period from 2 January 1956 to 27 December 1956, 8/18, Protocol no. 15 of the Presidium meeting of 14 April 1956, unpagged.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, Minutes of the TSKŻ’s 3rd National Congress on 15–16 April 1956.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*; also *ibid.*, Protocol no. 18 of the Presidium meeting of 24 April 1956.

¹⁰⁶ AŻIH, TSKŻ, 285, Protocol from the extended Plenum of the TSKŻ in Wrocław of 6–7 May 1956, unpagged.

¹⁰⁷ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes of meetings from 7 January 1955 to 13 December 1955, 8/17, Minutes of the Presidium meeting of 26 November 1955.

from Wrocław – did not know the formal and legal status of the Wrocław building; or they had perhaps forgotten that as of July 1953, by the decision of the Ministry of Culture (that is, when the PTŻ was formally based in Wrocław), the building had officially been taken over by the Central Management of Theatres.¹⁰⁸ It was reported unofficially that it was still operating as an independent artistic enterprise, not subject to any higher authority or external supervision.¹⁰⁹

The changes in the PTŻ's operation ran parallel to the systemic transformations in Poland from the second half of the 1950s. The programme of social indoctrination weakened, and the general public felt a sense that the ideological straitjacket was loosening. The attitude of the Party and society towards the Jewish national minority began to change. Phobias and aversion towards the Jews, which had hitherto been inhibited by the ruling apparatus, began to emerge.¹¹⁰ To some extent, these factors forced the TSKŻ to be open to the needs and problems of the community it represented. One such was the case of the Estera Rachela Kamińska DTŻ. At the end of 1955 Fiszgrund suggested changing the previous name of this centre to the Estera Rachela Kamińska House of Culture; this was to be the first step on the way to taking over the building and using it for the needs of the Society. At this point, the plan was to take over the previously unused rooms and place the club and all the TSKŻ troupes and associations operating in Wrocław in the building on Dubois Street. In addition, the offices presently on Włodkowska Street were to be moved to the administration building. The Society should return the premises it had been using so far back to the municipal authorities. In its contacts with the Wrocław authorities, it was decided to “make it clear [...] We

¹⁰⁸ AŻIH, TSKŻ, 1, Decision of the Ministry of Culture and Art addressed to the ZG TSKŻ, 8 May 1953, unpagued.

¹⁰⁹ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes of meetings from 7 January 1955 to 13 December 1955, 8/17, Minutes of the Presidium meeting of 26 November 1955.

¹¹⁰ Within the government, as within society as a whole after 1956, two tendencies in the approach to nationality issues clashed. One of them aimed at marginalising the problem of minorities and drew upon the pre-1956 policy. The second, related to the circles inclined to liberalise the system, emphasised the need for the free development of the individual national groups. Whereas at the beginning the latter concept held a clear advantage, then by the late 1950s the former became much more prominent. This was expressed in pressure from the state to promote the current ideology in minority circles, to emphasise the supremacy of the party, and to limit all forms of independence. For more see Szydzisz, *Spolecznosc żydowska*, pp. 62–65; also: Berendt, *Życie żydowskie w Polsce*, pp. 291–314; P. Machcewicz, *Polski rok 1956*, Warszawa 1993, pp. 56–58.

want to carry out our work in these buildings”.¹¹¹ And in the event that the Wrocław Municipal National Council refused to hear the TSKŻ’s case, it was intended to immediately “turn to the superior authorities”, that is, the Voivodship Office (*Urząd Wojewódzki*).¹¹²

The TSKŻ’s Wrocław activists hoped that in a few weeks it would be possible to renovate and put into use the building of the House of Culture and its administrative rooms. But these plans all came to nothing. As had already happened in the 1940s, it quickly turned out that the Society had neither the financial resources nor the support from the city: “The delegation of the [TSKŻ] branch went to the Municipal National Council [in Wrocław] for subsidies to this end. [...] [The Municipal National Council] ordered them to sell the piano and allocate the amount received to renovation”.¹¹³ Support was still sought from the Office of the Council of Ministers – but unsuccessfully.¹¹⁴ The only option left was to reduce costs and carry out renovation in the so-called economic system.¹¹⁵ Therefore, some of the planned work was abandoned, some was not completed, and the rooms which were put into use were equipped with equipment transferred from the premises which the TSKŻ had previously used. Despite all the troubles – after a delay of 18 months (September 1957) – the TSKŻ club was opened at a specially organised ceremony in the building of the Estery Rachela Kamińska House of Culture. The ceremony was summarised as follows: “We can see a new willingness to work [in the Wrocław branch of the TSKŻ]”.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes of the sessions for the period from 2 January 1956 to 27 December 1956, 8/18, Minutes of the Presidium meeting of 1 February 1956; also Protocol no. 18 of the Presidium meeting of 24 April 1956, unpagged.

¹¹² AAN, SSZ, 476/26, Information of the Committee of the Propaganda Department of the KW on the activities of the TSKŻ in the Wrocław voivodship, 1955, p. 294; also ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes of meetings for the period from 2 January 1956 to 27 December 1956, 8/18, Minutes of the meeting of the Presidium of 1 February 1956.

¹¹³ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes of meetings for the period from 2 January 1956 to 27 December 1956, 8/18, Protocol no. 22 of the Presidium meeting of 26 May 1956, unpagged.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Minutes of meetings for the period from 3 January 1957 to 23 December 1957, 8/19, Protocol no. 17 of the Presidium meeting of 25 March 1957.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Minutes of meetings for the period from 2 January 1956 to 27 December 1956, 8/18, Protocol no. 35 of the Presidium meeting of 18 September 1956; also Protocol no. 35 of the Presidium meeting of 18 September 1956, unpagged.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Minutes of meetings for the period from 3 January 1957 to 23 December 1957, 8/19, Protocol no. 44 of the Presidium meeting of 19 September 1957.

It quickly turned out that this was just the beginning of the TSKŻ's struggles with the Wrocław authorities. The problem of the theatre building returned quite regularly, at intervals of several years. And so in the first days of 1960, the Board of Directors of the TSKŻ's Wrocław branch submitted a request to the Presidium of the District National Council Wrocław-Old Town "for consent to be granted to the permanent management and use" of the building at 28 Świdnicka Street.¹¹⁷ Such actions were partly forced by the memory of the circumstances in which the theatre building in Łódź was lost, and partly in reaction to the 1958 Act 'On the rules and procedure for the expropriation of real estate'.¹¹⁸ The TSKŻ was not the owner of the building, but rather an institution using it to implement its statutory activity, and which was making efforts to implement the provision on the right of perpetual usufruct. Until this point (since 1953), the GDT had been the legal owner. Therefore, it was very likely that the subject of the dispute – the building of the Estera Rachela Kamińska House of Culture – would be able to change its user.

A few months later, but still in the same year of 1960, the head of the Social and Administrative Department of the Office of Internal Affairs in Wrocław conducted a thorough inspection of the local branch of the TSKŻ. In his final assessment, the assessor – while maintaining a neutral tone – emphasised the commitment and good organisation of the Society's work. He probably did not know the legal status of the Jewish Cultural Centre, as he stated in his report: "The TSKŻ is

¹¹⁷ Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw (hereinafter: AIPN), the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland: legal status of the real estate in Wrocław, 5/7/9 Włodkowica Street and 28 Świdnicka Street, handed over for management and use, Protocol, decisions, appeal, resolution, contract, ciphertext, official notes, correspondence, 1961–69, 1585/7212, Letter from the Wrocław USW to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Warsaw, 21 May 1966, p. 18. The correspondence between the Wrocław branch of TSKŻ and the Wrocław-Old Town District National Council mentioned the properties on Włodkowica and Świdnicka Streets. The TSKŻ allegedly stated that "it has been using the above-mentioned properties since 1945, and before the last war the Jewish Community was the owner". It is not known whether this argument was used directly by TSKŻ, or whether it was a secondary report, interpreted and processed by the USW in Wrocław. While the property on Włodkowica Street did actually belong to the Jewish Community during the interwar period, this was certainly not the case with the Kammer Lichtspiele cinema.

¹¹⁸ The Act of 12 March 1958 on the rules and procedure for the expropriation of real estate, *Dziennik Ustaw* (Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland; hereinafter: Dz.U.) 1958, no. 17, item 70 (<http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19580170070>, accessed 2 February 2018).

the owner of the building of the Jewish Theatre on 28 Świdnicka Street”.¹¹⁹ There are many indications that this inspection served not only to assess the TSKŻ itself, but also its assets. The ‘Jewish Community Centre’ – in the opinion of the head of the Department – was the most valuable element of the society’s inventory. Its value was estimated at over 1.6 million złoty, which was almost 85 per cent of the Wrocław branch of the TSKŻ’s entire assets.¹²⁰ These claims by the representative of the administrative authority (about ‘the owner’ and ‘ownership’) were true, but only partially so. In another letter from that period, albeit from a higher authority (the Ministry of Municipal Economy [*Ministerstwo Gospodarki Komunalnej*]), it was clear that the ‘Jewish’ real estate in Wrocław (including the House of Culture) was owned by the State Treasury and directly subordinate to the GDT. It was not until the decision by the Minister of Municipal Economy of 12 August 1961 that the facility was handed over to the management and use of the TSKŻ. In addition, “financial conditions for the use of the property” were to be established.¹²¹ On 1 October 1961, on behalf of the ministry, the Presidium of the District National Council of Wrocław-Old Town awarded the TSKŻ Wrocław branch the disputed buildings “free of charge [...] for their permanent management and use”.¹²²

In 1963, the conviction prevailing within ZG TSKŻ was that the fate of the Estera Rachela Kamińska House of Culture (referred to interchangeably in Polish and

¹¹⁹ AIPN, Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (Wrocław branch), activity audits, Minutes, resolutions, orders, reports, information, official notes, 1960–84, 1585/7197, Protocol from the inspection carried out in the TSKŻ’s municipal branch in Wrocław at 28 Świdnicka Street, from 23 June to 14 July 1960, pp. 8–9.

¹²⁰ Ibid., Protocol from the inspection carried out in the municipal branch of TSKŻ in Wrocław at 28 Świdnicka Street, from 23 June to 14 July 1960, p. 13.

¹²¹ AIPN, Socio-Cultural Society of Jews in Poland: legal status of the property in Wrocław, 5/7/9 Włodkowska Street and 28 Świdnicka Street handed over for management and use, Protocol, decisions, appeal, resolution, contract, ciphertext, official notes, correspondence, 1961–69, 1585/7212, Letter of the Minister of Municipal Economy to ZG TSKŻ in Warsaw, 12 August 1961, p. 1. The legal basis for the decision taken by the Minister of Municipal Economy was as follows: Regulation of the Council of Ministers of 2 August 1949 on the transfer of real estate necessary for the implementation of national economic plans, Dz.U. 1949, no. 47, item 354, and the Act of 12 March 1958 on the principles and procedure of expropriation of real estate, Dz.U. 1958, no. 17, item 70.

¹²² Ibid., Protocol on the handover to permanent management and use of a property located in Wrocław, f. 44. District Management of Wrocław-Old Town Residential Buildings was represented by director Michał Lewicki and legal counsel Juliusz Jablecki. The TSKŻ branch in Wrocław was represented by Mozes Szafranek and Leon Dratewka.

Jewish documentation as the Jewish Theatre) was a foregone conclusion. Perhaps this is why, when the ZG TSKŻ chairman Leopold Domb spoke about the theatre at the end of that year, his speech lacked even a hint of anxiety. The part of his statement devoted to theatre was definitely in the spiritual sphere: “The Jewish theatre has become one of those cultural factors that determine our Jewish life. [...] It teaches love for the Jewish nation, for its past”.¹²³ The speaker was only a little regretful that theatre, as a culture-creating institution, was too weakly linked to the socialist system and the ideology of so-called stabilisation in the 1960s, that the theatre lacked young actors, and that Jewish theatre only rarely gave performances in small centres.¹²⁴ This statement lacked only the information that there was a special place in the country where the State Jewish Theatre performed most often: in the very *Dom Kultury im. Estery Racheli Kamińskiej* in Wrocław. At that time, the building fulfilled a very important mission: it served to uphold Jewish culture and its development. An official of the Wrocław USW wrote to the Presidium of the Municipal National Council (PMRN) after an inspection in mid-1964: “The tradition of this division (of the Wrocław TSKŻ) may also include the well-known artistic Friday evenings held at the E. R. Kamińska House of Culture. Indeed, larger events are organised in the House of Culture”.¹²⁵ The building was also treated as a common good. It served not only the TSKŻ, Jewish artists, music and theatre groups (both professional and amateur), but the stage and rooms were rented to Polish theatres (the Dramatic and the Chochlik puppet theatre), minority organisations (Germans, Lithuanians, Greeks, Ukrainians) and Polish institutions and organisations (the building hosted, among others, district workshops for the Polish Post and Telecommunications, the Festival of Military Song and training sessions for the Fire Service Provincial Headquarters).¹²⁶ The guests, however, were from Wrocław. Perhaps this openness posed a real problem in the future for the TSKŻ and the Estera Rachela Kamińska House of Culture.

¹²³ Summary of L. Domba’s lecture.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ AIPN, Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (Wrocław branch), activity audits, Minutes, resolutions, ordinances, reports, information, official notes, 1960–84, 1585/7197, p. 42. Report on the inspection carried out on 29 June to 3 July 1964 at TSKŻ, Wrocław branch.

¹²⁶ Kałużna, ‘Teatr żydowski’, p. 247.

It can be assumed that the activists of the Wrocław TSKŻ treated the steps taken by the Wrocław-Old Town District National Council as a pure formality, which brought to an end the proceedings concerning the theatre initiated back in January 1960. However, as the future was to show, the effectiveness of the Society's efforts and activities to date lay in the sphere of faith and hope. Less than (or perhaps as much as) four years passed from the official takeover of the building, when in February 1965 the Presidium of the Wrocław-Old Town District National Council initiated the next phase of disputes. Over the next several months, the TSKŻ was flooded with reports which all led to only one conclusion: the Society should be deprived of the theatre building. At this stage, the conflict was also a test of strength.¹²⁷

The Wrocław authorities, speaking openly against the TSKŻ, based their attacks on the 'Regulation on the change of certain rights to land into the right of perpetual usufruct or the usufruct of the Minister of Municipal Economy' of January 1962.¹²⁸ The Provincial National Council did not challenge the ministerial decision taken less than five months beforehand (12 August 1961), but it stated that the TSKŻ had not complied with the formalities. Here is a sample of the official party meticulousness: "The TSKŻ has not yet submitted an application for perpetual usufruct, so [...] there is no basis for the free use of the above-mentioned real estate". There was also a warning: "If the TSKŻ does not submit such an application, we will believe that it will therefore give up further use of the property".¹²⁹ There is no doubt that

¹²⁷ In the 1960s, the party withdrew from its more liberal nationalities policy, and the government's approach to the TSKŻ changed along with this trend. This could have been related to the ongoing 'nationalisation' of the personnel at the Ministry of the Interior. The model in which societies represented the interests of minorities was rejected, and they were ordered to implement the demands of the authorities. The positions of the party representatives operating in their ranks were strengthened, and proper 'ideological development' was taken care of. The TSKŻ was also subject to these processes. On the one hand, the activists of the society were quickly forced to return to the role of representing the party's interests in the Jewish community and ordered to combat all 'negative tendencies' (Zionism, nationalism, religiosity); and on the other hand, efforts were made to control the Jewish population to a greater extent than before. The stage of trust in the Jewish party activists had come to an end. For more see Szydzisz, *Spoleczność żydowska*, pp. 65–70.

¹²⁸ Regulation of the Minister of Municipal Economy of 26 January 1962 on the change of certain rights to land into the right of perpetual usufruct or usufruct, Dz.U. 1962, no. 15, item 67 (<http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19620150067>, accessed 2 February 2018).

¹²⁹ AIPN, Socio-Cultural Society of Jews in Poland: legal status of the property in Wrocław, 5/7/9 Włodkowica Street and 28 Świdnicka Street, handed over for management and use, Protocol, decisions, appeal, resolution, contract, ciphertext, official notes, correspondence, 1961–69, 1585/7212, Letter of the Department of Communal and Housing Economy of the PRN in Wrocław to ZG TSKŻ in Warsaw, 24 February 1965, p. 5.

these top-down actions should have been taken in the TSKŻ's own interest. In practice, however, the Municipal National Council, as an institution operating within the law and working in the interests of its citizens, also failed to meet its obligations. The law and regulation issued by the head of the Ministry of Municipal Economy was recalled after a delay of only four years.

Meanwhile, the TSKŻ did everything to make up the shortcomings. Thus, letters on this case were sent, but the Department of Municipal and Housing Economy of the Ministry of National Education refused, using the key sentences: 'on [the TSKŻ's] failure to take over [the property] into perpetual usufruct', 'expiry of the right of use',¹³⁰ 'payment of rent [by the TSKŻ] in accordance with the applicable rates' and 'initiation of enforcement proceedings'.¹³¹ Regardless of this, the Wrocław authorities started looking for other arguments that would help close the case of the Jewish Cultural Centre. It was perhaps coincidence that the problem began to worsen, and that the attacks on TSKŻ went hand in hand with claims against the building from other Wrocław theatres. Other institutions became involved in the dispute: directly, the Cultural Department of the PMRN, and indirectly the Dramatic theatre and the Chochlik puppet theatre, which had previously rented rooms from the TSKŻ. The predominant view at that time was that of the PMRN departments that the TSKŻ was not using "the theatre building[...] as intended"¹³² because there was no theatre: the city should take the building over and hand it over to Polish cultural institutions.

There are also other threads in the inter-administrative correspondence from the mid-1960s. In a letter from the Wrocław-based WGKiM¹³³ to its counterpart in Warsaw, the question was asked: was the building granted to the State Jewish Theatre in Warsaw treated as compensation for the Wrocław theatre building?¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Ibid., Letter from the Department of Communal and Housing Economy of the Wrocław PRN to the ZG TSKŻ in Warsaw, 23 March 1965, p. 6.

¹³¹ Ibid., Letter from the Department of Municipal and Housing Economy of the Wrocław PRN to the Wrocław-Old Town District Board of Residential Buildings, 27 April 1965, p. 8.

¹³² Ibid., Letter from the Department of Municipal and Housing Economy of the Wrocław PRN to the ZG TSKŻ in Warsaw, 10 June 1965, p. 9.

¹³³ *Wydział Gospodarki Komunalnej i Mieszkaniowej* (Department of Municipal and Housing Economy).

¹³⁴ Ibid., Letter of the Presidium of the Capital City Council, Department of Municipal and Housing Economy in Warsaw to the Presidium of the National Council of the city of Wrocław, Internal Affairs Office, 10 August 1965, p. 11.

Most of the WGKiM's correspondence contained more or less critical assessments of the TSKŻ for charging (too high) fees from Polish theatres for renting the theatre rooms of the Estera Rachela Kamińska House of Culture. But there was a contradiction in this documentation. The top-line statement was: "The building is not being used as intended". Proof was demanded from the TSKŻ that the DTŻ/DK "had been built at the expense of all the resources and resources of the Jewish community": construction cost estimates, documentation of collection campaigns, cadastral maps, estimated data of the building's value.¹³⁵

In different, though equally critical terms, the position of the government in the Department of Culture of the National Heritage Board of Poland was justified: "The takeover of this building is important [...] in order to protect it against further decapitalisation. [...] The TSKŻ will never have sufficient funds to carry out a major renovation, but after this facility has been taken over, the appropriate amounts can be included in the [city] budget".¹³⁶ The opinion was rather subjective; that is, it was true to the extent that it met the expectations and needs of the client – the administrative authority. Undoubtedly, for several years the building had been heavily exploited by the artistic communities, both Jewish and Polish. As a public utility site, it had to be kept in proper condition. In the era of 'real socialism', this was a difficult undertaking. There was a shortage not only of funds, but also the necessary materials. Regardless of all the nuances, in 1965 there could be only one effect of the activities carried out by the Wrocław authorities: "They decided to take over the hall for the cultural needs of the city".¹³⁷

By the end of 1965, the PMRN in Wrocław might have felt as if it had finally closed the issue of the 'Jewish theatre' – under the influence of actions supported by appropriate argumentation – if not for the prosaic reality of political life, that is, the fact that the party had participated in this conflict. Officially, the PZPR was an impartial observer, but in practice (and behind the scenes) it was the arbiter and decision maker in the disputes which took place in 1960–66. Thanks to party pressure (and perhaps, back then, the Jewish activists' faith in internationalist

¹³⁵ Ibid., Letter of the Internal Affairs Office at the PRN of Wrocław to the Ministry of the Interior, Social and Administrative Department, 15 January 1966, pp. 12–14.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 11–14, Letter from the Office of the Interior of the Wrocław PRN to the Ministry of the Interior, Social and Administrative Department, 15 January 1966.

¹³⁷ Ibid., Note on the building of the Jewish theatre in Wrocław, January 1966, p. 16.

ideas), in January 1966 the Wrocław authorities took the TSKŻ's earlier efforts into account (starting in January 1960), and established a new legal status for the building at 28 Świdnicka Street in favour of the TSKŻ's Wrocław branch.¹³⁸ In March that year, its chairman, Brafman, officially thanked the Polish comrades during the Society's 5th Congress: "The local party and government bodies have evaluated the work of the Wrocław branch positively, and, especially recently, have provided a great deal of attention and help to the Society".¹³⁹

By the way, it is worth recalling again that the disputes in Wrocław between the PMRN and the TSKŻ had their source (at least initially) in an improper flow of information between them. The officials did not admit their guilt, although it turned out that it was their fault that the main addressees (the Municipal and Housing Economy Department in Wrocław and the Wrocław-Old Town District National Council) had no evidence in the case, specifically the documentation produced by the TSKŻ in 1960. It was only in mid-1966 that it turned out that the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Warsaw was aware of the subject, and that the documentation was in the possession of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Wrocław.¹⁴⁰ Even if the negligence on the part of the Ministry of the Interior/the Office of Internal Affairs was not deliberate, just as the failure by the TSKŻ's Wrocław branch to take appropriate actions was a consequence of the organisational mess, the protracted conflict was still a derivative of it. Leopold Domb aptly summarised this part of the theatre disputes. In 1966, during a meeting of the Wrocław branch of TSKŻ and the local secretary of the PZPR Provincial Committee, he said: "If the theatre is taken away from the Jews in Wrocław, it will be demolished. I am aware that there was no political ground for this, and that economic considerations prevailed. If the government were to measure its activity in financial measures, then we too are in deficit. The nationality policy cannot be counted with money".¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes of the sessions for the period from 12 January 1966 to 21 December 1966, 8/28, Minutes of the 5th Congress of the TSKŻ held on 5 and 6 March 1966.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., Letter from the USW in Wrocław to the Ministry of the Interior in Warsaw, 21 May 1966, p. 18; also *ibid.*, Letter from the USW at Wrocław PRN to the Ministry of the Interior, Social and Administrative Department, 15 January 1966, p. 12.

¹⁴¹ AP Wr, KW PZPR, 74/XIV/35, Note from the meeting of the TSKŻ City Board in Wrocław with the Secretary of the KW PZPR, comrade J. Faleńczyk, 26 February 1966, pp. 25–26.

It is not known how the comrade secretary received these words, or how he responded to the manifestations of anti-Semitism mentioned during this meeting by Jewish comrades from Wrocław.¹⁴² It soon turned out, however, that the case of the Kamińska House of Culture in Wrocław had become associated with the ‘national policy’ of the Polish ‘patriots’.

Act Three

For the Jewish diaspora in Poland, the so-called stabilisation came to an end in mid-1967. This was due to factors including the outbreak of the Six-Day War (also known as the Third Israeli-Arab War or the June War), the Polish government’s announcement of its position (7 June), and in consequence (following the position of the USSR) the severing of diplomatic relations with Israel (12 June). This sequence of events was closed by Władysław Gomułka’s speech at the 6th Congress of Trade Unions (19 June), during which he demanded that Polish citizens of Jewish nationality adopt an unequivocal attitude towards the Middle East conflict.¹⁴³ The position of the PZPR’s general secretary was treated by many party comrades as a permission to take a harsher line (‘tighten the course’) in relation to the Jewish national minority in the People’s Republic of Poland.¹⁴⁴ The authorities returned to the practices used in 1949–53. In the UB’s reports about the current situation in the Wrocław voivodeship, there were words about Zionist propaganda being directed against the party, socialism and the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁵ At the turn of July

¹⁴² Ibid., pp. 23–24, 26–27; also: *ibid.*, Note from the meeting of the TSKŻ Party Group in Wrocław on 21 February 1966, p. 29.

¹⁴³ D. Stola, *Kampania antysyjonistyczna w Polsce. 1967–1968*, Warszawa 2000, p. 274.

¹⁴⁴ Selected literature on the events of 1967–8 include: J. Eisler, *Marzec 1968. Geneza, przebieg, konsekwencje*, Warszawa 1991; *id.*, *Polski rok 1968*, Warszawa 2006; Ł. Kamiński, ‘Sytuacja polityczna w latach 1957–1967’, in *Dolny Śląsk. Monografia historyczna*, ed. W. Wrześniński, Wrocław 2006; *Marzec 1968. Trzydzieści lat później*, ed. M. Kula, P. Osęka, M. Zaremba, Warszawa 1968; P. Osęka, *Syjonisci, inspiratorzy, wichrzyciele. Obraz wroga w propagandzie marca 1968*, Warszawa 1999; W. Sęczyk, ‘Obraz Marca ’68 na Dolnym Śląsku w prasie lokalnej’, *Sobótka* 2001, no. 1; *id.*, *Marzec ’68 w publicystyce PRL. Studium z dziejów propagandy*, Wałbrzych 2009; *Spółeczność żydowska w PRL przed kampanią antysemitką lat 1967–1968 i po niej*, ed. G. Berendt, Warszawa 2009; W. Suleja, ‘Wrocław’, in *Oblicza Marca 1968*, ed. K. Rokicki, S. Stępień, Warszawa 2004; W. Suleja, *Dolnośląski marzec ’68*, Warszawa 2006; W. Suleja, ‘Dolnośląscy “syjonisci”’ [The Lower Silesian ‘Zionists’], *Plotkies Spring*, 2011, no. 47; J.Z. Wiszniewicz, *Z Polski do Izraela: rozmowy z pokoleniem ’68*, Warszawa 1992; *ead.*, *Życie przecięte. Opowieści pokolenia marca*, Wołowiec 2009.

¹⁴⁵ For more, see Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance Branch in Wrocław

1967, a wave of demands emerged from a low-ranking official from Wrocław's USW, (effectively) extorting the members of the TSKŻ's presidium of Wrocław to express 'full solidarity' with the position of the party and the Polish government on the assessment of the situation in the Middle East: "It is high time for [them] to make a clear and decisive statement, especially since most of them are members of the Polish United Workers' Party, and the position taken by the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, Comrade Gomułka, should be duly implemented by them".¹⁴⁶ It soon turned out that this was only a prelude to what was to happen in the first months of 1968.

Back in mid-September 1967, the chairman of the TSKŻ, Leopold Domb, hoped that the situation was under control. He was probably looking for the period of pressure to come to an end when he said: "In their talks with us, the party and state institutions have constantly emphasised their positive attitude towards the Society, towards its further existence and activities. This gives us faith that we will overcome all difficulties and hold onto all our achievements so far".¹⁴⁷ Meanwhile, a few days before Domb's speech, the Wrocław-based USW had begun activities related to the issue of the 'Jewish theatre'. This started with a quarrel between TSKŻ activists and Zygmunt Spangilet, the 'director of the Jewish Theatre in Wrocław'.¹⁴⁸ A USW official urged the latter to cooperate more closely with the KW MO and collect materials incriminating Samuel Brafman (the TSKŻ's secretary in Wrocław) and Sznycer (the TSKŻ's chief accountant in Wrocław). He suggested that they were deriving material benefits from each event organised

(hereinafter: AIPN Wr), Reports on the activities of the 2nd Department, 053/1373, Report on the work of the 2nd Department of the Security Service of the KWMO in Wrocław for 1968 (secret special significance), pp. 91-93; also: Suleja, 'Dolnośląscy "syjoniści"'.
¹⁴⁶ AIPN, Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (Wrocław branch), activity audits, Minutes, resolutions, ordinances, reports, information, official notes, 1960-84, 1585/7197, Memo from an interview conducted by the head of the USW, M.Sc. J. Orzeszyna, with the chairman and secretary of the municipal branch of TSKŻ in Wrocław, comrades M. Szafranek and S. Brafman, on the Branch Board's adoption of a resolution condemning Israel's aggression against Arab countries, p. 53.

¹⁴⁷ AIPN, Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland, meetings of divisional secretaries and party activists. Minutes, theses, information, official notes, 1585/7168, Report on the meeting of TSKŻ divisional secretaries on 18 September 1967, p. 6.

¹⁴⁸ AIPN, Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (Wrocław branch), activity audits, Minutes, resolutions, ordinances, reports, information, official notes, 1960-84, 1585/7197, Memo on the research carried out at the TSKŻ Branch in Wrocław, 13 September 1967, pp. 70-72.

in the 'theatre'. Applying such methods to the head of the Kamińska House of Culture was probably not very effective, since during a meeting with the case officer he said: "Obtaining up-to-date evidence [...] poses some difficulties, because the secretary and the accountant have extensive experience in this field, and formally they have maintained the documentation well".¹⁴⁹ Such activities were indirectly related to the increased surveillance of the Jewish community by the SB.¹⁵⁰

The fact that the authorities would soon launch a frontal attack on the Jewish community was best evidenced by a note which, at the same time, very unambiguously presented its position on the building at 28 Świdnicka Street, "[...] on the acquisition of real estate located in the city of Wrocław, allegedly owned by a social organisation, for your benefit".¹⁵¹ The author of the document, A. Szebeko, pointed out that the issue of the TSKŻ's 'alleged ownership' could be resolved on the basis of the 1962 regulation of the Council of Ministers on the transfer of land in cities and settlements.¹⁵² This is how he justified the purposefulness and effectiveness of the proceedings: "The transfer of real estate on the basis of [these] regulations is a very convenient way for the State to take over this real estate, as it ensures speed of action. The effectiveness of this action – in the event of disagreement on the part of the social organisation which owns the property – is assured".¹⁵³ He emphasised: "The rules for settling the value of real estate are also simple: compensation for land is determined as in the case of expropriation

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., Official note from the survey carried out at the TSKŻ Branch in Wrocław, 13 September 1967, p. 71.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 70–72; see also: AIPN, Operational documentation on the People's Club at TSKŻ in Wrocław, 053/1480, Official note, Wrocław, 23 September 1966; AIPN Wr, Operational correspondence regarding Zionism, 053/1481, vol. 2, vol. 5, p. 30.

¹⁵¹ AIPN, Socio-Cultural Society of Jews in Poland: legal status of the property in Wrocław, 5/7/9 Włodkowska Street and 28 Świdnicka Street, handed over for management and use, Protocol, decisions, appeal, resolution, contract, ciphertext, official notes, correspondence, 1961–69, 1585/7212, p. 20, 'Note to comrade director Z. Orłowski on the takeover of your real estate located in the city of Wrocław, allegedly owned by a social organisation', Warsaw, 16 November 1967.

¹⁵² Regulation of the Council of Ministers on the transfer of land in cities and housing estates, Dz.U. 1962, no. 35, item 159 (<http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19620350159>, accessed 2 February 2018).

¹⁵³ AIPN, Socio-Cultural Society of Jews in Poland: legal status of the property in Wrocław, 5/7/9 Włodkowska Street and 28 Świdnicka Street, handed over for management and use. Protocol, decisions, appeal, resolution, contract, ciphertext, official notes, correspondence, 1961–69, 1585/7212, 'Note to comrade director Z. Orłowski on the takeover of your real estate located in the city of Wrocław, allegedly owned by a social organisation', Warsaw, 16 November 1967, p. 20.

of real estate, compensation for buildings is determined on the basis of their technical value minus the degree of wear. Both of these elements can be determined on the basis of the opinion of the voivodeship's experts for expropriation".¹⁵⁴ If these arguments could be treated as a plan of action, then only a pretext was needed to start the procedure of taking over the property. The reasons, methods and means of action were irrelevant: what mattered was their effect.

At the end of 1967, the Wrocław Municipal National Council did not remain passive either. More and more boldly, it demanded the transfer of other properties managed by the TSKŻ to the city, including the Jewish school, the boarding school, and the premises on Dubois Street.¹⁵⁵ Jakub Wasserstrum assessed the situation in which the Society found itself very clearly during the January meeting of the Wrocław branch's board: "The state is taking over a number of functions that the Society had previously performed".¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, he probably did not anticipate how this 'taking over' would end.

Meanwhile, against the background of the conflicts within the PZPR itself, between supporters of the liberalisation of social and political relations and their opponents, referred to as 'moczarowcy'¹⁵⁷ (who favoured the 'nationalisation' of the government), there was a radicalisation of attitudes. It soon turned out that a series of speeches made by students in Warsaw in March 1968 would form the pretext for an open fight between the party 'liberals' on one side and the 'moczarowcy' on the other. An article published in *Słowo Powszechne* and reprinted by *Wieczór Wrocławia* was another blow to the Jewish community. This publication clearly stated that the leaders of the events at the University of Warsaw came from the Babel Club.¹⁵⁸ The attack on Jewish students became a pretext to attack the entire Jewish community, known as the 'anti-Zionist campaign'.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ ATSKŻ Wa, Minutes of meetings for the period from 2 January 1968 to November 1968, 8/30, Protocol no. 1 of the Presidium meeting of 2 January 1968; also: *ibid.*, Protocol no. 2 of the meeting of the Presidium of the TSKŻ Board of Directors of 9 and 10 January, 1968.

¹⁵⁶ AP Wr, KW PZPR, 74/XIV/35, Memo from a meeting held on 27 January 1968 at the TSKŻ branch in Wrocław, f. 39.

¹⁵⁷ A reference to Mieczysław Moczar (1913–86), a wartime partisan leader and subsequent senior Communist politician, who led an anti-Semitic campaign in March 1968 to weaken the authority of then First Secretary Władysław Gomułka.

¹⁵⁸ 'Do studentów Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego', *Wieczór Wrocławia* 12 March 1968, no. 61 (reprinted from *Słowo Powszechne*).

¹⁵⁹ For more see Stola, *Kampania antyżydowska*, pp. 145–88.

At that time, the sense of the continued existence of the TSKŻ was called into question many times, and as the Society looked for support in the party, it was forced to become more and more submissive to the authorities.¹⁶⁰ The latter (including the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party) avoided contacts with the Jewish community, and treated the TSKŻ itself in an instrumental fashion.¹⁶¹ Meetings only took place in exceptional circumstances. At that time, the representatives of the PZPR and the USW (Deputy Head of the Administrative Department of the Voivodship Committee (KW) of the PZPR K. Jaśnikowski, Senior Instructor of the Administrative Department of the PZPR KW A. Żelazny, and the head of the Social and Administrative Department of the USW E. Zadrożny) at the TSKŻ's meetings were not merely present, but also extremely active. However, their main, if not their only task, was to accuse the Society's representatives of insubordination: of not fulfilling its tasks, and thus of adopting a hostile attitude towards the party and the Polish state.¹⁶²

Such actions by the authorities, together with the atmosphere created at the same time, motivated the Polish side to participate in the fight for the Kamińska House of Culture. Party activists disavowed the 'unfavourable Jewish claims' that they were influencing the course of events in 1968.¹⁶³ On every occasion, they emphasised

¹⁶⁰ AP Wr, KW PZPR, 74/XIV/35, Resolution of the TSKŻ's Board of Directors in Wrocław, adopted on 30 March 1968, p. 73.

¹⁶¹ AP Wr, KW PZPR. Administrative Department, 74/XIV/18, Official note from the meeting of the Presidium of the Board of the TSKŻ's Wrocław Branch, 15 March 1968, pp. 41–45.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, Note on the meeting with the TSKŻ delegation in Wrocław, 25 March 1968, pp. 46–49. One accusation was that the Wrocław branch did not react properly to the protests by the students in Warsaw, and did not adopt a resolution in which it definitively disassociated itself 'from the Zionists and their troubling activities'. On 30 March 1968, the Board of the Wrocław Branch adopted such a resolution. In it, they sympathised with the position of the PZPR leadership, condemned Israel's aggressive policy, and emphasised that from the very beginning the Society had opposed nationalism and fought against Zionism (AP Wr, KW PZPR, 74/XIV/35, Copy of the resolution of the TSKŻ Board in Wrocław adopted on 30 March 1968, pp. 34–35; also *ibid.*, Letter from the Administrative Department of the Provincial Committee to the Administrative Department of the Central Committee of the PZPR, 6 April 1968; p. 33; AIPN, Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (Wrocław branch), activity audits, Minutes, resolutions, ordinances, reports, information, official notes, 1960–84, 1585/7197, Resolution of the Management Board of the TSKŻ in Wrocław adopted on 30 March 1968, p. 73.

¹⁶³ AIPN Wr, Reports on the activities of the 2nd Division, 053/1373, pp. 91–93, Report on the activities of the 2nd Division of the Security Service of the KWMO in Wrocław for 1968 (secret special significance); also W. Rozenbaum, 'Kampania antysyjonistyczna w Polsce, 1967–1968', in *Plotkies*, January 2004, no. 18; Suleja, 'Dolnośląscy "syjoniści"'.

that the events related to this case had nothing to do with anti-Semitism. As in previous such skirmishes, the party representatives officially demonstrated their impartiality. However, it may be suspected that each side had already been allotted its role. The representatives of the administration from the first half of the 1960s were replaced by the party press in 1968. The party comrades treated the reports by investigative journalists from Wrocław's *Wiadomości* (Jerzy Drużycki), *Słowo Polskie* (Zofia Frąckiewicz) and *Wieczor Wrocławia* (Tadeusz Emerling) as the voice of the people's tribunes speaking on behalf of the Wrocław public. This may come as a surprise, because the actual source of all the press sensations, reports and discoveries of the 'deeper truth' were people either originating from the party or subordinate to it: PZPR activists and officials.

The editors of Wrocław's newspapers dressed the history of the theatre building in clothing tailored to the current needs. So they wrote that the takeover (and not the reconstruction) of the theatre building by Jewish organisations in the second half of the 1940s was unfounded. They treated it as a desire to appear in public life forced through by the Jews, and an expression of that community's megalomania, as if they were completely unaware of the enthusiasm with which the regional newspapers had originally reported the creation of something new in multicultural Wrocław – a Jewish theatre – and as if they were unaware of the support with which the Wrocław authorities and political parties had supported the Jewish activities; in addition, they rejected the idea that the Lower Silesian public, including many Poles, had participated in these activities. They emphasised that for years the building had been administered (deliberately omitting the term 'used') by the TSKŻ, and expressed regret that the society had been its legal owner since 1966, which was perhaps the only objective formulation. The others were rather subjective. Like a mantra, it was repeated that TSKŻ had not run a theatre company for years, so continuing to own a theatre building was at least debatable. The authors were outraged that the building had not been renovated for several years: "At 28 Świdnicka Street you can hear the constant creaking of old, uncomfortable chairs. This theatre is an old, unmodernised room. The equipment of the room and its backstage are even worse".¹⁶⁴ In addition, the

¹⁶⁴ Z. Frąckiewicz, 'Kamienicznik', *Słowo Polskie* 1968, no. 96, p. 2.

information about the incredible benefits had TSKŻ derived from subletting theatrical rooms was always provided in the form of an accusation, while at the same time the Society was blamed for not undertaking renovation work: “The TSKŻ itself, despite having millions of funds in the recent past, has never tried; the building, without renovation, will soon turn into a ruin”.¹⁶⁵ In this stream of words, the authors showed no ability to assess the TSKŻ’s activities regarding the Kamińska House of Culture more objectively.

The administrative authorities were also accused of cancelling TSKŻ’s debt for the period before obtaining the right of perpetual usufruct, as well as failing to fight for a proper place for Polish theatres in Wrocław. Sometimes the authors of these articles allowed themselves to be exceptionally independent – in all cases they used the word ‘*kamienicznik*’ [a pejorative expression for a tenement house], which in the era of real socialism functioned as an offensive epithet. All these negative clichés allowed the Polish audience to get to know the enemy: the rich, Jewish institution of the TSKŻ. The conclusions of the editorial teams were intended to be indisputable for Polish readers: “The city’s explanations are too obvious for anyone to refute them with the most hypocritical attacks and accusations of anti-Semitism”.¹⁶⁶

In the turbulent period from March to May 1968, the topic of the ‘Jewish theatre’ was often a topic for discussion at the meetings of the TSKŻ’s Presidia in both Warsaw and Wrocław.¹⁶⁷ By a strange coincidence (?), on the same day, 9 May 1968, all the parties to the dispute independently adopted a position or took binding decisions. The TSKŻ’s Board of Directors of the Wrocław branch sent a letter to its sister body in Warsaw: “Due to the numerous articles in the Wrocław press, stating that the TSKŻ’s Board of Directors in Wrocław should transfer the ownership title to the building of the E.R. Kamińska House of Culture in Wrocław to the city [...] we ask [you] to adopt a quick position on this matter”.¹⁶⁸ At the same time, the Presidium of the TSKŻ’s Board of Directors in Warsaw sent

¹⁶⁵ ‘Teatr odzyskany dla miasta’ [Theatre regained for the city], *Wiadomości* 1968, no. 16, p. 4.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ ATSKŻ Wa, ZG TSKŻ, 8/30.

¹⁶⁸ AIPN, Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (Wrocław branch), activity audits, Minutes, resolutions, orders, reports, information, official notes, 1960–84, 1585/7197, Letter from the TSKŻ branch in Wrocław to the TSKŻ ZG in Warsaw, 9 May 1968, p. 83.

a letter to the Wrocław PMRN informing about the “waiver of the ownership right to E.R. Kamińska House of Culture in Wrocław, for the benefit of the city”.¹⁶⁹ On the same day, at a meeting of the Wrocław-Old Town PDRN, resolution no. 145/159/68 was adopted: “The perpetual usufructuary is not using the property in a manner consistent with its intended use, and so there is no basis for maintaining the existing condition, and in accordance with the above-mentioned regulations, the perpetual usufruct contract should be dissolved in this case”.¹⁷⁰ A month later, another discreet participant in the previous struggle – the SB – joined in. One of its Wrocław employees, Capt. Stanisław Newel, proudly wrote in his report: “As a result of the inspiration of the press, and the reports of party-administrative factors about the irregularities in the management by the TSKŻ of the building of the Jewish Theatre at 28 Świdnicka Street, a resolution of the Wrocław-Old Town DRN was adopted, as a result of which the TSKŻ has been deprived of its perpetual usufruct, and the building handed over to the city”.¹⁷¹

Conclusion

Who played their part best in this nineteen-year-old show? Who turned out to be the winner, and who was the loser? Certainly, the party and its tame press showed their strength. But did their victory also prove the weakness of the Jewish community? Probably not. It was proof that the idea of internationalism had been

¹⁶⁹ ATSKŻ Wa, ZG TSKŻ, 8/30, Protocol no. 13 from the meeting of the Presidium of the ZG TSKŻ of 9 May 1968, unpagged.

¹⁷⁰ AIPN, Socio-Cultural Society of Jews in Poland, legal status of the property in Wrocław, 5/7/9 Włodkowica Street and 28 Świdnicka Street handed over for management and use. Protocol, decisions, appeal, resolution, agreement, ciphertext, official notes, correspondence, 1961–69, 1585/7212, Resolution no. 145/159/68, Wrocław-Old Town PDRN of 9 May 1968, p. 27; also AIPN, Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland (Wrocław branch), activity audits, Minutes, resolutions, ordinances, reports, information, official notes, 1960–84, 1585/7197, p. 74, Letter from the Wrocław PRN USW to the Social and Administrative Department at the Interior Ministry in Warsaw, 18 May 1968.

¹⁷¹ AIPN, Materials on the March events in Wrocław and the actions taken in connection with them by the Security Service, 53/565, vol. 2, Assessment of some aspects of the security situation in the Wrocław voivodship and the countermeasures undertaken for the period 1 March – 6 June 1968 by the group to combat Zionism, 6 June 1968, p. 11; see also *ibid.*, Operational assessment of creative circles and mass media institutions, 6 June 1968, p. 15. The latter document indicates how the SB guided the work of the *Wiadomości* weekly: “[The periodical] portrayed the attitudes and activities of specific people and institutions. The repercussions of these articles found a response in a wide range of public opinion as well as among the relevant authorities; one of their effects was to restore the building previously occupied by the TSKŻ to the city”.

sacrificed on the altar of party interests and in the name of national values. A few weeks after this total victory, in June 1968, the PMRN handed over the buildings of the Estera Rachela Kamińska House of Culture to the Wrocław drama theatres. Since then, the theatre building at 28 Świdnicka Street has been home to the Chamber Stage (*Scena Kameralna*). Since the end of 1990, the *Teatr Polski* has been its perpetual user. In 2005, a memorial plaque was unveiled to remind the people of Ida Kamińska. There is no mention of the Esther Rachela Kamińska Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre, nor about the Cultural Centre under the same patronage. Therefore, the question of whether this is tangible evidence of historical justice will probably remain unresolved.

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SUMMARY

The fate of the Jewish theatre building was very turbulent. From the very beginning, its existence depended on the authorities' nationality policy and the current interests of the Polish United Workers' Party. The building – which was reconstructed on the ruins of a former German cinema in the late 1940s, thanks to the efforts of Jewish political and social organisations, as well as Jewish financial resources – not only served to maintain Jewish culture. At the same time, it was treated as a meeting place for acquaintances and friends, so in a sense it maintained a communal, Jewish identity. This does not mean that the Jews treated it as a bastion or as proof of their separateness. On the contrary, Poles also used this centre. As a result, it fulfilled universal functions: it was intended to unite, not divide. However, in the second half of the 1960s, during the deepening socio-political and economic crisis, the case of the Jewish theatre building was used as a pretext to fight for the interests of Poles against an imaginary enemy – the assimilated Jewish population. The authorities wanted to show their strength and distract society from real problems. They took away the theatre – but the crisis continued.

KEYWORDS

anti-Semitism • politics • culture • theatre • Polish and Jewish institutions in Wrocław • KW PZPR • WKŻ • TSKŻ • MRN • Estera Rachela Kamińska Lower Silesian Jewish Theatre • Estera Rachela Kamińska House of Culture