

Magdalena Semczyszyn
Institute of National Remembrance Branch in Szczecin

MARTYNA RUSINIAK-KARWAT, *NOWE ŻYCIE
NA ZGLISZCZACH. BUND W POLSCE W LATACH 1944–1949*,
INSTYTUT STUDIÓW POLITYCZNYCH PAN,
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In an interview Marek Edelman, probably the most famous activist of the General Jewish Workers' Union in Poland, aka the Bund, described the party's post-war history in this way:

After the Holocaust, political activity based on the Jewish masses no longer made sense. The Bund disappeared with the Jewish people. It was a party of the Jewish proletariat, and the latter [...] “marched in groups of four to the *Umschlagplatz*.” In addition, all our values, starting with tolerance, were contrary to Bolshevism [...]. We had some more meetings, we published newspapers, but this was not real political activity. Before the war, the Bund was a party which decided the fate of the country, which participated in its structures. It didn't make sense after the war.¹

¹ Quoted in W. Bereś, K. Burnetko, *Marek Edelman. Życie. Do końca*, Warszawa 2013, pp. 444–46.

Does Edelman's well-known and oft-repeated opinion of the irrelevance of the Bund's post-war fate fully reflect the epilogue of this organisation in Poland? When looking for an answer to this question, it is worth reaching for the monograph by the historian and political scientist Dr. Martyna Rusiniak-Karwat entitled *Nowe życie na zgliszczach. Bund w Polsce w latach 1944–1949* [New Life in the Ashes. The Bund in Poland in 1944–49], published in 2016 by the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. The author's goal was to present the Bund as a party "decimated, but still alive, which in the new reality tried to modify its political program and mark its presence on the so-called 'Jewish street', that is, at the forum of the Presidium of the CKŻWP [the Central Committee of Jews in Poland] and the Jewish committees, and on the Polish political scene" (p. 13). Undoubtedly, the preparation of a book on the party, whose real importance in the period under discussion was limited, and as such underappreciated by historians for many years, must have posed a great challenge for Dr. Rusiniak-Karwat, particularly as her book is the first attempt in Poland at a monograph examining the history of the Bund after 1944.

The work is structured chronologically and thematically, and consists of seven chapters in which the author discusses the process of the party's revival after the Holocaust, the activity of the Bund among the surviving Jews, the party's programme, its attitude to the PPR, the activity of party members on the CKŻWP's forum, the party's activity (committees, press and publications, anniversary celebrations, etc.), its dispute with the Zionists, contacts with Bund activists in the West, and the process of liquidating the party in 1949. The book ends with an appendix which contains eight of the Bund's manifestoes from the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute (AŻIH) and from the party press. The content is complemented by 23 photographs from the AŻIH's and private collections.

The author's use of a wide base of sources and literature on the subject is noteworthy. The work was prepared on the basis of materials stored in Polish archives (Archiwum Akt Nowych [Central Archives of Modern Records], AŻIH, the Institute of National Remembrance, and the State Archives in Wrocław), foreign archives (the diaspora archives in Tel Aviv, the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York, the Yad Vashem Archives in Jerusalem, the National Archives in London), as well as 30 press titles in Polish and Yiddish, sources published all over

the world, and individual memoirs. Rusiniak-Karwat has performed a creditable task of organising and disseminating the post-war legacy of the Bund as deposited at the AŻIH in Warsaw.

The articles and studies include the most important works devoted to the party's post-war history, including books by Daniel Blatman, Joshua D. Zimmerman, Yosef Gorny, David Engel and David Slucki. The author also mentions Polish historians who examined selected aspects of the Bund's activities in 1944–9 (including Bożena Szaynok, Natalia Aleksium, August Grabski, Aleksandra Namysło and Grzegorz Berendt). The bibliography also includes works wherein Bund members describe the party's history themselves. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the author also reached out to participants in the events described, and conducted interviews with notables including Marek Edelman and Ichhak Luden, editor of the last Bund magazine published in Israel, *Lebns Fragn*.

Rusiniak-Karwat points out how difficult the process of rebuilding the party in the post-war ruins was. The first chapter of the book begins with a description of the losses. The activists who survived in the ghettos, camps and the USSR lacked the most charismatic party leaders: Wiktor Alter, Henryk Erlich, Szmul Zygielbojm, Maurycy Orzech, Włodzimierz Kosowski. Those who joined the process of rebuilding the party after 1944 had experienced traumatic experiences. Among the most active in this period included Dr. Szloma Herszenhorn, Salomon Fiszgrund, Sioma Temczyn, Michał Szuldenfrei, Liber Brenner and Ignacy Falk. One great advantage of Dr. Rusiniak-Karwat's book is the biographical notes, thanks to which the reader has the opportunity to get acquainted with the characters who formed the post-war party structures; this is all the more valuable as their later fate is not widely known. After several years of failures and the final dissolution of the party, a few Bund members decided to stay in Poland, as did the above-mentioned Marek Edelman. A group of opponents of 'organic unity' with the PPR, whose size is difficult to estimate, left legally or illegally for the West at the turn of the 1950s. Those who supported the process of the Bund's dissolution were in turn condemned to silence in the Bund's own press and in world literature. Many former party activists left Poland as a result of the anti-Semitic campaign of 1968.

Drawing on a solid base of source, Dr. Rusiniak-Karwat has made an attempt to reconstruct the party's activities at the central and local level. Until 1949,

the Bund (along with the youth groups *Cukunft* and *Skif*) was one of the few Jewish parties operating legally in Poland.² Political pluralism was in line with the concept of national and cultural autonomy for Jews in Poland that the authorities were promoting at that period. In fact, the diversity of views on the so-called Jewish Street was controlled by the government, and all legalised organisations had to ‘pay tribute’ by including into their manifestoes a point about the alliance with the USSR and the acceptance of the policy pursued by the Polish Workers’ Party.

As the emigration of the Jewish population increased, the size of the Bund’s ranks was constantly changing (after the war the party had about 2000 members), which in turn influenced the quality of work of individual committees in the country. The changes were so dynamic that it is difficult today to determine exact how many local Bund committees there were. Some of them were ephemeral; not all institutions kept their own documentation, and where they did do so, not all their materials were preserved (the author lists 44 committees whose activities are documented, p. 75). Undoubtedly, the strongest concentration of Bund activists was in Łódź after the war. During the first few years after the war, the committees in Lower Silesia and Szczecin were also very active.

After the tragedy of the Holocaust, the Bund – which had been the most influential Jewish party before the war – became a marginal group, whose socialist programme drawing upon a broad base of traditions was losing out to the new political reality in the country. The party activists made attempts to validate their political programme, adapting it to the new realities, including a declaration of support for “the alliance with the USSR, the accession to the July Manifesto and the actions of the KRN and the Provisional Government” (p. 27). Moreover, the unity of the workers’ movement was declared, as well as its disassociation from the Polish government in exile. Bund representatives joined the CKŻwP, sat in the State National Council (KRN) and the Legislative Sejm (Michał Szuldenfrei), while traditionally selecting the PPS as their ideological ally.

² There is still no broader-scale monographic study on the post-war history of individual Jewish parties in Poland. So far, studies on the Zionist movement have appeared: N. Aleksiu, *Dokąd dalej? Ruch syjonistyczny w Polsce (1944–1950)*, Warszawa 2002; G. Berendt, ‘Zjednoczenie Syjonistów Demokratów “Ichud”’, in A. Grabski, G. Berendt, *Między emigracją a trwaniem. Syjoniści i komuniści żydowscy w Polsce po Holocauście*, Warszawa 2003, pp. 101–223; D. Flisiak, *Działalność syjonistów-rewizjonistów w Polsce w latach 1944/1945–1950*, Lublin 2020.

Rusiniak-Karwat points out that the decimated party found itself in a very difficult position, in fact remaining in permanent dispute with the main Jewish political groups in Poland – the Zionists and Communists from the Jewish faction of the PPR. Shortly after the war, the Zionists who promoted the emigration of the survivors (*Sh'ërit ha-Pletah*) to Palestine gained a significant advantage in the Jewish community; the Bund consistently opposed the programme of emigration. This was a very different trial of strength compared to the situation on the political map of pre-war Poland. Before 1939, it was the Jewish socialists who dominated over those Zionists who envisioned building a Jewish state in Palestine. The trauma of the Holocaust and the geopolitical shock caused in Europe by the Second World War made realistic that which had seemed to be a pipe dream a few years earlier. The author devotes much space to the Bund's attitude to the Zionists and emigration. This is one of the most exhaustively described issues in the book, reflecting well the essence of the dispute within the Jewish community at that time, which boiled down to the answer to the question 'stay or leave?'. The author also presents the Bundists' attitude, closely related to the issue of emigration, to the refugee camps in the Allied-occupied zones of Germany and Austria, the Palestine issue, and the party's contacts with the World Jewish Congress (chapter 5).

Opposing the idea of 'emigrationism' — especially after the Kielce pogrom, when tens of thousands of Jews in Poland were affected with the burning desire to leave — stood no chance of gaining support from the Bund's activists. The book shows that the problem of the approach to emigration also existed within the party itself. Although the Bund was an anti-Zionist party, a position in support of leaving Poland did emerge (Ignacy Falk). The supporters of such a solution doubted the possibility of rebuilding *Yishuv* in Poland, and argued in favour of individual emigration, which did not — as the Zionists proclaimed — necessarily have to mean Palestine. Unfortunately, it is not known whether this view had any real influence on the party's activities. Falk himself was one of the greatest critics of this Zionist policy.³ The differences in how certain issues were perceived within the party are probably a topic worth developing in separate biographical texts

³ See Aleksiu, *Dokąd dalej?*, pp. 251, 254.

devoted to the outstanding Bundists. As the book shows, the internal divisions concerned a range of matters, and probably contributed to the group's weakness (p. 150). Rusiniak-Karwat's analysis allows us to distinguish a faction within the Bund who opted for a merger with the PPS, another seeking to merge with the Polish Workers' Party, supporters of the party's dissolution, and supporters of the concept of a 'Jewish settlement in Poland'. Disagreement can also be observed when the author describes the activities of individual committees. For example, Bundists from Legnica and Wrocław boycotted the pro-Palestinian mass rallies organised by the Zionists in early 1948, in which party representatives from Dzierżoniów actually participated (p. 59).

The Bund activists wanted to stick to their own opinions on many issues. This is best seen in the example of the party members' activities on the CKŻwP forum as described in the book. Against the will of the majority, the Bund rejected the content of the CKŻwP's Memorandum for the Anglo-American Commission of February 1946, and put up its own candidates on the PPS's electoral lists for the Legislative Sejm elections of 1947. Year by year, the Bund's dispute with the Communists deepened, particularly on matters such as how to specify the autonomy 'for the Jewish Street' which they demanded, while uncritically succumbing to the influence of the Polish Workers' Party. This dispute eventually led to the party's dissolution.

Some of the threads examined by the author remain unfulfilled. Perhaps this is a natural impression, resulting from the fact that the thematic scope thus constructed required a synthetic approach. Therefore, I will limit myself to only one example, which in my opinion is of some importance. The issue of the Bundists' attitudes towards anti-Semitism occupies little space in the work. In the first years after the war, it was one of the key issues for Polish Jews, who were torn between 'emigration fever' and the concept of rebuilding a Jewish settlement as advocated by the authorities and the CKŻwP. This also applied to Bund activists. One of the four manifesto pledges adopted at the First National Party Conference in Łódź (16–17 June 1945) was to fight anti-Semitism. This issue was raised many times, especially after the murder of the Bund activist Fiszka Nejman from Łódź (24 June 1946) and after the Kielce pogrom (4 July 1946). The author of course mentions these events (pp. 32–35, 40, 59, 65, 150), pointing out that they changed the Bundists' attitude

towards the prospects for the Jewish minority in a Poland ruled by Communists. However, it does not elaborate on what anti-Semitism was in the view of the Bund. How did the party members react to the great wave of violence against Jews in Poland in the first years after the war? According to Bund activists, what was the 'fight against anti-Semitism' they demanded to have looked like?

There are also minor editorial shortcomings at work. For example, p. 46 lacks all the footnotes listing the illegal Jewish parties (the author added a footnote concerning *Aguda*, but at the same time there is no explanation of who the 'folkists' and revisionists were). In the aforementioned footnote to *Aguda*, Rusiniak-Karwat lists the literature concerning the CKŻwP: but this list lacks the monograph entitled *Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce (1944–1950). Historia polityczna* [The Central Committee of Jews in Poland (1944–50). A Political History] (Warsaw 2015) by August Grabski (although, to be scrupulously accurate, the author does refer to this work elsewhere in her book). On p. 47, the name of the representative of the Jewish Agency, Mosze Iszaj, is not expanded upon. Sometimes there are repetitions in the narrative, such as in the description of the newspaper *Dos Naje Lebn* (pp. 60–62), the celebrations and anniversaries (pp. 91–95) and the activity of the Historical Commission (pp. 123–27), as well as inconsistencies in spelling (e.g. Grzegorz/Grisza Jaszuński, pp. 25, 69). The work also lacks an ending in the form of a short summary of the conclusions drawn from the author's research. However, these oversights do not influence my overall high assessment of the work as a whole. It is worth adding that the author has managed to reconcile the academic requirements with a clear manner of communication, which makes the book very accessible to read. Above all, however, it allows us to look at the Bund in a slightly different way than that as established on the basis of Edelman's opinions. After 1944, Bund members tried to continue their activity in extremely difficult conditions. It was by no means a passive endeavour, but rather a political activity carried out on several fronts by a marginalised party.