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JEWS IN THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC 1918–38: AN OUTLINE OF THE ISSUE

Due to the persistence of the stereotype of *Żydokomuna* (Judaeo--Communism), the problem of the Jewish participation in the Communist movement in interwar Poland still evokes a great deal of emotion. Although this topic has been discussed many times in the historical literature, no comprehensive and objective study has yet appeared on the presence of activists of Jewish nationality in the ranks of the Communist Party of Poland (KPP) and the organisations associated with it.[1]

The purpose of this text is to summarise the current state of knowledge about Jewish Communists in Poland. It is based mainly on the literature on the subject, in particular the publications of Henryk Cimek, concerning the number of Jews in the Polish Communist movement,[2] and the pioneering work of the sociologist Jaff Schatz, who analysed the issue of these individuals' motivations and national

[1] The sociologist Paweł Śpiewak made the first attempt at a holistic view in his popular science work *Żydokomuna. Interpretacje historyczne*, Warszawa 2012; however, his book was critically assessed by reviewers as containing methodological errors and many simplifications.

[2] H. Cimek, *Mniejszości narodowe w ruchu rewolucyjnym w II Rzeczypospolitej*, Rzeszów 2011; id., 'Żydzi w ruchu komunistycznym w Polsce w latach 1918–1937', *Polityka i Społeczeństwo* 2012, no. 9.

identity.[3] The literature is supplemented by the results of my own research into the community of 46 Jews and people of Jewish origin who belonged to the elite of the Communist party in Poland.

This article discusses the participation of Jews in the revolutionary movement in Russia (especially in Poland) before the First World War; the social structure of the Jewish population in Poland; the path of the splinter groups who departed from the Jewish left-wing parties and moved to the Communist Workers' Party of Poland; the attitude of Jewish radicals towards the Bolshevik aggression against Poland in 1920; and the number of Jews in the Polish Communist movement, their identities, and their motives for joining the movement.

Genesis: Jews in the revolutionary movement in Russia

Jews were active in the Polish and Russian revolutionary movements from the beginning of its existence. Back when the first socialist groups and organisations started their operations within the Russian partition (the Kingdom of Poland and the so-called Taken Territories), many Poles of Jewish origin participated. This was the case with the Social and Revolutionary Union of Poles (1878–79), the so-called Great Proletariat (the 'Proletariat' International Social Revolutionary Party, 1882–85), the Second Proletariat (the 'Proletariat' Polish Social and Revolutionary Party, 1887–92) and the Union of Polish Workers (1889–92). Most of them came from Polonised middle-class and intellectual families.[4]

In 1892, as a result of the merger of several smaller socialist organisations, the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) was established; it combined Marxist slogans (overthrowing the capitalist system) with the pursuit of Polish independence in its manifesto. Its founders included activists of Jewish origin, Stanisław Mendelson and Feliks Perl. A year later, the PPS Jewish Organisation was established, bringing together Jewish-speaking workers and craftsmen.[5] In 1906, Jews constituted 25 per cent of the total number of PPS members living in the city of Warsaw, and

[3] J. Schatz, *The Generation. The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Communists of Poland*, Berkeley 1991.

[4] H. Piasecki, *Żydowska Organizacja PPS 1893–1907*, Wrocław 1978, pp. 13–14.

[5] Ibid.; T. Weeks, *From Assimilation to Antisemitism. The 'Jewish Question' in Poland 1850–1914*, DeKalb 2006, pp. 116–19.

from 25 to 33 per cent in several other cities of the Kingdom of Poland: Pabianice, Siedlce, Płock, Kalisz, Częstochowa and Kielce.[6]

In November 1906, there was a split in the ranks of the Polish Socialist Party. Some activists rejected the plans for an anti-Russian national uprising presented by Józef Piłsudski and his companions (the so-called PPS-Revolutionary Faction), and formed the PPS-Left. This grouping was primarily focused on the victory of the revolution in Russia, ignoring the postulate of Polish independence in its programme. The PPS-Left included most of the members of the PPS Jewish Organisation,[7] and many Jews were part of its leadership, including Feliks Kon, Feliks Sachs, Bernard Szapiro and Maksymilian Horwitz-Walecki.

In 1893, some former activists of the Union of Polish Workers and the Second Proletariat, who did not support the national demands contained in the PPS's manifesto, established the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland (known from 1900 as the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania, SDKPiL). This party was hostile to aspirations to Polish independence, and tried to bring about an outbreak of an internationalist workers revolution and the introduction of proletarian rule. It favoured the formation of a Polish autonomous republic within a socialist Russian federation.[8] It is not known how many Jews were in the SDKPiL's ranks. Jaff Schatz lists the names of ten of the group's top leaders who played a significant role in the history of Poland, the Soviet Union and the international labour movement.[9] Among them were six Jewish intellectuals: Jakub Firstenberg (Hanecki), Leon Jogiches (Tyszka), Róża Luxemburg, Karol Sobelson (Radek), Józef Unszlicht and Adolf Warszawski (Warski).[10] From 1906, the SDKPiL was an autonomous part of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Russia (RSDLP), founded in 1898; the leadership

[6] A. Żarnowska, *Geneza rozłamu w Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej 1904–1906*, Warszawa 1965, pp. 41–42, 456, 460, 464, 509–12.

[7] Ibid., p. 264.

[8] P. Wróbel, 'Failed Integration. Jews and the Beginning of the Communist Movement in Poland', *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry* 2011, no. 24, p. 195.

[9] Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 76.

[10] Schatz states there were seven Jewish intellectuals in the *SDKPiL*'s leadership group, probably because he mistakenly included Julian Leszczyński-Leński in this group.

of the latter also included Jews. Four out of nine delegates at the First Congress of the RSDLP were Jews.[11]

In 1897, the first revolutionary Jewish party in the Russian Empire was established: the Universal Jewish Workers' Union (*Algemeyner Yidisher Arbeter Bund in Litah, Poyln un Rusland*). The Bund fought for national and cultural autonomy for Jews in a future democratic Russia. During the period of its greatest expansion, during the revolution of 1905, it had 33,000 members throughout the Russian Empire, including 16,000 on the territory of the Kingdom of Poland, the Lithuanian and Belarusian lands.[12] At the same time, the RSDLP had only 8500 members. From 1906, the Bund acted as an autonomous division.[13]

At the Bund congress in Zurich at the end of 1905, a resolution that opposed the demand for Polish independence was adopted, as it was deemed to distract workers from the primary goal of overthrowing tsarism, freeing the working class, and obtaining cultural autonomy for Jews. The idea of establishing a separate parliament for the Kingdom of Poland within Russia was also opposed.[14]

In 1905, the Zionist-Socialist Workers Party (*Siyonistish-Sotsialistishe Arbeter--Partai*) was established in Russia, and later the Jewish Social Democratic Workers' Union *Poalei Siyon* – the Workers of Zion (*Yidishe Sotsialdemokratishe Arbeter--Partai 'Poalei Siyon'*). These parties combined Zionist slogans with a Marxist revolutionary programme. Also in 1906, the Jewish Socialist Workers' Party (the so-called *Seymists*) began its activity. Its manifesto was a synthesis of Jewish national and socialist ideas; it was not a Marxist grouping. In June 1917, the Jewish Socialist Workers' Party United (*Fareynikte Yidishe Sotsialistishe Arbeter-Partai*) was formed from a merger of the Zionist-socialists and the Seymists.[15]

The Jewish members were very active and visible in the all-Russian and international revolutionary movement. At the 5th Congress of the RSDLP in 1907, according to the personal surveys, the 336 delegates included 119 Russians,

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[11] A. Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews: The Red Book; The Tragedy of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the Soviet Jews*, Enigma Books 2003 (transl. into Polish by E. Kaźmierczak, W. Leder, Warszawa 2004, p. 36).

[12] Piasecki, *Żydowska Organizacja PPS*, pp. 229–30.

[13] Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, pp. 34, 39.

[14] J. Zimmerman, *Poles, Jews and the Politics of Nationality. The Bund and the Polish Socialist Party in Late Tsarist Russia 1892–1914*, Wisconsin 2004, p. 208.

[15] Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, pp. 43–45.

98 Jews (including Bund members), 38 Poles, 31 Georgians and 30 Latvians.[16] In fact, there were more activists of Jewish origin, as not all of them admitted their roots in the surveys. They were also visible in the leadership of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party (SR). According to Gerald Sorin, in 1903 half of all revolutionaries in Russia were Jews.[17] Most of them had a deep sense of Jewish identity, and did not see a conflict between Judaism and radicalism.[18]

In the first period after the 1917 revolution, Jews played a disproportionate role in the Bolshevik party and in the Soviet government apparatus in relation to the number of Jewish citizens in Russia. There were also a disproportionate number of them among the Hungarian, German and Austrian Communists during the revolutionary upheavals of 1918–23, and in the apparatus of the Communist International.[19] It is noteworthy that Yakov Sverdlov was the chairman of the All--Russian Central Executive Committee, and Lev Trotsky was the organiser of the Red Army.[20] In 1918, as part of the RCP(b),[21] the so-called *Yevsektsia* (Jewish section) was created, whose task was to ignite the flame of revolution in the Jewish masses.[22] Most active Bund members also sympathised with the Bolsheviks. In April 1920, a split occurred at the conference in Gomel. The radical majority formed the Communist Bund (*Kombund*), which was dissolved in 1921. The former Bund activists then formed cadres of the *Yevsektsia*.[23] The left wing of the *Poalei Siyon* party also actively supported the Bolsheviks. In August 1919, this party split, and as a result the Jewish Communist Party *Poalei Siyon* (the so-called *yevkapisti*) was established;[24] it was incorporated into the RCP(b) in 1922.

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[16] В.И. Ленин, *Собрание сочинений В.И. Ленина*, vol. 12: *РСДРП*, Москва 1947, p. 477.

[17] G. Sorin, *The Prophetic Minority: American Jewish Immigrant Radicals 1820–1920*, Bloomington 1985, p. 28. On the role of Jews in the world-wide socialist movement see R. Wistrich, *Revolutionary Jews from Marx to Trotsky*, London 1976, pp. 1–22.

[18] N. Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917*, vol. 1, New York–London 1988, pp. 4–5.

[19] R. Pipes, *Rosja bolszewików*, Warszawa 2005, p. 120.

[20] S. Baron, *The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets*, New York 1975, p. 169.

[21] The Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik), later the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union).

[22] Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union*, p. 57.

[23] Ibid., pp. 64–65.

[24] Z.Y. Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics. The Jewish Sections of the CPSU 1917–1930*, Princeton 1972, p. 216.

The fact that many Jewish Communists from Poland, such as Karol Radek and Józef Unszlicht, held high positions in the apparatus of the Bolshevik party and in the Soviet administration was of significant importance for the formation of the stereotype of *Żydokomuna* in Poland.[25]

The KPRP and the Jewish radical-left parties after 1918

On 16 December 1918, as a result of the merger of the SDKPiL and the PPS--Left, the Communist Workers' Party of Poland (KPRP) was established in Warsaw. In 1919, it had around 10,000 members and an unspecified number of supporters. It is not known how many Jews were among them at that time. However, they must have constituted such a large group that as early as the beginning of 1919 a separate Jewish Department was organised within the party, which directed propaganda and agitation among the Jewish proletariat. Initially, its activity was concentrated mainly in the Jewish district of Muranów in Warsaw, but by May 1921 it covered 29 cities in central and eastern Poland.[26] The Communist Workers' Party of Poland was quickly banned due to its anti-state and subversive character.

The Union of Communist Youth [*Związek Młodzieży Komunistycznej*], established in December 1918, initially operated only in Warsaw and had only a few dozen members, mostly pupils and students. In 1919, more Communist youth circles were established in other cities, the strongest of which was the 'Young Commune' [*Młoda Komuna*] in Łódź. It was only in March 1922 that the Communist Youth Union in Poland was formed from the merger of these circles as a permanent nationwide organisation. According to various sources, it numbered between 600 and 1100 members.[27]

At that time, under the influence of the Russian Revolution, the Jewish workers and socialist parties operating in Poland were moving more and more to the left, coming closer to full Communism. In November 1918, a group of 180 members of the left wing of *Poalei Siyon* in Warsaw left the party and joined the KPRP.[28]

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[25] J.B. de Weydenthal, *The Communists of Poland. An Historical Outline*, Stanford 1978, p. 5.

[26] Wróbel, 'Failed Integration', pp. 204–05.

[27] L. Krzemień, *Związek Młodzieży Komunistycznej w Polsce. Pierwsze dziesięciolecie (1918–1928)*, Warszawa 1972, pp. 16–65.

[28] Archiwum Akt Nowych (Central Archives of Modern Records; hereinafter: AAN), Personnel Affairs Office of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (hereinafter: CK BSK PZPR), 237/XXIII-429, Personal files of Szymon Zachariasz, Personal questionnaire, 14 July 1944, p. 8.

In summer 1920, there was a split during the convention in Vienna; supporters of the party's accession to the Communist International formed the *Poalei Siyon*-Left, and their opponents the *Poalei Siyon*-Right. However, the Comintern did not consent to the accession of the *Poalei Siyon*-Left because its leadership refused to dissolve and merge its party members with the KPRP. In this situation, in the fall of 1921, the Communist faction left *Poalei Siyon*-Left and joined the KPRP. The members of the United Jewish Socialist Workers' Party, the so-called *Ferainigte* (Zionist-Socialists until 1918), went through a similar evolution. In 1919, the left-wing faction cooperating with the Communists began to crystallise, and in 1921 it merged with the KPRP.[29]

The Bund initially supported Poland's independence, demanding cultural autonomy for the Jewish community. However, as early as December 1918, a radical left wing formed within the party, which in April 1919 gained the majority in the leadership and pushed through a resolution demanding that all power be taken over by workers' councils and that a dictatorship of the proletariat be established in Poland. At the congress in April 1920, the Bund merged with the Jewish Social-Democratic Party of Galicia. At that time, it had 9500 members; a resolution to join the Communist International was adopted at the same time. The Second Congress of the Comintern, held in July and August 1920, set 21 conditions for joining the organisation, but part of the Bund leadership questioned some of them, and so the issue of accession was postponed. The Bundists were primarily against the principle that only one party entering the International could exist on the territory of one state. They wanted to maintain their independence from the KPRP as well as the ethnic, Jewish character of their organisation. The Bund was divided internally into three factions. Ultimately, in December 1921, most of the delegates to the congress refused to join the Comintern on the basis of the 21 conditions. At that time, the pro-Communist activists organised their own grouping, that is, the *Kombund* Jewish Communist Workers' Union in Poland, which was made up of around 20 per cent of the Bund's membership (from 2000 to 3500 members, according to various estimates). In February 1923, the *Kombund* merged with the KPRP.[30]

[29] Cimek, 'Żydzi w ruchu komunistycznym', pp. 30–31.

[30] G. Iwański, 'Żydowski Komunistyczny Związek Robotniczy Kombund w Polsce 1921–1923', *Z Pola Walki* 1974, no. 4, pp. 43–76; Wróbel, 'Failed Integration', pp. 209–11.

The youth organisation of the Bund, the *Przyszłość* [Future] Socialist Youth Organisation (*Sotsialdemokratishe Jugnt-Bund Tsukunft*), also underwent radicalisation. On 22 May 1920, at its 2nd Congress, *Tsukunft* made the decision to join the Communist Youth International, which the Bund opposed. This led to a split, as a result of which in February 1922 the *Komtsukunft*, numbering around 3000 people, was established; two months later it joined the Union of Communist Youth.[31]

Jewish radicals and the Bolshevik aggression in 1920

The radicalisation of the above-mentioned parties had a major impact on the attitude of some of the Jewish population towards the Bolshevik invasion of Poland in 1920, which in turn largely influenced the formation of the *Żydokomuna* stereotype.

There was a large group of Jews in the ranks of the Red Army. Meeting in Kharkov in June 1920, the Political Bureau of the Jewish Communist Party *Poalei Siyon* decided to send 10 per cent of its members to the front against the Poles. Recruitment points were opened in major cities around Ukraine for Jewish volunteers who wanted to fight against Poland.[32]

On 2 August 1920, the Provisional Revolutionary Committee of Poland (TKRP) was installed in Bolshevik-captured Bialystok, which was to take over administrative and political power in the occupied territories of Poland. Its inner circle included three Poles (Julian Marchlewski, Feliks Dzierżyński and Edward Próchniak) and two Jews (Feliks Kon and Józef Unszlicht). Public support for this puppet creature was negligible. At the first rally in Białystok, only 1500 people assembled, mainly Jewish workers and traders.[33] According to reports and documents, Red Army units entering Polish territory were most often greeted by young Jewish radicals wearing red cockades.[34]

In the first half of August, political commissars at Red Army units organised revolutionary committees (*revkom*s) in poviats, cities and communes in the occupied areas of Podlasie and Mazovia, composed of representatives of the local population.

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[31] Cimek, 'Żydzi w ruchu komunistycznym', p. 33; M. Kozłowska, *Świetlana przyszłość? Żydowski Związek Młodzieżowy Cukunft wobec wyzwań międzywojennej Polski*, Kraków–Budapeszt 2016, pp. 88–89.

[32] K. Zieliński, *O Polską Republikę Rad. Działalność polskich komunistów w Rosji Radzieckiej 1918–1922*, Lublin 2013, p. 114.

[33] *И.* Костюшко, *Польское бюро ЦК РКП(б) 1920–1921 гг.*, Москва 2005, pp. 13–14.

[34] D. Magier, 'Kolaboracja z bolszewikami w regionie bialskopodlaskim w sierpniu 1920 roku – skala, motywy, konsekwencje', in *Wobec komunizmu. Materiały z sesji naukowej pt. "Lubelskie i południowe Podlasie wobec komunizmu 1918–1989"*, ed. D. Magier, Radzyń Podlaski 2006, p. 22.

In rural areas, these were mainly farm workers and poor peasants, and the local Jews in cities and towns. After arriving in the former governorate town of Siedlce, Karol Radek stated that, apart from Jews, there were no candidates for work in the *revkom*s. Feliks Kon, a member of the TKRP, complained that many of the committees were staffed by "nobody but Jewish shopkeepers".[35] This was the case, for example, in Suchowola and Brańsk, where the *revkom*s' announcements were published simultaneously in Polish and Yiddish.[36]

Many Jewish youths were drawn into becoming Soviet commissars in the ranks of the Red Army, even creating their own small units. One of them was the so--called Jewish Legion in Sokołów Podlaski. Most of its volunteers died during the retreat of the Bolshevik troops across the river Bug near Brest.[37] It was found that in eighteen towns east of the river Vistula alone, 1193 young Jews had volunteered to join the Red Army.[38] The *revkom*s also formed a people's militia in which, apart from Polish and Jewish Communists, there were also members of the Jewish workers' parties: the Bund, *Poalei Siyon* and *Ferainigte*.[39]

The sources often contain information about the pro-Bolshevik involvement of radicalised members of the local *Poalei Siyon*, Bund and *Tsukunft* organisations. The provisional left-wing leadership of the *Poalei Siyon* party, led by Saul Amsterdam (Gustaw Henrykowski) and Aron Lewartowski, removed the supporters of the Zionist Congress from the party and opted for the support of the *revkom*s created on the territories occupied by the Red Army.[40] The Bund's Central Committee acted differently; they sent a recommendation to all local organisations located in the area occupied by the Red Army to "develop their active measures, but not to participate in the ruling structures created by the Communists".[41] In practice,

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[35] Костюшко, *Польское бюро*, pp. 17, 25; O. Budnitskii, *Russian Jews Between the Reds and the Whites 1917–1920*, Philadelphia 2012, pp. 389–91.

[36] Zieliński, *O Polską Republikę Rad*, p. 137.

[37] P. Borek, 'Postawa społeczeństwa południowego Podlasia wobec kontrofensywy znad Wieprza w sierpniu 1920 roku', *Radzyński Rocznik Humanistyczny* 2010, vol. 8, pp. 64–65.

[38] W.W. Hagen, *Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland 1914–1920*, Cambridge 2018, p. 379.

[39] Ibid., pp. 414, 424, 446, 455; J. Szczepański, *Społeczeństwo Polski w walce z najazdem bolszewickim 1920 roku*, Warszawa–Pułtusk 2000, pp. 324–25, 332.

[40] L. Gamska, 'Lewica żydowskich partii socjalistycznych wobec III Międzynarodówki i KPRP (1918–1923)', *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 1976, no. 97, p. 63.

[41] S. Bergman, 'Bund a niepodległość Polski', in *Bund. 100 lat historii 1897–1997*, ed. F. Tych, J. Hensel, Warszawa 2000, p. 113.

however, members of Bund local organisations took their decisions individually, and many of them joined the *revkom*s. On 8 July, Henryk Ehrlich spoke in favour of the immediate commencement of Polish-Bolshevik peace negotiations and an end to the war during a speech at the Warsaw city council. This was perceived in Polish society as a pro-Soviet position and a betrayal of Polish interests. The state authorities temporarily banned the Bund, its activists were arrested, and the party's premises were closed.[42]

Previous research shows that in towns occupied by the Red Army the richer Jews clearly supported the Polish side, while most of the rest took a wait-and-see attitude, simply wanting to see the war out and survive. As a rule, the Bolsheviks were supported by radical Jewish youth and the uneducated. Their activity was so demonstrative and visible that the image of the 'Jew-Bolsheviks' became established in Polish society.[43]

The number of Jews in the Polish Communist movement

With regard to Jewish participation in the Communist movement, the statistics always generate great interest and emotions, but the data on the number of Jews in the KPP only covers certain periods. According to a report by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Poland, in 1930 Jews constituted 35 per cent of all the party members in central and western Poland.[44] However, according to the preserved data from 1931–5, their per centage in the party's ranks varied from 22 to 30 per cent.[45] There is no doubt, then, that Jews were clearly overrepresented in the Communist movement in relation to the per centage of their share in the society of the Second Polish Republic. According to the census

[42] A. Gontarek, 'Ogólnożydowski Związek Robotniczy "Bund" w Mińsku Mazowieckim w II RP – ocena stanu organizacyjnego, struktur partyjnych i wpływów', *Rocznik Mińskomazowiecki* 2014, no. 22, p. 41; G. Pickhan, *'Gegen den Strom'. Der Allgemeine Jüdische Arbeiterbund 'Bund' in Polen 1918–1939*, Stuttgart 2001, trans. into Polish by A. Peszke as: *Pod prąd. Powszechny Żydowski Związek Robotniczy Bund w Polsce w latach 1918–1939*, Warszawa 2017, p. 90.

[43] A. Gontarek, 'Postawy żydowskich mieszkańców Mińska Mazowieckiego i Kałuszyna wobec wojny polsko-bolszewickiej 1920 roku', *Studia Żydowskie. Almanach* 2012, vol. 2, p. 70; Zieliński, *O Polską Republikę Radziecką*, p. 138.

[44] J. Auerbach, 'Niektóre zagadnienia działalności KPP w środowisku żydowskim w latach kryzysu 1929–1932', *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytut Historyczny* 1965, no. 55, p. 42.

[45] Cimek, 'Żydzi w ruchu komunistycznym', p. 35.

of 1921, over 2,845,000 people 'of the Mosaic faith' lived in Poland (10.5 per cent of the entire population).[46]

Even more fragmentary is the information on the autonomous parties operating in the eastern territories of the Second Polish Republic: the Communist Party of Western Belarus (KPZB) and the Communist Party of Western Ukraine (KPZU). We only know that in 1924 there about 75–80 per cent of the KPZB's members were Belarusians, 18–20 per cent Jews and only 2–4 per cent Poles. At that time, Ukrainians constituted 78 per cent of the KPZU, Jews 13.3 per cent, and Poles 8.7 per cent.[47]

There were also large regional disproportions. In some district organisations, Jews constituted the majority. Their participation in the Lublin District Committee reached 82 per cent in 1925, although in 1928 it fell to 58 per cent. However, in the Siedlce District Committee in 1928 it was 55.5 per cent.[48] In Warsaw, in 1930, Jews made up 44 per cent of the total number of KPP members living in the city, and in 1937 as many as 65 per cent.[49] In 1930, the per centage of Jews in the party in Lublin reached 60 per cent, and in small towns it was even higher.[50]

It is typical that the per centage of Jews was significantly higher among the members of the youth wing of the KPP, that is the Communist Youth Union (ZMK; from 1930 the Communist Polish Youth Union – KZMP). It also included the autonomous organisations of the Communist Youth Union of Western Belarus (KZMZB) and the Communist Youth Union of Western Ukraine (KZMZU).

In 1926, the whole of the ZMK in Poland numbered about 3700 members. It consisted of 43 per cent Jews, 27 per cent Poles, 20 per cent Belarusians and 10 per cent Ukrainians.[51] In the years 1928–33, the per centage of Jewish youth in this organisation plateaued, reaching 50.7 per cent at its peak (1930), then

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[46] S. Bronsztejn, *Ludność żydowska w Polsce w okresie międzywojennym. Studium statystyczne*, Wrocław 1963, p. 27.

[47] Cimek, *Mniejszości narodowe*, pp. 64–65.

[48] E. Horoch, *Komunistyczna Partia Polski w województwie lubelskim w latach 1918–1938*, Lublin 1993, pp. 83–86.

[49] J. Schatz, 'Jews and the Communist Movement in Interwar Poland', in *Dark Times, Dire Decisions: Jews and Communism*, ed. J. Frankel, Oxford 2004 (*Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 20), p. 20.

[50] AAN, Central Committee of the Communist Party of Poland (hereinafter: KC KPP), 158/VII-5, Report of the Central Committee of KPP for the period from the 4th Congress, pp. 3–4.

[51] Cimek, *Mniejszości narodowe*, p. 66.

falling to 32 per cent. During most of this period, however, Jews were the most numerous ethnic group in the KZMP. The per centage of Poles ranged from 19.2 to 34.5 per cent. The rest of the members (from 28 to 35 per cent) were Ukrainians and Belarusians, with a few Germans.[52]

It is worth noting that in the eastern territories of the Second Polish Republic (today's western Belarus and western Ukraine), where Poles made up two or three times larger per centages of the population than Jews, completely different proportions can be seen in the ranks of Communist youth organisations. In 1933, according to internal statistics, the KZMZB had 3100 members, including 2100 Belarusians, 450 Ukrainians, 450 Jews and only 100 Poles. At that time, KZMZU had 3400 members, including 2750 Ukrainians, 550 Jews and 100 Poles.[53]

Jews dominated the International Organisation for Aid to Revolutionaries (MOPR), which in 1932 numbered 6000 members, 90 per cent of whom were Jews. In 1936, this per centage was at a similar level.[54]

The stereotype of *Żydokomuna* was undoubtedly strengthened by the large number of people of Jewish origin in leadership positions in the Communist party. So far, no publication that thoroughly analyses this problem has been published.[55] My findings show that a total of 28 people passed through the top management of the KPRP/KPP (Politburo), including eleven activists of Jewish origin (39 per cent). In the broader party elite, that is, the Central Committee, the per centage was similar. There were 37 Jews among the 100 members and deputy members of the Central Committee. It is also necessary to take into account the composition of the National Secretariat of the Central Committee of the KPP, the body which managed the party's day-to-day activities. Throughout the period under discussion, it had a total of 36 people, including up to 21 Jews (58 per cent).[56] These three

[52] Ibid., p. 150.

[53] AAN, Communist Polish Youth Union (hereinafter: KZMP), mf 933/11, Organisational status of the KZMP for the period from the 6th Comintern Congress, 1933, p. 132.

[54] Cimek, 'Żydzi w ruchu komunistycznym', p. 37.

[55] Krystyna Trembicka limited herself to providing only some basic information about the members of the KPP Politburo, see K. Trembicka, *Między utopią a rzeczywistością. Myśl polityczna Komunistycznej Partii Polski (1918–1938)*, Lublin 2007, pp. 66–68.

[56] The author's findings are based on an analysis of the biographical data of members of the *KPP* party elite. For more on the composition of the Central Committee, the Political Bureau and the National Secretariat of the KPP, see F. Świetlikowa, 'Centralne instancje partyjne KPP', *Z Pola Walki* 1969, no. 4, pp. 140–43.

decision-making bodies comprised a total of 115 Communist activists in the years 1918–38, including 46 Jews (40 per cent).[57]

The significant per centage of activists of Jewish origin in the party elite remained uninterrupted throughout the interwar period, and was even higher at middle management levels. In 1936, out of 30 members and deputy members of the Central Committee of the KPP, 15 were Poles, 12 were Jews, two were Ukrainians and one was Belarusian. According to data from the National Secretariat of the Central Committee of the KPP, the participation of Jews in the broader leadership of the entire party and KZMP in this period amounted to 54 per cent. Among the secretaries of the KPP District Committees there were 28 of them, compared to 23 Poles. An even higher per centage of Jewish activists was recorded in the KPP's publishing apparatus (75 per cent), while the 'technical apparatus' of the National Secretariat and the management of the KPP's District Committee in Warsaw were 100 per cent Jewish.[58]

The reasons for the significant presence of people of Jewish origin in the leadership of the KPP can probably be found in the insufficient number of Polish Communists with appropriate education,[59] as well as in the conscious personnel policy adopted by the Comintern, who preferred Jews as being suspected less of 'Polish nationalism'.[60]

It is worth noting that in the entire 115-member party elite there were only five women, four of whom were Jewish (Maria Eiger-Kamińska, Helena Grudowa [Gitla Rapaport], Zofia Unszlicht-Osińska and Romana Wolf-Jezierska), and one Polish (Maria Koszutska). In the entire KPP, the per centage of women was only 9.5 per cent; according to reports from party activists, most of these were Jewish. This indirectly confirms the established social origin of KPP members, among whom only 10 per cent were women of peasant origin, and as much as 15 per cent were petty-bourgeois in origin. The majority (59 per cent) were daughters of workers.[61] Another indication is that the life partners of many Polish Communists were

[57] 21 members of the National Secretariat sat on the Central Committee; the remaining 15 did not belong to this body.

[58] Cimek, *Mniejszości narodowe*, p. 143.

[59] Śpiewak, *Żydokomuna*, p. 154.

[60] W. Bieńkowski, *Motory i hamulce socjalizmu*, Paris 1969, p. 46.

[61] Z. Szczygielski, *Członkowie KPP 1918–1938 w świetle badań ankietowych*, Warszawa 1989, p. 28.

Jewish Communists. This resulted from the custom of entering into male-female relationships in one's own party circle. A similar phenomenon occurred in the Soviet Union, where the wives of non-Jewish party leaders were often Jewish women.[62]

According to estimates by Jaff Schatz, the number of Jewish Communists in the ranks of the KPP and KZMP (including those in prison) ranged between 6200 and 10,000 in the 1930s.[63] Meanwhile, according to estimates by the Polish Interior Ministry, in 1927 the socialist Bund numbered around 10,000 members, and its youth organisation Tsukunft held around 6000.[64] In 1935, 7000 Jews belonged to the Bund,[65] while the Polish Socialist Party had around 30–33,000 activists at its peak in 1931.[66]

In the parliamentary elections, the illegal Communist party issued its own electoral list three times. In 1922, the Union of the Town and Country Proletariat won 121,448 votes and two parliamentary seats. In 1928, the Workers and Peasants' Unity list gained over 297,000 votes, which gave it seven seats in the Sejm. In 1930, 232,000 people cast their votes for this list, thanks to which the Communists won four seats.[67] The estimates by Jeffrey Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg show that in 1922 only 4 per cent of the Jews in Poland voted for Communists, although in 1928 this per centage rose to 7 per cent; for Polish Catholics, the figures were 2 and 4 per cent respectively. The Communists enjoyed by far the greatest support among Ukrainian and Belarusian peasants.[68]

From the above findings it can be concluded that the Communists were supported by twice as many Jewish voters as Poles, but their group still constituted a small minority of this community. Most of the Jewish population, as well as the Polish population, was naturally averse to Communism. This also resulted

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[62] A. Vaksberg, *Stalin against the Jews*, New York 1994, p. 64.

[63] Schatz, 'Jews and the Communist Movement', p. 20.

[64] AAN, Ministry of the Interior (hereinafter: MSW), 1062, Jewish political groups in Poland, 1 May 1927, pp. 15–16. Published in *Żydowska mozaika polityczna w Polsce 1917–1927. Wybór dokumentów*, selected and ed. by C. Brzoza, Kraków 2003, pp. 122–24.

[65] A. Polonsky, 'The Bund in Polish Political Life 1935–1939', in *Essential Papers on Jews and the Left*, ed. E. Mendelsohn, New York–London 1997, p. 175.

[66] J. Żarnowski, *Polska Partia Socjalistyczna w latach 1935–1939*, Warszawa 1965, pp. 367–68.

[67] Z. Zaporowski, *Między Sejmem a wiecem. Działalność Komunistycznej Frakcji Poselskiej w latach 1921–1935*, Lublin 1997, pp. 20–23.

[68] J.S. Kopstein, J. Wittenberg, 'Who Voted Communists? Reconsidering the Social Bases of Radicalism in Interwar Poland', *Slavic Review* 2003, vol. 62, no. 1, pp. 98, 102.

from the sense of threat, deeply embedded in the psyche of East European Jews, posed by any revolution or social disturbances, as these were usually accompanied by looting and pogroms.[69] However, the pro-Communist minority caught the eyes of Polish public opinion. The local press frequently reported arrests and trials of Communists bearing Jewish names, which also perpetuated the stereotype of *Żydokomuna*.

The identity of the Jewish Communists

It is commonly expressed in the literature that when Communists of Jewish origin became Communists, they automatically ceased to be Jews and completely lost their national identity, turning into internationalists, or possibly Poles;[70] as such they were allegedly characterised by a desire to abandon their Jewishness, and focused on acculturation and assimilation.[71] According to Julia Brun-Zejmis, "the denial of national identity played a much more important role in their entrustment to the Communist movement than their hatred of social injustice".[72]

Communism was thus one of the available forms of assimilation into the non--Jewish world, especially for 'refugees from the Jewish caste' who faced double disapproval. These people had already been rejected by their former milieu, yet were still considered strangers by non-Jewish society. Supposedly, the best solution for them was 'red assimilation', that is, joining the Communist movement.[73] The situation of Jewish Bolsheviks was presented in a similar way by Nora Levin: "Bolshevism attracted Jews pushed out of the brackets, suspended between two worlds – Jewish and Christian […]. Having renounced their own identity and roots, but not finding themselves fully a part of Russian life (outside the party), the Jewish Bolsheviks found their ideological home in the universal revolutionary doctrine".[74]

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[69] A. Kainer, 'Żydzi a komunizm', *Krytyka* 1983, no. 15, pp. 225–26.

[70] Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 127; Śpiewak, *Żydokomuna*, pp. 167–68; J.T. Gross, *Upiorna dekada. Trzy eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i komunistów 1939–1948*, Kraków 1998, pp. 93–94.

[71] M. Mishkinsky, 'The Communist Party of Poland and the Jews', in *The Jews of Poland between Two World Wars*, ed. Y. Gutman et al., Hanover–London 1989, p. 64.

[72] J. Brun-Zejmis, 'National Self-Denial and Marxist Ideology: The Origin of the Communist Movement in Poland and the Jewish Question 1918–1923', *Nationalities Papers* 1994, vol. 22, no. 1, p. 29.

[73] Kainer, *Żydzi a komunizm*, p. 228; S. Krajewski, 'Żydowscy komuniści – problem dla nas?', in *Żydzi i komunizm*, ed. M. Bilewicz, B. Pawlisz, Warszawa 2000, p. 152.

[74] Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union*, p. 49; Pipes, *Rosja bolszewików*, p. 109.

Such examples of 'red assimilation' are well known, but they mainly concern the party elites. However, one must not generalise the experience. On the basis of his sociological research, Schatz stated that the empirical facts contradict the hypothesis that Jewish people joined the Communist movement after completely rejecting their ethnic roots and cultural heritage. Despite the fact that accession to Communism was usually associated with a rebellion against the traditions and values of their parents, they did generally retain their Jewish identity.[75] This opinion is also confirmed by the results of research by Polish historians, which indicate the peculiar separatism displayed by the Jewish Communists.

On the basis of the aforementioned research by Schatz, the community of interest to us should be divided into two basic groups: 1) the majority, i.e. Communists raised in traditional Jewish families, living in Yiddish-language culture, and active on the so-called 'Jewish street'; and 2) the minority, activists who had often been assimilated for generations, relatively well-educated, speakers of good Polish, active in the party elite and in Polish circles. Naturally, there were exceptions to this division, but the vast majority of Jewish Communists fell within the above groups.

Most Jewish Communist activists came from traditional, mostly poor petty--bourgeois families. They spoke Yiddish on a daily basis and spoke little Polish.[76] They grew up and mixed in Jewish neighbourhoods, among Jewish colleagues, and in Jewish social and political organisations. When they became Communists, they romanced and married in their own milieu.[77] They maintained their Jewish identity, "idolised Jewish culture and dreamed of a society in which Jews would be equal to others as Jews". They tried in various ways to reconcile Marxism with a Jewish national identity.[78]

The above findings are all the more comprehensible if we consider the cultural and linguistic face of the Jewish community in Poland. According to the 1931 census, 2,487,000 persons (79.9 per cent) declared their native language to be Yiddish, and 243,000 stated it to be Hebrew, which accounted for 8.6 per cent of the entire population. The Polish language was declared by 372,000 people

[75] Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 48.
[76] Ibid., p. 54.
[77] Ibid., p. 116.
[78] Ibid., p. 48.

'of the Mosaic faith' (11.9 per cent).[79] Thus, the vast majority of Jews (according to the denominational criterion) retained a sense of their own national identity and used their own language on a daily basis. Although they had broken with her family environment, they were subconsciously steeped in certain elements of their heritage. Schatz wrote on this subject:

> The basic cultural heritage was passed on to these people through religious instruction, religious practices, holiday rituals, legends and songs, stories from their parents and grandparents, listening to elders' discussions. […] All this formed the deep core of their identity, values, norms and attitudes with which they entered their subversive youth and adulthood. This core was sometimes so profoundly transformed by acculturation, secularisation and political radicalisation that it was simply denied. Yet all their later perceptions were filtered through these deep layers.[80]

Before joining the Communist movement, most representatives of the Jewish community in Poland belonged to Jewish political parties and youth organisations with a left-wing tone, such as the *Poalei Siyon*-Left, the All-Jewish Workers' Union Bund, *ha-Shomer ha-Tzair* (a leftist Zionist scouting organisation), the *Jugent* Jewish Socialist Workers' Youth, the *Tsukunft* Union of Jewish Socialist Youth (the Bund's youth organisation), the *Shtern* sports clubs and Jewish left-wing trade unions. Whether a given person ended up in Bund, *Poalei Siyon* or KPP was often determined by coincidence.[81] These organisations were infiltrated by Communists, and under the influence of their agitation, entire member groups were gradually radicalised and joined the KPP or the KZMP.

Research by Polish historians also shows that unassimilated Jews from small towns played a key role in the field of party activity. Emil Horoch established that in the years 1931–38, members of the district and district committees of the Communist Party of Poland in the Lublin and Siedlce districts came mainly from the poor petty

[79] 'Drugi powszechny spis ludności z dn. 9 XII 1931 r. Mieszkania i gospodarstwa domowe, ludność. Stosunki zawodowe. Polska (dane skrócone)', *Statystyka Polski*, Series C, no. 62, p. 31; *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce w zarysie (do 1950 roku)*, ed. J. Tomaszewski, Warszawa 1993, p. 159.

[80] Schatz, *The Generation*, pp. 37–38.

[81] Ibid., pp. 54–57, 61.

bourgeoisie. Among 171 people there were only 14 farmers, 7 white-collar workers and 8 students. Most of them were small craftsmen and traders. It was easier for Jews in these professions to move around in the field without arousing suspicion by the police. Moreover, they had a certain minimum amount of education.[82]

In materials prepared for the Comintern in 1929, we read: "Jewish comrades in cities usually account for over 50 per cent of the organisation […]. There are towns where the organisation is purely Jewish".[83] Such a national and professional composition of party organisations made it difficult for the Communist party to gain access to Polish peasants and workers. "Jewish activists were often treated as 'the other' or 'strangers'. They themselves were reluctant to work among the peasants, justifying themselves in terms of the Polish people's anti-Semitism. As a result, the influence of the KPP was limited to semi-proletarian circles, from the border of towns and villages, and to the unemployed."[84]

Another, separate group were the left-wing Jewish writers and journalists who spoke Yiddish ('the citizens of *Yiddishland*'). This group, preserving its Jewish identity, were centred around the magazine *Literarishe Tribune* and included Dawid Sfard, Bernard Mark, Izaak Deutscher and Michał Mirski.[85]

Numerous documents indicate that a significant number of Jewish Communists (and also Ukrainian Communists), despite officially adhering to the slogan of proletarian internationalism, were characterised by strong separatist tendencies. Initially, these were manifested in efforts to create a separate Jewish Communist party in Poland (the *Kombund* case described above). When this proved impossible, they strove to maintain autonomy within the KPP, which was served by the activities of the Central Jewish Bureau.[86]

This office operated on the so-called 'Jewish street', coordinating the work of Jewish party units in larger and smaller towns. It exercised supervision of the Muranów District Committee (KD Muranów) in Warsaw, which was purely

[82] E. Horoch, 'Grupy kierownicze KPP w województwie lubelskim w latach 1930–1938', in *Między Wschodem a Zachodem. Studia z dziejów polskiego ruchu i myśli socjalistycznej*, ed. A.F. Grabski, P. Samuś, Łódź 1995, pp. 205–06.

[83] Horoch, *Komunistyczna Partia Polski*, p. 88.

[84] Ibid., p. 117; Cimek, 'Żydzi w ruchu komunistycznym', pp. 35–36.

[85] J. Nalewajko-Kulikov, *Obywatel Jidyszlandu. Rzecz o żydowskich komunistach w Polsce*, Warszawa 2009, p. 77.

[86] Cimek, 'Żydzi w ruchu komunistycznym', p. 39.

Jewish in character. The KPP's Warsaw Committee repeatedly drew attention to the separatism exhibited by the Muranów branch. In 1926, the local KD was reorganised to include party cells made up of Poles. However, the tendency towards separatism turned out even stronger, because by 1933 all of the committee's 315 members were of Jewish origin.[87] It should be added that Muranów was by far the strongest district, which led the way for the Warsaw Committee of the KPP.[88]

A similar situation prevailed in the Warsaw party's youth group. The KZMP's organisation in Warsaw consisted of separate Polish and Jewish professional units. The latter was made up of textiles, shoemakers, tailors, bakers, traders, and so on. In 1934, there were 1100 KZMP members in ten Warsaw districts, including as many as 900 Jews. Two districts were completely Jewish: Muranów (386 members) and Śródmieście (290 members).[89] As reported by the KZMP's directorate, small--town Jewish organisations in the area "were separated from the countryside by a Chinese wall".[90]

In the milieu of Jewish Communists in Warsaw, there was opposition to the leadership of the KPP, which was associated with Trotskyism. A splinter group of ex-combatants, headed by Hersz Mendel Stockfisz and Pinkus Minc, was removed from the party. In 1932, they created the KPP-Opposition, which numbered around three hundred people in Warsaw and had structures in seven other cities. A second Trotskyist group was created in the same period by a faction of the Central Committee of the KPP led by Abe Pflug (the so-called 'Abists'), and was also excluded from the party. After 1934, its members returned to the ranks of the KPP on an individual basis.[91]

The Comintern activist Wincas Mickiewicz-Kapsukas stated at the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in July 1930: "Those comrades who spoke about a kind of two parties, Polish and

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[87] E. Kowalczyk, 'Struktura Komitetu Warszawskiego KPRP/KPP', in *Komuniści w międzywojennej Warszawie*, ed. E. Kowalczyk, Warszawa 2014, p. 88.

[88] Z. Szczygielski, 'Warszawska organizacja KPP. Problemy organizacyjne', in *Warszawa II Rzeczypospolitej*, vol. 1, ed. M. Drozdowski, Warszawa 1968, p. 185.

[89] 'Komunistyczny Związek Młodzieży w międzywojennej Warszawie', in *Komuniści w międzywojennej Warszawie*, ed. E. Kowalczyk, Warszawa 2014, pp. 101–04.

[90] AAN, KZMP, 159/II/80, Information on the work of the KZMP, 14 July 1932, p. 7.

[91] A. Grabski, 'Nurt trockistowski w polskim ruchu komunistycznym w latach trzydziestych XX w.', in *Komuniści w II Rzeczypospolitej. Ludzie – struktury – działalność*, ed. M. Bukała, M. Krzysztofiński, Rzeszów 2015, pp. 347–49; J. Jacobs, 'Communist Questions, Jewish Answers: Polish Jewish Dissident Communists of the Inter-War Era', *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry* 2005, no. 18, pp. 369–64.

Jewish, they were right".[92] While this statement was undoubtedly an exaggeration, it nevertheless drew attention to a real problem within the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union as well, many of the Jewish Communists operating in the *Yevsektsia* strove to maintain their ethnic identity.[93] The *Yevsektsia*, fighting brutally with the Jewish faith and Hebrew culture, shaped a secular model of life based on Yiddish as a recognised vernacular. It provided conditions for the national survival of Jews in the 1920s, and then in the 1930s it slowed down the processes of assimilation.[94]

Interestingly, in a Soviet state proclaiming the principles of internationalism, people were attributed their ethnic nationality from above. This particularly struck the assimilated Jews, who felt they were Russians. A researcher into the question, Arno Lustiger, noted: "Every Jew – whether he wished it or not – had his national identity (*yevrej*) entered in his documents (when internal passports were introduced in 1932)".[95] Arkady Vaksberg stated that "from the point of view of the Kremlin and the Lubyanka, it was not religion, but blood that decided who was a Jew".[96]

Another minority group within the Jewish Communists were the assimilated intellectuals, most often from the wealthier intellectual, petty-bourgeois or bourgeois houses. Their parents usually spoke Polish on a daily basis. Some knew Yiddish but referred to it as 'jargon'. They supported the Zionist parties, or the Polish left and the centre. They limited Jewish traditions to keeping *kosher* and celebrating the most important holidays. They rejected traditional clothing and considered themselves Poles or 'Poles of the Mosaic faith'. Communists from such houses were better educated, and as a rule held higher positions in the Communist movement. The level of assimilation was also geographically conditioned – it was much higher in Galicia than in the Eastern Borderlands, where Yiddish was cultivated.[97] In relation to these people, the category of 'non-Jewish Jew' used by some researchers can be useful here.[98]

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[92] AAN, Communist Party of Western Belarus (hereinafter: KPZB), 163/III-34, IV Plenum of the Central Committee of KPZB, July 1930, p. 69.

[93] Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union*, p. 280.

[94] B. Pinkus, *The Jews of the Soviet Union: A History of a National Minority*, Cambridge 1988, p. 62.

[95] Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, p. 94.

[96] A. Vaksberg, *Stalin against the Jews*, New York 1994, p. 64.

[97] Schatz, *The Generation*, pp. 55–56.

[98] Ibid., p. 13; Kainer, *Żydzi a komunizm*, p. 218.

Roman Zambrowski (an assimilated Jewish Communist), describing his Jewish prison comrades from the 1920s, stated that "they were mostly intellectuals brought up in Polish culture; in terms of their mentality and manner of being, they did not differ from Poles, and they felt they were Poles". In their dealings with the authorities, at the investigative office, or during a court hearing, when asked about their nationality, they most often answered 'Jew' – in this way they sympathised with the discriminated minority.[99] Among the assimilated Jewish Communists, there was often a common belief in the superiority of their own group over gentiles, as well as an attitude of superiority and alienation towards traditional Polish culture.[100]

One interesting source for determining the national identity of the Communist parties' members are the party questionnaires completed by the participants in KPP congresses and the activists employed by the Comintern. These surveys included a column headed 'nationality'. An analysis of the questionnaires completed by 36 members of the party elite of Jewish origin[101] brings the following results: 17 indicated their nationality as Jewish, 12 indicated it as Polish, and the remaining 7 could be included in the intermediate group (4 of them declared themselves Poles of Jewish origin, 2 entered 'Jew-Pole' [*Żyd-Polak*]). Tadeusz Daniszewski declared Jewish origin, but gave Polish as his mother tongue.

The results of the survey confirm the opinion of Abel Kainer (Stanisław Krajewski) that the Jews constituted a highly heterogeneous group in terms of their 'degree of Jewishness'. He wrote about intermediate categories of national identity, such as 'Pole of Jewish origin' [*Polak żydowskiego pochodzenia*] and 'Pole-Jew' [*Polak-Żyd*] (a double self-determination).[102] The questionnaires reflect the varying degrees of assimilation. In the party elite, for example, Maria Eiger-Kamińska could be considered a fully assimilated person, who grew up in an atmosphere filled with Polish patriotism, while at the same time being almost completely non-religious.[103] At the other extreme was Szymon Zachariasz, who was continuously active in the 'Jewish section', and knew

[99] R. Zambrowski, *Wspomnienia*, vol. 1, Warszawa 1976 (typescript available in the author's collection), p. 69.

[100] Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 119.

[101] I did not find the questionnaires of the remaining ten members of the elite.

[102] Kainer, *Żydzi a komunizm*, p. 216.

[103] M. Kamińska, *Ścieżkami wspomnień*, Warszawa 1960, pp. 183–85.

the Polish language only poorly.[104] Saul Amsterdam (Gustaw Henrykowski), a member of the Political Bureau of the KPP's Central Committee, also consistently declared Jewish origin. As a Communist, in 1923 he undertook a Jewish religious wedding 'under a canopy'.[105] Between these attitudes there are various intermediate degrees of linguistic and cultural-civilisational assimilation.

Thus, it can be seen that even within the party elite, which usually included well-educated activists from better-off families (see below), half of them declared themselves to be Jews. Therefore, it can be assumed that they constituted the majority at lower management levels. There is also no doubt that most of the rank and file of Jewish members of the KPP and KZMP retained their Jewish identity.

Motives for joining the Communist movement

The most frequently cited reason for some Jews' fascination with Communism was their difficult social situation: poverty, limited opportunities for employment, and a sense of injustice. According to this interpretation, ethnic discrimination and anti-Semitism in the Second Polish Republic resulted in a feeling of rejection and alienation in society, and a serious limitation of the victims' opportunities for scientific and professional development. The revolution was treated as an opportunity for liberation and equality. It offered an alternative to Zionism.[106]

In the tsarist empire, large numbers of Jews, Latvians, Poles, Georgians, and so on. joined the Bolsheviks. The Communist movements in Poland (the KPP, and including the KPZU and KPZB) was mostly composed of representatives of national minorities. In interwar Central and Eastern Europe, Communism was the carrier of the unfulfilled national aspirations of various ethnic groups that were subjugated to other nations. This was true of, for example, the Hungarians and Ruthenians (Ukrainians) in Czechoslovakia.[107]

The unstable socio-political and economic situation in the first years of the Second Polish Republic worsened the material situation of the broad masses of society, which resulted in ubiquitous poverty. After a period of economic

[104] AAN, BSK KC PZPR, 237/XXIII-429, Personal files of Szymon Zachariasz.

[105] AAN, Collection of personal files of workers' activists, 101, Autobiography of S. Amsterdam, 1936, p. 24; G. Berendt, 'Polscy Żydzi wobec komunizmu przed Zagładą', *Biuletyn IPN* 2010, no. 11, p. 37.

[106] Mishkinsky, 'The Communist Party of Poland', pp. 100–01; Śpiewak, *Żydokomuna*, pp. 159–60.

[107] P. Lendvai, *Antysemityzm bez Żydów*, part 2, Warszawa 1987, pp. 54–55.

recovery in the second half of the 1920s, the great economic crisis of the first half of the 1930s broke out. The themes of poverty, the inability to continue education and the lack of life prospects appear in almost all the autobiographies and memoirs of Polish Communists coming from working-class and peasant circles, and from the poorer class of the petty bourgeoisie (children of craftsmen). This also applied to a large proportion of the Jews who lived in poverty.[108]

As already mentioned, the leadership of the KPP and KZMP was mostly made up of relatively well-educated Jews, coming from the better-off social strata. As calculated by Schatz, of all the Jewish Communists described in the two volumes of the Słownik biograficzny działaczy polskiego ruchu robotniczego [Biographical dictionary of the activists of the Polish labour movement],[109] up to 40 per cent came from bourgeois and petty-bourgeois families, and 23 per cent were from intellectual families.[110] Among the Jews in the party elite (according to questionnaires), only 8 of them were from the working class; 13 were petty-bourgeois, 11 bourgeois and 6 intellectuals. The remaining five people stated that they were of intellectual-bourgeois or intellectual-petty-bourgeois origin.[111]

The Jewish petty bourgeoisie and intelligentsia were also hugely affected by the economic crisis. In 1930, 35 per cent of Jewish enterprises (shops, workshops) went bankrupt, and unemployment among white-collar workers reached as much as 20–25 per cent during the crisis years.[112] Apart from pauperisation and unemployment, young intellectuals faced various forms of discrimination consisting in restrictions on access to studies and work in offices or state institutions. As a result of the barriers artificially applied (*numerus clausus* and *numerus nullus*), the number of Jewish students fell from 24.6 per cent in the academic year 1921/22 to 8.2 per cent in 1938/39.[113]

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[108] Schatz, 'Jews and the Communist Movement', p. 14.

[109] See *Słownik biograficzny działaczy polskiego ruchu robotniczego*, ed. F. Tych, vol. 1, Warszawa 1978; vol. 2, Warszawa 1987.

[110] Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 350.

[111] The author's findings were based on an analysis of the questionnaires of 43 Jewish members of the KPP elite. The questionnaires of a further three people were not found.

[112] J. Żarnowski, *Społeczeństwo Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej 1918–1939*, Warszawa 1973, p. 204.

[113] E. Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1982, trans. into Polish by A. Tomaszewska as: *Żydzi Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w okresie międzywojennym*, Warszawa 1992, pp. 70–71.

Bearing in mind the above, it should also be noted that not all Jewish Communist intellectuals were deprived of life prospects and career options in the Second Polish Republic. A good example is that of Jakub Berman, a future member of the PZPR's leadership; he was a graduate of law studies, writing his doctorate under the supervision of a well-known sociologist, Prof. Ludwik Krzywicki. In Berman's biography, Anna Sobór-Świderska stated that "he could have successfully done something else, become a scientist, lawyer, influential journalist".[114] His colleague, the economist Hilary Minc (also a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party) worked at the Central Statistical Office in the 1930s. The famous torturer of the Communist security apparatus, Colonel Józef Różański (Goldberg), ran his own legal practice before 1939. Thus, the assimilated intellectuals were not always pushed into Communism by problems with their academic and professional careers.

According to memorials from surviving Communists, the political and social radicalism of young, sensitive people from wealthy intellectual, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois families most often germinated under the influence of their observations of the reality which surrounded them. Being privileged, compared to others, and seeing their parents' world as saturated with hypocrisy and injustice, they experienced guilt and a thirst for justice.[115] Maria Eiger-Kamińska, the daughter of a great industrialist, was shocked when she saw the terrible conditions of the workers while visiting the factories owned by her father Bolesław Eiger and her uncle Maurycy Poznański.[116]

Schatz aptly noted that "ascribing Jewish radicalism solely or mainly to the fact of the plight of the Jews (oppression, anti-Semitism, poverty) as an explanation is not enough in itself". Material factors cannot alone explain, for example, the disproportionately large share of Jews in the New Left in the United States.[117] It is also difficult to explain the example of Hungary, which before 1918 could have been considered a tolerant country towards its Jewish minority. Despite the lack of pogroms and open discrimination, it was the Jewish Communists who created

[114] A. Sobór-Świderska, *Jakub Berman. Biografia komunisty*, Warszawa 2009, p. 32.

[115] Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 57.

[116] Kamińska, *Ścieżkami wspomnień*, pp. 46–49.

[117] J. Schatz, 'Zagadka pokolenia żydowskich komunistów', in *Żydzi i komunizm*, ed. M. Bilewicz, B. Pawlisz, Warszawa 2000 (special edition of the journal *Jidełe*), pp. 15–16.

the Hungarian Soviet Republic headed by Bela Kun in 1919. Of the 26 ministers and deputy ministers in Kuna's government, 20 were of Jewish origin.[118]

A frequently quoted motive for the accession of Jews to the Communist movement was the pursuit of the aforementioned 'red assimilation', that is, leaving the Jewish ghetto and merging with Polish society through Communism. According to the supporters of this thesis, the KPP was the only Polish political group open to emigrants from the ghetto.[119] The Communist organisation satisfied their troubling need to feel rooted. The path of assimilation, however, turned out to be the source of a long-term disease of consciousness, an identity crisis. This was felt particularly strongly by the intelligentsia. For them, joining the Communist movement was a way to overcome their alienation and find a new community that would replace their lost ties and offer them a new set of moral values – a 'new faith'.[120]

As Paweł Śpiewak aptly noted, Jews joining the KPP essentially replaced their former ghetto (*shtetl*) with another ghetto, the Communist one.[121] After all, as members of an illegal party, they functioned in isolation from society. The large share of people of Jewish origin in the leadership of the KPP and KZMP additionally contributed to the party's alienation from Polish society; the fact of their predomination created another barrier to be exploited by anti-Communist propaganda.[122]

One such chance to leave the ghetto came from joining the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), which demanded equal rights for the national minorities. It strongly opposed anti-Semitism and all forms of discrimination against the Jewish population. The party often collaborated with the Bund, especially in the second half of the 1930s.[123] No statistics on nationality were kept in the PPS, but on the basis

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[118] Śpiewak, *Żydokomuna*, pp. 146–47; Mendelsohn, *The Jews*, p. 137.

[119] Kainer, *Żydzi a komunizm*, p. 228; A. Landau-Czajka, *Syn będzie Lech… Asymilacja Żydów w Polsce międzywojennej*, Warszawa 2006, p. 394.

[120] Schatz, *The Generation*, pp. 15, 58, 66; Kainer, *Żydzi a komunizm*, pp. 227–28.

[121] Śpiewak, *Żydokomuna*, p. 163.

[122] Bieńkowski, *Motory i hamulce socjalizmu*, pp. 43–46.

[123] J. Holzer, 'Relations between Polish and Jewish left wing groups in interwar Poland', in *The Jews in Poland*, ed. Ch. Abramski, M. Jachimczyk, A. Polonsky, Oxford 1986, pp. 144–45; J. Holzer, 'Polska i żydowska lewica polityczna w II Rzeczypospolitej. Polacy wobec Żydów i kwestii żydowskiej; Żydzi wobec Polski i Polaków', in *Narody: jak powstawały i jak wybijały się na niepodległość? Profesorowi Tadeuszowi Łepkowskiemu w sześćdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin i czterdziestolecie pracy przyjaciele, koledzy, uczniowie*, ed. M. Kula, Warszawa 1989, p. 439.

of reports it can be concluded that there was a fairly large group of Polish Jews in its ranks; its directorate included Herman Diamand, Herman Lieberman and Feliks Perl. Thus, this party offered an alternative to pro-assimilation leftist individuals.[124] Some Jewish youth, however, probably chose the KPP because the PPS was not radical enough for them; it did not meet the need for a 'new faith' or a new brotherhood. In addition, the Socialist Party had a clear anti-Soviet attitude, which could not please those young Jews who were fascinated by 'the successes of the USSR'.

It seems that another factor that attracted people to Communism to a greater extent than 'red assimilation' was its internationalism, which was especially attractive to those 'refugees from the Jewish caste' who did not want to clearly declare their nationality. They often felt that they were neither Jews nor Poles, but cosmopolitans.[125] Kainer states that these cosmopolitan leanings were "perhaps the most striking convergence of Communism with the attitude of the Jews". In his opinion, they resulted mainly from the fact that the Jews were the only significant national minority without their own ethnic territory.[126] The attractiveness of internationalist slogans was mentioned, among others, by Bronisław Anlen, a member of the KPP from 1928: "In the PPS they did not complain about the Jews, but the PPS was national. For us in the 1920s, the USSR was a miracle, a model of socialism. We did not feel like traitors to Poland's affairs – but the internationalist attitude and the idea of 'the whole world' were the most important things. This line attracted people to the KPP".[127]

At the same time, this internationalism and the glorification of the Soviet Union as the 'homeland of the world proletariat' were the main factors which pushed ethnic Poles away from Communism. The Communists' condemnation of all manifestations of 'nationalism' made it impossible for them to penetrate into the deeper layers of Polish society, creating a psychological barrier that was difficult to cross; so the Polish intelligentsia who joined the party had a great deal of resistance to overcome. These obstacles did not play such a big role for the Jewish community, which was inherently less sensitive to problems of national sovereignty.

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[124] See statements by Stefan Arski and Żanna Kormanowa in R. Pragier, *Żydzi czy Polacy*, Warszawa 1992, pp. 56, 98–99.

[125] Landau-Czajka, *Syn będzie Lech*, p. 396.

[126] Kainer, *Żydzi a komunizm*, p. 227.

[127] Pragier, *Jews or Poles*, p. 79.

In the 1920s, perhaps the most important factor attracting Polish Jews to Communism was precisely the perception of the Soviet Union as a country where the Bolshevik revolution had freed society from anti-Semitism and poverty, and provided Jews with equal rights. Such a program was most attractive to most of the Jewish Communists who wished to preserve their identity. The promise of Soviet society seemed to them more concrete, quicker and realistic than the Zionist dreams and the Bund's program. It also opened up opportunities for promotion and a career.[128]

The KPP also programmatically fought anti-Semitism and stood up for the linguistic and cultural rights of the national minorities.[129] In the resolution of the Second Congress of the KPRP in 1923, we read:

> The Polish proletariat must demand the lifting of all restrictions on Jews in the fields of administration, education and the judiciary. For the Jewish popular masses, it demands complete freedom of cultural development, the destruction of the government-supported ghetto, the abolition of religious *kheder*s, the introduction of state and city schools with the Jewish language of instruction, unrestricted access to general schools for Jews, the right to use the mother tongue in administration and the judiciary.[130]

Indeed, in the 1920s, over 2.5 million Jews living in the USSR could benefit from the flourishing of Yiddish education, literature and culture. The language could be used in schools, offices and public institutions. About 20 per cent of the entire Jewish population in the Soviet Union belonged to the class of the intelligentsia and white-collar workers. The Jewish Communist workers' party, *Poalei Siyon*, operated legally until 1928.[131] One confirmation of equality was the relatively large number of Jews in important party and state positions. In the first years after the revolution,

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[128] Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 60; Śpiewak, *Żydokomuna*, pp. 162, 164.

[129] H. Cimek, *Komuniści a Polska (1918–1938)*, Warszawa 1989, p. 228; Mishkinsky, 'The Communist Party of Poland', p. 65.

[130] L. Gamska, 'KPP wobec problemów kulturalno-oświatowych ludności żydowskiej w okresie od I zjazdu do IV konferencji (1925 r.)', *Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* 1977, no. 103, p. 44.

[131] Г. Костырченко, *Сталин против "космополитов". Власть и еврейская интеллигенция в СССР*, Москва 2010, pp. 38–42; Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, pp. 82–86; S. Baron, *The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets*, New York 1975, pp. 216–17, 226–29.

35 per cent of the inner elite of the RCP(b) were Jews.[132] In the years 1922–25, three Jews were among the seven members of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee: Grigory Zinoviev (Radomyslski), Lev Kamenev (Rozenfeld), and Leon Trotsky (Bronstein).[133] In 1922, Jews constituted 5.2 per cent of the total number of party members, three times more than their share of the population of the Soviet Union. They held 13 per cent of the positions in the People's Commissariat of Trade, and a similar per centage in the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, and made up 11.8 per cent of the full-time government officials employed in Moscow.[134] A radical change in their position took place in the mid-1930s, when, on a par with other national groups, they found themselves subjected to Stalinist terror.[135] Interestingly, however, in 1934 they constituted 38.5 per cent of the entire leadership of the NKVD and managed seven of the ten key departments.[136]

Perhaps the factor which historians underestimated most in assessing susceptibility to Communist agitation was youthful idealism. One of the Polish Jewish Communists, Roman Zambrowski, recalling the reasons why he joined the Communist movement, mentioned three factors: 1) his own life experiences, 2) literature, 3) "youth – its strength, imagination, faith, uncompromising attitude".[137] On the basis of KPP members' questionnaires, Zbigniew Szczygielski calculated that 43 per cent. of them had started their social and political activity at the age of 14 to 20, i.e. often before reaching the age of majority. In the narrower group of party officials, this per centage was 62.6 per cent.[138] The above-mentioned per centage of Jews in the KZMP (up to 50 per cent) clearly shows that Jewish youth was particularly susceptible to Communist agitation. A characteristic feature of the generation of 'Jewish-Polish Communists' was early and intense involvement in politics. Sisters, brothers and cousins of future KPP members also searched for

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[132] E. Mawdsley, S. White, *The Soviet Elite from Lenin to Gorbachev. The Central Committee and its Members 1917–1991*, Oxford 2000, p. 40.

[133] К. Залесский, *Империя Сталина. Биографический энциклопедический словарь*, Москва 2000, p. 527.

[134] Levin, *The Jews in the Soviet Union*, p. 47; L. Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, London 1960, pp. 349–50.

[135] Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, pp. 94–99.

[136] A. Polonsky, 'Jews and the Communism in Soviet Union and Poland', in *Jews and Leftist Politics. Judaism, Israel, Antisemitism, and Gender*, ed. J. Jacobs, Cambridge 2017, pp. 154–55.

[137] Zambrowski, *Wspomnienia*, p. 28.

[138] Szczygielski, *Członkowie KPP 1918–1938*, pp. 95–103.

ideology as a response to their difficult economic and social situations. Often, one family contained supporters of several groups who were in conflict with each other: Bundists, Zionists, Communists. Overall, the ideological climate was radical.[139] As Ezra Mendelsohn wrote: "Interwar Poland was certainly not a paradise for Jews, but it was a paradise for their contemporary politics".[140]

The radical organisations also made it possible to free oneself from the existing ties and social hierarchies. Jewish youth from conservative homes sought an escape from the influence of their parents, whose traditional educational ideals and views were relics of a bygone era for the young. The emancipation of some Jews from the domination of Orthodoxy continued throughout the interwar period, which was related to the popularity of both Zionism and left-wing movements. In the autobiographies of many young Jews and Jewish women, an overwhelming will to act, be active and 'break away' from the tutelage of their parents and the conservative milieu is repeated.[141]

In practical terms, the road to Communist organisations led through reading, and most of all, through other people. Communists sought to infiltrate legal organisations such as scout troops, sports clubs, and trade unions, and agitated among their members. In high schools [*gymnazja*], they reached out to pre-selected individuals and gradually drew them into their movement. They became mentors for younger colleagues.[142] As Tadeusz Zabłudowski recalled, numerous Marxist circles were created, for example, among students of the Merchants' Association High School [*Gimnazjum Zgromadzenia Kupców*] in Warsaw, which was attended by young people from petty-bourgeois and intellectual families.[143]

It should also be remembered that many of the Communists convicted of anti-state activities were in prison, where they continued their agitation and recruitment activities.

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[139] Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 56.

[140] Mendelsohn, *Jews of Central and Eastern Europe*, p. 64.

[141] K. Zieliński, 'Uwiedzeni, zmanipulowani, zdesperowani? Młodzież komunistyczna w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej', in *Procesy socjalizacji w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej 1914–1939. Zbiór studiów*, ed. A. Landau-Czajka, K. Sierakowska, Warszawa 2013, p. 91.

[142] Schatz, *The Generation*, pp. 62–63. Artur Kowalski vividly describes this method of agitation in his memoirs: id., *Kochałem ją nad życie. Wspomnienia b. komunisty*, Rosenheim 1986, pp. 107–12.

[143] AAN, Collection of personal files of workers' activists, Z 5733, Files of Tadeusz Zabłudowski, Biography, 22 March 1950, p. 5.

Prisons were a particular breeding ground for Communist cadres. A researcher of Jewish criminal circles has stated: "Political prisoners organised in communes helped (they provided food, tobacco, newspapers) to anyone who decided to adopt their worldview. Jewish prisoners, often torn from the homogeneous environment of the closed Jewish community and crammed into the cogs of the Polish prison machine, easily succumbed to the influence of Communists, both Poles and Jews".[144]

When looking for an answer to the question of why Jewish youth flocked to Communism, one should also consider the theories and observations explaining Jewish radicalism in terms of the cultural heritage of this nation. They show certain 'structural' convergences and elements common to Communism (Marxism) and Jewish spirituality (Judaism). This mainly concerns such traditional values as messianic longings, intellectualism and love of knowledge.[145] Most of the Jews who joined left--wing movements were brought up in traditional schools. Gerald Sorin, analysing Jewish radicalism in America in the early twentieth century, argued that Jewish revolutionaries (most often emigrants from Central Europe) formed a prophetic minority that was inspired by the spirit of Biblical principles of justice, reinterpreted for the modern world.[146]

While joining Communism meant a rebellion against religion and traditional Jewish values, the young people still remained a product of the old world. The heritage of the *shtetl* in the form of historically shaped values and attitudes was embedded in them subconsciously.[147] Cultural traditions can be transmitted in an indirect, elusive and barely discernible way, and even by direct contradiction.[148]

The Communists were atheists, but Communism was in fact a form of pseudo--religion. For the Communists, Marxism-Leninism was a theory explaining everything, a global interpretation of the universe. Formally, it was based on rationalism and hard scientific laws, while at the same time it promised to fulfil the eternal human dreams of a paradise on earth; for these reasons, it was repeatedly compared to a 'secular religion'. According to Raymond Aron, it fulfilled the basic functions that sociology attributes

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[144] M. Rodak, 'Izolacja więzienna jako czynnik sprzyjający akulturacji. Z badań nad przestępczością żydowską w województwie lubelskim w okresie międzywojennym', in *Wokół akulturacji i asymilacji Żydów na ziemiach polskich*, ed. K. Zieliński, Lublin 2010, p. 147.

[145] Kainer, *Żydzi a komunizm*, p. 222; Schatz, 'Zagadka pokolenia żydowskich komunistów', pp. 12–14.

[146] Sorin, *The Prophetic Minority*, p. 3.

[147] Schatz, *The Generation*, pp. 37–38.

[148] G. Sholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, New York 1971, p. 1.

to religion. Apart from interpreting history, it established a hierarchy of values and moral principles. The messianism it proclaimed evoked feelings similar to religious ones.[149]

Joining the Communist movement was usually preceded by a departure from the religion of one's ancestors, typical of adolescence. Rebellion against authority and age-old religious and social principles often led to a 'nihilistic moral void'. There was then a natural desire for a 'simple catechism', i.e. for a new system of values to replace the one which had been rejected.[150] Communism could fill such a void in the soul. Father Józef Maria Bocheński wrote: "Man is shaped in such a way that he needs a worldview, a constant faith, which must be able to explain to him the meaning of his thinking and acting. And that is what Marxism-Leninism does".[151]

One of the main elements of Marxism as a 'new faith' was the messianic idea it contained – the myth of salvation. It was a secular application of the religious concept that history is heading towards the fulfilment of the ultimate goal of Paradise on earth. The role of the Messiah was played by the proletariat, as it becomes "the new Israel, the people chosen by God, the deliverer and creator of the future kingdom of heaven on earth".[152]

Bocheński derived Communist messianism from Christian sources;[153] however, according to Schatz, it had more in common with Jewish messianism, one which was clearly oriented towards the temporal world. While Christian messianism saw salvation as an event in the realm of "the spiritual and invisible, the reflective soul, within the private world of each individual", Jewish messianism concerned this world, and treated the act of redemption "as an event that takes place in public, on the stage of history and among the community of mankind". Salvation was understood as "peace, justice, harmony and perfection, both for the individual and for society as a whole".[154]

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[149] R. Aron, *L'Opium des intellectuels* (Paris, Calmann-Lévy 1955), trans. into Polish by C. Miłosz as *Opium intelektualistów*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 295–99.

[150] A. Wat, *Mój wiek. Pamiętnik mówiony*, part 1, Warszawa 1990, p. 79; Schatz, *The Generation*, p. 66.

[151] J.M. Bocheński, *Marksizm-leninizm. Nauka czy wiara?*, Komorów 2006, pp. 136–37.

[152] Kainer, *Żydzi a komunizm*, p. 221; N. Berdyaev, *The Russian Revolution*, Ann Arbor 1961, pp. 69–70.

[153] In his view the proletariat, in the role of the Messiah, evoked associations with Christ, as he was free from 'original sin' (i.e. private ownership of the means of production) and suffered for the sins of others (Bocheński, *Marksizm-leninizm*, pp. 27–28).

[154] Schatz, *The Generation*, pp. 38–39.

Messianic longings have had a long tradition in Jewish history. They exploded several times in the form of dynamic social movements, the most famous of which was the Sabbatai Zvi movement in the mid-seventeenth century. The Jewish messianic idea was multidimensional, holding both a national and a universal aspect. It induced some emancipating Jews to join revolutionary movements. Marxist's secularised messianism gave them a sense of mission and the certainty of victory. One of Schatz's interlocutors stated: "I believed in Stalin and the party just as my father believed in the Messiah".[155]

Messianism also had its own kind of popular dimension, characterised by apocalyptic thinking, especially in times of poverty and persecution. The final salvation was to be preceded by wars, catastrophes and catastrophes called 'the birth pangs of the Messiah'. In periods of heightened messianic expectations, messianic activism grew: that is, the belief that the course of history should be accelerated. 'Hasteners of the End Times' emerged, condemned by Jewish religious and secular leaders.[156]

As in traditional Judaism, Jewish Communists often had great respect for science and education. They were characterised by a pious attitude towards the works of Marx and other 'classics', and the belief that they contained the deepest truths, which could be reached through patient exegesis.[157] The discussions were based on the methods used in traditional Talmudic studies, i.e. memorising long parts of the text and then interpreting them in the manner of the traditional *pilpul*. The sense of this method lay in the search for common thought within seemingly contradictory statements. The Communists themselves called it a 'Talmudic art'.[158]

Conclusions

The stereotype of *Żydokomuna* present in Polish society during the Second Polish Republic mainly resulted from observations of real events. Jews played a large role in the Polish and Russian revolutionary movements, and they were then very visible in the structures of Communist power after 1917 in Soviet Russia and on the Polish territories temporarily occupied by the Red Army in 1920. Their participation in the Polish Communist movement increased even more after they

[155] Ibid., pp. 40–41, 140.
[156] Ibid., pp. 41–42.
[157] Kainer, *Żydzi a komunizm*, p. 224.
[158] Śpiewak, *Żydokomuna*, pp. 157–58.

joined the ranks of the KPP, together with the splinter factions from the Bund and the *Poalei Siyon*-Left, and was several times higher than the share of the Jewish population in the society of the Second Polish Republic. Jewish people made up about 30 per cent of all KPP members, and in the party youth group (KMZP) the figure reached as high as 50 per cent. In the party elite, activists of Jewish origin constituted around 40 per cent, and predominated in the leadership's mid-level cadres.

Of course, the vast majority of Polish Jews rejected the Communist ideology and methods. They were supported by a maximum 7 per cent of Jewish voters. However, this Communist minority played such an important role in the entire movement that it caught the eye of Polish public opinion. The local press frequently reported arrests and trials of Communists with Jewish surnames, which perfectly perpetuated the stereotype of *Żydokomuna*.

The results of Schatz's sociological analysis and the research of Polish historians contradict the common and widespread thesis that Communists of Jewish origin automatically ceased to be Jews when they became Communists. Such 'red assimilation' concerned primarily intelligentsia and party elites. On the other hand, the majority of Jews joining the Communist movement retained their Jewish identity, although they rebelled against the traditions and values of their parents. Half of those belonging to the party elite also claimed to be Jewish. The social structure of this group reflected the overrepresentation of this group in some social layers: the petty bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie.

The reasons for the significant participation of Jews in the Communist movement cannot be explained (as is often done) solely in terms of their difficult social situation and discrimination. Rather, it was a combination of many factors of various natures, both universal and specifically Jewish. The general causes common to all nationalities were poverty, the idealism of youth and the search for a 'new faith'. In the 1920s, the Jews were fascinated by the equality of national minorities in the Soviet Union and the participation of their fellows in the local power structures. On the other hand, the specifically Jewish features were the inclination towards internationalism (cosmopolitanism) and certain elements common to Marxism and Jewish spirituality, above all messianism. Among some Jews, their aversion to Catholicism and Poland as a migrant country probably also played a role.

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SUMMARY

The article describes the participation of Jews in the revolutionary movement in Russia (especially in Poland) before World War I; the social structure of the Jewish population in Poland; the path of the splinter groups from Jewish left-wing parties to the Communist Workers' Party of Poland (KPP); the attitude of Jewish radicals towards the Bolshevik aggression against Poland in 1920; the number of Jews in the Polish Communist movement, their identity, and their motives for joining the Communist movement.

The share of Jews in the Polish Communist movement was several times higher than the share of the Jewish population in the society of the Second Polish Republic. Jews made up about 30 per cent of all KPP members, and in the party youth group the figure reached as high as 50 per cent. Activists of Jewish origin made up about 40 per cent of the party elite, and they even came to predominate in the middle ranks.

The reasons for the significant participation of Jews in the Communist movement cannot be explained (which is often done) solely by their difficult social situation and discrimination. Rather, it was a combination of many factors of a different nature, both universal and specifically Jewish.

KEYWORDS

Jews • Communism • Second Polish Republic • Communist Party of Poland