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THE POGROM IN KIELCE, AS REPORTED BY OPINION-  
-MAKING US NEWSPAPERS IN 1946 (*THE NEW YORK TIMES*,  
*THE WASHINGTON POST* AND *THE LOS ANGELES TIMES*)

This article examines how the Kielce pogrom was reported in the opinion-making US newspapers. I will show a picture of the tragic anti-Jewish events that took place in Kielce as they were reported in major US newspapers: *The New York Times* (NYT), *The Washington Post* (WP) and *The Los Angeles Times* (LAT), and commented on by journalists and readers in their letters to the editors. However, I will not analyse the extent to which this picture is true, as the origin and social and political background of the Kielce pogrom continue to be the subject of research by historians.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Some major works on the subject of the pogrom are: B. Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach 4 lipca 1946* (Warsaw, 1992); *Wokół pogromu kieleckiego*, vol. 1, ed. by Ł. Kamiński and J. Żaryn, vol. 2, ed. by L. Bukowski, A. Jankowski, and J. Żaryn (Warsaw, 2006–2008); J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Okrzyki pogromowe. Szkice z antropologii historycznej Polski 1939–1946* (Wołowiec, 2012), pp. 143–176; J. Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod klątwą*, vols 1–2 (Warsaw, 2018); M. Zaremba, *Wielka trwoga. Polska 1944–1947. Ludowa reakcja na kryzys* (Cracow–Warsaw, 2012), pp. 606–611 ff. For research issues relating to the pogrom, see B. Szaynok, “Nowe ustalenia badawcze dotyczące pogromu w Kielcach 4 lipca 1946 r.” in *Pogromy Żydów na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX w.*, vol. 4: *Holokaust i powojnie (1939–1946)*, ed. A. Grabski (Warsaw, 2018), pp. 215–235; B. Szaynok, “Polska historiografia po 1989 na temat pogromów i powojennej przemocy wobec Żydów w latach 1944–1947,” in *Pogromy Żydów na ziemiach polskich*, pp. 511–526; R. Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki, “Stawiając pytania, zbliżamy się do prawdy. Wokół bezradności badawczej nad pogromem Żydów w Kielcach 4 lipca 1946 r.” in *Relacje polsko-żydowskie w XX wieku*.

The first *NYT* and *WP* reports were based on information provided during a press conference hastily convened by Brigadier General Wiktor Grosz,<sup>2</sup> the head of the Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on the night of 4–5 July 1946. The first reports described the killing of 26 Jews and two others (a Polish officer and a member of the Polish Workers' Party) by Poles.<sup>3</sup> However, unofficial information provided by Grosz made it possible to conclude that the death toll could have been higher than fifty. The newspapers also reported attacks by armed groups on Jewish dwellings, the headquarters of the Jewish Voivodeship Committee in Kielce, and attacks on Jews on trains in the Kielce region. The scale of the unrest was demonstrated by the militia's use of armoured vehicles and the authorities' imposition of a police curfew in the city from 8.00 p.m.

The *NYT* and the *WP* relied exclusively on Grosz's statements when reporting on Kielce. His argument about the existence of a political connection between the pogrom and the referendum that had just been held in Poland, as well as his comment that hooliganism during important political moments in this country had a "long and sad tradition" were uncritically reported to American readers. The blame for the attack was therefore attributed to "Fascist elements," probable members of the illegal organisation "NSZ" (*Narodowe Siły Zbrojne*, i.e. National Armed Forces) (articles in US newspapers, presumably quoting Grosz, consistently used this abbreviation without explaining what it stood for and without writing it out), and was probably centrally organised.<sup>4</sup> The *NYT* correspondent in Poland, the well-known US journalist William H. Lawrence (he was part of the press group that the Soviets had invited to visit the site of the Katyn Massacre in 1944), was provided with information – probably by government officials or even Grosz

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*Badania, kontrowersje, perspektywy*, ed. by T. Domański and E. Majcher-Ociesa (Kielce–Warsaw, 2021), pp. 303–340. My article also corresponds with the coverage of the pogrom in the Australian press, recently presented in: L. Dziedzic, "Widziane z Antypodów. Pogrom w Kielcach z 1946 roku na łamach prasy australijskiej," in *Relacje polsko-żydowskie w XX wieku*, pp. 359–366.

<sup>2</sup> *NYT* and *WT* misspelled his surname as Groc.

<sup>3</sup> "Poles Kill 26 Jews in Kielce Pogrom: Two Others Die in Rioting," *NYT*, 5 July 1946. Other newspapers repeated this information after the *NYT*: "28 Massacred by Pogrom Gang in Polish Town," *LAT*, 5 July 1946.

<sup>4</sup> The communist authorities' accusation of underground or "reactionary" organisations causing the pogrom was an essential element of the propaganda used by the ruling camp in Poland. See R. Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki, "Pogrom w Kielcach – podziemie w roli oskarżonego," in *Wokół pogromu kieleckiego*, vol. 1, p. 27.

himself – that the authorities would not be reporting on the pogrom in the press out of fear that it would trigger similar incidents in other towns.<sup>5</sup>

The Kielce pogrom, the largest anti-Semitic outbreak since the Cracow incidents of October 1945, was, according to Lawrence, part of a series of isolated attacks by the forces of an “underground” that the *NYT* correspondent did not specify.<sup>6</sup> The activities of these forces were to be one of the main reasons for the mass emigration of Jews from Poland to the American occupation zone in Germany. Lawrence noted that only 800 Jews remained in Kielce out of 50,000 Poles,<sup>7</sup> and over 900,000 Jews had left Poland the previous year. He quoted the opinion of his Polish interlocutors, which was the same regardless of their political leanings that despite the survival of only a fraction of the pre-war Jewish population, there is more anti-Semitism today than in the entire history of this – as he stated – “traditionally anti-Jewish country.” He regarded this as a “sad and tragic” fact. The authorities admitted to having difficulty dealing with the problem, so Jews living in small towns could not feel safe.<sup>8</sup>

The following day, the *NYT* reported that the death toll had increased and indicated that the direct cause of the pogrom had been two mystifications. The first was the alleged kidnapping of a 9-year-old child who had escaped home after being held at the Jewish committee for three days. The second was the actions of a group in military uniforms who entered the Jewish committee’s headquarters, which was under siege by a crowd and promised protection to the people inside before handing them over to the mob outside after leading them into the street. Lawrence pointed out that the “cruel, bestial demonstration of the undoubted widespread anti-Semitic feeling thorough Poland” at the same time demonstrated the authorities’ inability to ensure citizens’ safety within a 200 km radius of the capital. In the morgue in Kielce, the *NYT* correspondent saw the bodies of thirty-six dead, including nine women and one newborn baby – a girl born prematurely

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<sup>5</sup> “Poles Kill 26 Jews in Kielce Pogrom.”

<sup>6</sup> The issue of blaming the underground for the pogrom is still far from being fully clarified. See R. Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki, “Tłum na ulicy Planty – wokół niewyjaśnionych okoliczności genezy i przebiegu pogromu Żydów w Kielcach 4 lipca 1946 r.,” in *Wokół pogromu kieleckiego*, vol. 2, pp. 127–128.

<sup>7</sup> Before the war, Kielce’s religious community numbered 16 to 18 thousand people. K. Urbański, *Kieleccy Żydzi* (Cracow, 1993), p. 126.

<sup>8</sup> “Poles Kill 26 Jews in Kielce Pogrom.”

when the crowd fatally beat her mother. The other victims were two civilians, an army officer and a militiaman. In addition, 40 Jews were seriously injured, and many others suffered lighter injuries.<sup>9</sup>

*The Washington Post*, on the other hand, devoted more space to Henryk Błaszczyk, who was not kidnapped but ran away from home. He was said to have been urged to tell his story of kidnapping by his host, who had sheltered him. The *WP* unreflectively repeated the official position that this peasant was a member of the armed underground. It also reported on another alleged act of violence: dragging seven Jews from a train by a crowd shouting “kill the Jews” and beating them to death in the nearby village of Piekoszów.<sup>10</sup> The paper also repeated the Polish government’s official “revelation” that the man who had provoked the pogrom had been identified as a member of General Władysław Anders’s army. The words of a senior Polish army officer, who had come down to Kielce, about the murder of Jews being organised by the same group from abroad that had allegedly carried out the pogrom in the same place earlier, were also left without comment.<sup>11</sup>

On the same day, *NYT* readers could learn about what certain members of the American public thought about the incidents in Kielce. The Democratic Congressman Sol Bloom of New York, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, in the face of the anti-Semitic pogrom in Poland, called for a worldwide solution to the Jewish problem by the United Nations. In turn, the president of the World Jewish Congress, Stephen S. Wise, in a telegram sent to Prime Minister Edward Osóbka-Morawski, demanded effective measures to protect Jews against mindless attacks and the destruction of their property. While he appreciated the steps already taken, Bloom stressed that it was the authorities’ responsibility to maintain order and peace and, consequently, to protect Jewish lives and property.<sup>12</sup>

The question of punishing the main perpetrators of the pogrom occupied a good deal of space in *The New York Times*. Demand for the death penalty for the instigators of the anti-Jewish incidents in Kielce, made by the Polish authorities,

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<sup>9</sup> “Poles Declare Two Hoaxes Caused High Toll in Pogrom,” *NYT*, 6 July 1946.

<sup>10</sup> Information about an alleged ritual murder in Kielce was circulated on a train going to Piekoszów on 4 July 1946. At this station, people searched for Jewish passengers in the carriages and attacked Jews. See Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod klątwą*, vol. 1, p. 303; Zaremba, *Wielka trwoga*, p. 610.

<sup>11</sup> “Lie by Youth Held Causing 40 Jew Deaths,” *WP*, 6 July 1946.

<sup>12</sup> “Bloom will Insist U.N. Protect Jews,” *NYT*, 6 July 1946.

including Osóbka-Morawski and communist leader Władysław Gomułka, attracted particular attention. The news of the arrest of the deputy commander of the militia in Kielce was also reported by the NYT, but not commented on further. The NYT reported that 40 seriously wounded Jews had been transported to Lodz on a sanitary train under guard. Sixty-five others remained under care in Kielce.<sup>13</sup> Once again citing news coming from Warsaw, this time from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the NYT reported on an attempted pogrom in Częstochowa. The paper reported that a camel, a rare sight indeed in Poland, had attracted a crowd. At one point, the owner began to shout anti-Semitic slogans. The militia intervened quickly this time and, after arresting the provocateur, the crowd dispersed.<sup>14</sup>

From the same article, American readers first learned what Gomułka had said to discredit Stanisław Mikołajczyk, his political opponent. The leader of the Polish communists linked anti-Semitic actions to the leader of the opposition Polish People's Party (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*, PSL). The paper reported that Gomułka had claimed that the policy of negating the results of the June referendum defeat by PSL and the "NSZ" was an attempt to push the country into the abyss of civil war and anarchy. The pogrom in Kielce was said to be proof of this. The NYT quoted Gomułka's words about the Polish fascists worshipping Mikołajczyk, who had surpassed their masters (by implication the Nazis) in spreading anti-Semitism. As a result of the incidents in Kielce, Poland was shamed. There could therefore be no leniency for those accused of the pogrom. The article indicated that the soldiers who led the Jews out and handed them over to the mob would also be tried. The American correspondent estimated that the number of the arrested was between 75 and 100, but the exact figures were unknown.<sup>15</sup>

Another theme on which the American press focused was the panic and desire to leave Poland, as felt by the Jewish population. The NYT noted that, despite the news blockade imposed by the government, news of the pogrom spread rapidly among the Jews. The 48 survivors of the pogrom had only one desire: "to leave

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<sup>13</sup> "President of Poland Asks Doom of Killers," NYT, 8 July 1946.

<sup>14</sup> "Poles Ask Death for Kielce Guilty," NYT, 7 July 1946. On 6 July, a crowd of about 400 people gathered in the Stradom District, agitated by the alleged murder of a child by Jews; a militia unit, after searching the place for the alleged murder, forced people to leave. Zaremba, *Wielka trwoga*, p. 611. The information about the camel was not confirmed by other sources.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

Poland.” Despite the Polish authorities’ efforts to ensure the protection of the Jewish population, fears of further pogroms crystallised the conviction among the Jews that emigration was necessary. Crowds swarmed the Polonia Hotel in Warsaw, waiting for a transit visa to France via the American occupation zone in Germany. Others tried to obtain a similar document from the Czechoslovakian embassy to go to France, the United States or Palestine. The US officer in charge of the programme to assist Jews arriving in the US occupation zone in Germany estimated that illegal arrivals, at that time, amounting to 8,000 people per month on average, would increase 250%, but did not explain what this opinion was based on.<sup>16</sup>

The issue of emigration in the face of what was reported as a noticeable increase in anti-Semitism in some Central European countries appeared in the *NYT* in connection with a demonstration organised by Joseph Tenenbaum, head of the World Association of Polish Jews. Tenenbaum called for 100,000 Jews to be allowed to come to the USA and the same number to Palestine. Interestingly, he uncritically repeated the earlier accusation of the Polish communist authorities that General Anders was to blame for the outbreak of anti-Semitism in Poland, which had claimed more than 1,100 Jewish lives since the end of the war, “with the patronage, support and subsidies from the British government.”<sup>17</sup> Anti-Semitism, Tenenbaum argued, is a menace to the world and should be addressed by the United Nations.<sup>18</sup> His statement can be interpreted as resentful towards the UK government because of its role in Palestine at the time.

The *NYT* provided ongoing coverage of the trial of the perpetrators of the Kielce pogrom before a military court (9–11 July 1946). The prosecutor asked for the death penalty for nine of the twelve defendants, including a woman. The ruling was not open to a legal challenge. American and British correspondents noted the line of defence based on the argument that a military court should not try civilians. This motion was denied like other motions previously filed by the attorneys for the defendants to extend the time needed to prepare the defence. The court,

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<sup>16</sup> “Poles Ask Deaths for Kielce Guilty.”

<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting, however, that the *NYT* quoted an opinion expressed in a BBC programme that the Polish authorities were trying to blame the pogrom on the agents of General Anders, for when “these bestial murders took place, the inspirers spoke and raised shouts of ‘Long live Anders.’”

<sup>18</sup> “US Urged to Take Extra 100,000 Jews,” *NYT*, 12 July 1946.

composed of three army majors, proceeded to prove the defendants' involvement in the pogrom precisely. According to the *NYT*, it was clear that the authorities wanted the court to hand down a judgement in this case quickly. The article also mentioned that the ruling camp would try to accuse virtually everyone against the current government of anti-Semitism.<sup>19</sup>

The *NYT* also provided exhaustive coverage of the 11 July court verdict – nine death penalties by hanging.<sup>20</sup> The names of other convicted individuals were also provided. The “anti-Semitic agitator” Antonina Biskupska, a 26-year-old mother, was sentenced to 10 years in prison. Stanisław Rurarz, a 20-year-old man who appeared mentally disabled when testifying before the court, was given a life sentence. Tadeusz Szczęśniak, who denied that he was in Kielce on that day (in fact, he denied that he took part in the pogrom), was sentenced to seven years in prison. It was noted that this was the first of several trials: a deputy commander of the *Milicja Obywatelska* (Citizens' Militia) in Kielce, accused of allowing the massacre to happen and of failing to prevent the pogrom effectively, was also put on trial. Other people were also charged with criminal offences. None of the defendants had a right to appeal against the verdict, and their only recourse was to petition President Bolesław Bierut for a pardon. However, it was expected that the head of state would not exercise his right of pardon and that the death sentences would be executed quickly.

The correspondence stressed that, “for the first time” in Polish history, people involved in a pogrom were sentenced, including to death. The authorities took this step to show an iron hand in their actions against growing and violent anti-Semitism. At the same time, the *NYT* correspondent observed that the ruling camp was trying to make political capital out of the pogrom by accusing the communists' opponents in Poland – Mikołajczyk and the Catholic Church – of not doing enough to fight anti-Semitism. In fact, the indictment formally alleged that the Kielce incident had occurred due to the participants' disappointment with the results of the June 1946 referendum. The *NYT* correspondent, however, expressed surprise at the authorities' decision to hold a trial for the participants

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<sup>19</sup> On the beginning of the process see also “Pogrom Trial, Opens for 12,” *WP*, 10 July 1946.

<sup>20</sup> “Nine Plead Guilty in Polish Pogrom,” *NYT*, 10 July 1946. For more on the first trial, see Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod klątwą*, vol. 1, pp. 81–83, 186–188, 263–264.

of the pogrom. He compared the court case to the successful trial of members of a mob who had lynched a black person in the US South.<sup>21</sup>

The announcement of the verdict was accompanied by news that another Jew had been murdered on a train from Lodz bound for Wroclaw. Initially, there were rumours of 22 people dead and new outbreaks of violence against the Jewish population. However, these revelations were denied by General Grosz himself, who admitted that Jews had indeed been murdered, but indeed fewer than 20. Presumably based on his words, *The New York Times* reported that protection of Jewish passengers had been strengthened, that police and security forces had been mobilised, and that armoured vehicles had been deployed, but did not specify where such measures had been taken.<sup>22</sup> It is worth adding that more unsubstantiated information appeared in the NYT concerning the sentencing of nine participants in the Kielce pogrom. It was reported that the “banned NSZ” had taken nine Jewish hostages and threatened to kill them if the sentence was carried out on the Poles.<sup>23</sup>

At this time, the image of the pogrom in the American press was increasingly linked to the issue of Polish anti-Semitism. This was undoubtedly the result of a statement by Primate August Hlond, which was met with great criticism in US newspapers. The brunt of this criticism was directed above all against the hierarch's words that the rise of anti-Semitism in Poland was, to a large extent, linked to Jews occupying top positions in the present authorities, and their desire to introduce a type of government that most Poles did not want.<sup>24</sup>

According to Tenenbaum, the proof of the fallacy of this statement was that in pre-war Poland, Jews were not allowed in government positions, and anti-Semitism was also widespread.<sup>25</sup> Also the American Jewish Conference criticised the primate's

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<sup>21</sup> “9 Sentenced to Die in Kielce Pogrom,” *NYT*, 12 July 1946. A much shorter, informative description was also published in *WP*, 12 July 1946.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> “Poles Said to Hold Jews as Hostages,” *NYT*, 17 July 1946.

<sup>24</sup> In fact, Hlond said: “That this good relationship is breaking down, for this the Jews, who hold key positions in state life in Poland, and who seek to impose forms of government which the vast majority of the nation does not want, are to a great extent responsible. This is a harmful game because dangerous tensions arise from it. In the fatal armed clashes on the militant political front, unfortunately some Jews die, but unequally more Poles die...” Statement of Cardinal Hlond, Primate of Poland, to American journalists, Warsaw, 11 July 1946, in Tokarska-Bakir, *Pod kłqtwq*, vol. 2, p. 662.

<sup>25</sup> We should add that Tenenbaum met with Hlond during a visit to Poland in early June 1946. According to what the *NYT* published, he said that it was wrong to apply collective responsibility for



words. In a statement, it expressed concern that they would not calm the situation in Poland, which should be the desire of every spiritual leader in this country. The World Jewish Congress, on the other hand, believed that, as a result of his words, Cardinal Hlond would find it difficult to absolve himself of co-responsibility for anti-Jewish acts in the future.<sup>26</sup> In addition, in an unsigned commentary in *The Washington Post*, the primate's statement was judged to be "unfortunate," shattering his reputation as a humanist and an open-minded man. There was no doubt that he had uttered these words under great stress. To a certain extent, however, they justified anti-Semitic behaviour since the "creatures" who started the new wave of pogroms might also have thought so.<sup>27</sup>

It was as late as 14 July that the *NYT* covered the concerns raised by Mikołajczyk, who had met with 20 Western correspondents the day before. Mikołajczyk wondered why, despite the omnipotence of the security service, it was so vigilant against the PSL and other political opposition groups in Poland that it had allowed the Kielce pogrom to go ahead. Responding to a foreign correspondent's question about Prime Minister Osóbka-Morawski's statement that Mikołajczyk was no friend of Jews, the deputy prime minister of the Polish government reiterated that his party had categorically condemned the events in Kielce, regardless of who had inspired them. He expressed astonishment that crowds had been allowed to gather and commit crimes for several hours, as there were many security and military formations in Kielce. However, he refrained from commenting on Hlond's words.<sup>28</sup>

In "the opinion of all neutral observers who were in Kielce," acknowledged the *NYT*, commenting on the execution of the nine people sentenced by the military

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the acts of individuals, the Polish-Jewish collective was not to blame for the acts of those Jews who occupied government positions, and in turn no one should be deprived of such an opportunity because of race or religion. See "22 More Murders Charged in Poland," *NYT*, 13 July 1946; J. Tokarska-Bakir, "Logika uniku. O protokole audiencji Josepha Tenenbauma u prymasa Augusta Hlonda 3 czerwca 1946 r.," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 17 (2018), pp. 477–485.

<sup>26</sup> "22 More Murders Charged in Poland." The New York chapter of the Federation of Methodist Churches also protested against Hlond's words. A telegram to President Harry Truman demanded that the United States immediately sever diplomatic relations with the Vatican in light of the Vatican state's political commitment to protect those who "initiate pogroms and accuse Jewish government officials of murders instigated by others."

<sup>27</sup> "Anti-Semitism in Poland," *WP*, 13 July 1946. Presumably, the journal's commentator was unaware of General Grosz's dismissal of rumours of another wave of anti-Jewish speeches.

<sup>28</sup> "Mikołajczyk Hits Policy on Pogrom," *NYT*, 14 July 1946.

court, “the secret police and military did not act with the average speed or strength against the mob”, in a country where shooting to disperse a crowd was normal. It is worth highlighting this journal’s acknowledgement of the violent anti-Catholic campaign waged by the authorities following the primate’s statement, which may have been a prelude to actions taken against the Catholic Church later. Lawrence argued that the most radical members of the communist party had expressed their disappointment that the land reform did not include big property owned by the church.<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, it was believed that the pogrom might have shocked the world, but not Poland, for anti-Semitism, was deep-rooted and intense here, and some Poles openly admitted it. A dozen or so educated and intelligent people would tell the *NYT* correspondent that Hitler was right about at least one thing: he wanted to kill all the Jews. The existence of anti-Semitism in Poland, where there were only about 150,000 Jews out of a population of 24 million, astonished the American journalist.<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, the American press rightly observed that it was difficult to remain neutral in the sharp political division that existed in Poland. The left-wing groups, as the *NYT* called the communists and their allies in Poland, with a majority government, had in their ranks a large number of prominent Jews. In turn, some opponents of the ruling camp used anti-Semitic slogans to fight against it. The Jewish origins of Jakub Berman, called “the brains of the Left Wing”, of Hilary Minc, and a dozen deputy ministers and department heads were pointed out. On the other hand, the authorities tried almost daily to blame the “reactionary underground” and the Polish government-in-exile for anti-Semitism and to link hostility towards Jews to the PSL and its leader. According to official propaganda, this was to be the last weapon of the “Fascist reactionary elements.” The official opposition – Mikołajczyk and the Catholic Church – is “accused of failing or refusing to condemn anti-Semitism,” the *NYT* wrote.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> “Poland Executes 9 Pogrom Killers,” *NYT*, 16 July 1946.

<sup>30</sup> “Poles Said to Hold Jews as Hostages,” *NYT*, 17 July 1946.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* The American dailies, quoting the TASS agency, cited the opinion of Y. Viktorov, presented in the pages of the Soviet *Pravda*, who also blamed “Fascist underground gangs,” from where the trail led to the Polish People’s Party (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*, PSL) and Stanisław Mikołajczyk. It was no coincidence, argued the Soviet publicist, that Mikołajczyk, in an interview with *Gazeta Ludowa*, did not have the courage to condemn anti-Semitism; he spoke only of condemning violence and the murder of innocent people. According to Viktorov, Primate Hlond also did the same. “Red Lays Pogrom to Fascists,” *LAT*, 15 July 1946.

*The Washington Post*, in its commentary, published a little bit earlier, expressed a similar opinion about the situation in Poland. On the one hand, the government was made up of elements that were “probably unrepresentative” and had gained power due to Russian pressure. On the other hand, the opposition consisted not only of true democrats like Mikołajczyk but also of representatives of the most extreme reactionism in Europe. The war had taught them nothing, as the pogrom in Kielce showed. Prophetically (it has to be said), the argument went that it was a stain on Poland’s reputation that would be very difficult to erase. The massacre of Jews carried out as a result of a rumour indicated, according to *The Washington Post*, the existence in Poland of the same virus with which Hitler had poisoned Germany. The current authorities have taken decisive steps against anti-Semitism and sentenced the instigators of the massacre. “But... that is not strong. After suffering more than any other country during war, unhappy Poland now faces a continued period of chaos, confusion and even the possibly widespread civil strife.”<sup>32</sup>

In the second half of July of 1946, Primate Hlond’s statement was much commented on by readers of *The Washington Post* in their letters to the editor. The polemic was started by D. Siskind from Washington, who criticised the Polish Primate for his words. According to Siskind, Hlond “not only quoted a familiar Nazi line but also deliberately closed his eyes to the long anti-Semitic record of the pre-war Polish government (which contained no Jews) and the Polish people.” The author of the letter considered it indisputable that between 1919 and 1932, Poland was a leading anti-Semitic country “second to Germany.” In this “republic,” Jews were deprived of their civil and legal rights, segregated and forcibly ejected from educational institutions. No one could deny that severe anti-Semitism existed in Poland. The suffering during the Nazi occupation was not enough, according to Siskind, to awaken a spirit of brotherhood in the hearts of Poles. The “unaided” Jews waged a futile struggle in the ghetto. Siskind argued in his letter that, instead of using his influence to cement religious brotherhood, Cardinal Hlond added fuel to the growing flames.<sup>33</sup>

His critical views were met a few days later with a retort from Catherine Myslak. In her opinion, Hlond’s statement reflected the facts on the ground. Poland re-

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<sup>32</sup> “Polish Plebiscite,” *WP*, 13 July 1946.

<sup>33</sup> “Letter to the Editor,” *WP*, 18 July 1946.

mained a “sealed tomb:” the press was “shackled”; there was no democracy or liberty. Any other explanation of anti-Semitism by the hierarch would have served a government subservient to Moscow, not the Polish people.<sup>34</sup> In response, Godfrey Hochbaum expressed surprise at this defence of Polish anti-Semitism. Although Poland had suffered immensely over the centuries, it was not mature enough to embrace tolerance. Until the rise of Nazi pseudo-scientific anti-Semitism, Poland was surpassed in the ferocity of her persecution of Jews only by Romania and Russia, Hochbaum argued. He even noted an uncomfortable link between denunciations placing the blame for pogroms on Jewish leaders in Poland and the shifting of responsibility to international Jewry in Hitler’s policies.<sup>35</sup>

A summary of the visit to Poland by George M. Shabad, a businessman, lawyer and member of the American Jewish Congress, as presented in *The Washington Post*, can be regarded as the conclusion of the discussion around this topic. According to the daily, the current government in Warsaw is the first to fight honestly against anti-Semitism. Shabad accepted uncritically the claim that the pogrom had been organised by a “Fascist terrorist organisation” in the Kielce region, claiming that the police and army had successfully caught all its participants, except for Kielce itself. Unfortunately, the Fascist provocateurs found fertile ground in the local population. One of the main objectives of the organisers of the pogrom was to cause trouble for the authorities: to show that they were incapable of protecting their citizens. A decisive response to the pogrom came quickly, but in Shabad’s estimation, it would take several years to eradicate the “Fascist bands” in Poland. The member of the American Jewish Congress was also confident that these bands were receiving some help and funding from the London-based government. He believed that it would take one or two generations to eradicate anti-Semitism among the majority of Polish society. He thought Jews were leaving Poland not so much out of fear for their lives but out of a lack of emotional ties with the place. The pre-war government and the Poles themselves had done little to instil in Jews a sense of participation in Polish society. Moreover, persecution had not spared any Jewish family; the country had become

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<sup>34</sup> C. Myslak, “Polish Anti-Semitism,” *WP*, 25 July 1946.

<sup>35</sup> G.M. Hochbaum, “Polish Anti-Semitism,” *WP*, 28 July 1946.

a cemetery for this community. Therefore, he appealed to let Polish Jews go to Palestine and the United States.<sup>36</sup>

Summing up the issues relating to the Kielce pogrom and its consequences as they were covered in the opinion-making American press, the events, especially those that happened in the first days after the pogrom, were reported from the point of view of the communist authorities in Poland. From the press enunciations, readers could not learn much about the nuances of the complicated political situation in the country. It was not until a few days later that the American press published an opinion piece on the subject written by Stanisław Mikołajczyk, the leader of the opposition party PSL, and commentators started to pay more attention to the exploitation of the ensuing situation by the ruling communists to discredit the political opposition, the Catholic Church and the remnants of the armed underground, publicly branded as “Fascist.” Interest in the consequences of the Kielce pogrom surged after Primate August Hlond’s speech, with most articles and opinions expressed in letters to the editor engaging in polemics with his assertions. The pogrom against the Jews in Kielce was increasingly used to highlight the prevalence of Polish anti-Semitism, which did not start after 1945 but existed before the Second World War. Some statements openly embraced the rhetoric used by the ruling camp, which became portrayed by the press as a defender of the Jewish population in Poland, while the political opposition was accused of anti-Semitism.

In the statements made by members of Jewish organisations in the United States, one can also discern an attempt to use the tragic events in Kielce to publicise and to act on the emigration of the Jewish population from Central and Eastern Europe to Western countries and Palestine, and an intention to link the perpetrators of the Kielce massacre to the British government in London. Regarding statistics, the *NYT* showed the greatest interest in this issue (publishing more than a dozen articles) of the three newspapers. *The Washington Post* also covered it extensively. It presented the opinions of its readers that were raised not so much by the pogrom in Kielce directly as in reaction to Primate Hlond’s words. The *Los Angeles Times* covered the pogrom to a much lesser extent (with just a few articles), and its account was limited to the event itself.

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<sup>36</sup> G.M. Szabad, “Report On Poland,” *WP*, 20 July 1946.

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## SUMMARY

The article discusses how the Kielce pogrom and its aftermath were portrayed in the opinion-making American press. In the initial days after the incidents, press reports from Poland uncritically accepted the account of events presented by Poland's communist rulers. The press articles did not provide readers with many nuances to offer a fuller picture of the complicated political situation in Poland at the time. It was not until a few days later that the American press published an opinion piece by Stanisław Mikołajczyk, the leader of the opposition party, and other commentaries that tried to explain in greater detail how the communist rulers in Poland wanted to exploit the following situation to discredit their political opponents, the Catholic Church, and the remnants of the armed underground, which they called "Fascist." When the Polish primate, Cardinal August Hlond, spoke out about the issue, interest in the consequences of the Kielce pogrom resurged in the American newspapers, with most of the articles and letters to the editor polemising with Hlond's statements. The Kielce pogrom was increasingly used to emphasise Polish anti-Semitism, prevalent not only after 1945 but also before the Second World War. Some statements embraced the rhetoric of the ruling camp, which positioned itself as a defender of the Jewish population in Poland, accusing its political adversaries of anti-Semitism. Comments by members of Jewish organisations in the USA clearly indicated that they had attempted to exploit the tragic events in Kielce to publicise and intensify efforts to help Jews emigrate from Central and Eastern Europe to Western countries and Palestine, as well as a desire to link the perpetrators of the Kielce massacre to the UK government. In terms of statistics, *The New York Times* showed the greatest interest in this issue, followed by *The Washington Post*, which also provided extensive coverage, publishing readers' opinions, which were primarily reactions to Primate Hlond's words and not so much to the Kielce pogrom itself. *The Los Angeles Times* limited its event coverage to reporting on the incident.

## KEYWORDS

Polish-Jewish relations • 1946 Kielce Pogrom • anti-Semitism  
• American press