

## Lecture 17

### Poland Under Occupation

#### 1. Introduction

#### 2. The September Campaign and the Polish Defeat

Polish public opinion greeted the onset of the war with great equanimity. Government propaganda asserting the 'Great Power status' of the country and the 'triumphs' of 1938 had created an exaggerated idea of its strength, and it was generally believed that, in alliance with Britain and France, Poland would be more than a match for the German forces. According to Lieutenant-Colonel Roman Umiastowski, of the propaganda department of the Supreme Command, speaking on the radio on 4 September,

Our Supreme Commander held command on the front in 1920, when he was 33 . . . . The military experience of the commanders in the German army is limited . . . . Our army is prepared for war like no other. It is true that it has less equipment than the enemy, but it has instead soldiers and commanders of a type not possessed by the enemy — above all, young commanders.

These views were widely shared. According to the pro-German politician, Władysław Studnicki, 'many sensible people', including men like the peasant politician, Maciej Rataj, 'were enthusiastic for war'.

The prevalent optimism had no basis in the real situation. As a result of pressure from Britain and France, who were still hoping to reach a negotiated settlement with Hitler, general mobilization had been delayed by one day, and had only started on 31 August. Thus, though large sections of the Army had already been organized in earlier

'quiet' mobilizations, it had not reached its full strength when the German attack began on 1 September. On that date the Poles had under arms twenty-seven infantry divisions, three reserve infantry divisions, eight cavalry brigades, three mountain brigades, one armoured motorized brigade, and a number of special units and voluntary militia battalions. The force numbered 840,000 men, 70 per cent of the total provided for in the mobilization plan. It is true that mobilization continued after the onset of hostilities, but it was considerably impeded by the German Air Force's disruption of communications. Against the Poles, the Germans had mobilized thirty-seven divisions and improvised infantry groups amounting to another nine divisions, one mountain division, and fourteen mechanized or partially mechanized divisions. Their mobilization had gone much further than that of the Poles and 88 per cent of their total planned force of approximately 1.6 million men was under arms when hostilities began. The German mechanized divisions, which comprised six armoured divisions, four light divisions (motorized infantry with two armoured units), and four motorized divisions were to prove particularly effective against the Polish Army in which, as we have seen, the process of modernization had made little progress. The gap in equipment between the two armies was striking. The Germans possessed 2,700 tanks against the Poles' 313 light and medium tanks and 574 reconnaissance tanks. They had 6,000 guns and mortars to the Poles' 4,800, 4,500 anti-tank guns to the Poles' 1,250, and they were able to employ about 1,900 aircraft against the Poles' miserable force of 388 front-line planes

Although the Poles pinned great hopes on effective intervention by the British and French, they knew this could not take place immediately. Their aim was thus to contain the German attack and to prevent their own forces from being destroyed, so that they

could undertake a counter-offensive when the British and French moved into action against the Germans. They were not, however, in a strong position to carry out this plan. Poland, with its extensive frontier with Germany, which had been increased from 1,250 to 1,750 miles by the annexation of Moravia and the establishment of a German protectorate over independent Slovakia, and with its flat and relatively open terrain, was desperately vulnerable to the highly mobile German Army. Moreover the line chosen for defence by the Poles was not the most suitable. It ran along virtually the whole of the country's western, north-western, and south-western frontiers. It was originally intended to abandon Danzig and the Corridor, but with the fear that Hitler might limit himself merely to seizing the Free City, the Poles felt compelled to prepare themselves to respond to an action of this type. The forces in the Corridor were thus increased by two infantry divisions which, in the event, were rapidly cut off by the German attack. It would have been strategically more sensible to base the line of defence further back from the frontier, on the Narew, Vistula, and San rivers, but this was rejected on the grounds that it would have meant abandoning most of the country's industrial areas, and also as a result of over-confidence and an unwillingness easily to cede Polish soil. Furthermore, though the initial stages of the plan for a war with Germany had been worked out, the further evolution of the campaign, and in particular the direction of a possible retreat, had not been decided in detail before the outbreak of war. The Army was further handicapped in conducting a defensive operation of the type envisaged by the fact that there was no command on the army group level, and that the line of command thus went straight from the Supreme Commander to the individual army commanders.

In these conditions the outcome of the campaign was a foregone conclusion. More important than the German numerical predominance were the fourteen mechanized and partially mechanized German divisions. With their rapid and deep thrusting power they penetrated the thin and widely stretched Polish defensive line, and since their greater speed of manoeuvre impeded Polish withdrawals from the line along the border, they were able to prevent the Polish Army from fighting a series of delaying operations. The overwhelming German predominance in the air proved another vital factor. The Polish Air Force was able, by dispersing its aircraft, to avoid destruction by the *Luftwaffe*, but it was too small to counteract German operations in the air, which were able to put the Polish railway system out of action and also to destroy large sections of the communications network. This, coupled with German broadcasts intended to mislead the Polish forces, meant that the military system of communications virtually ceased to function after the first few days of the war.

The German plan of attack envisaged two thrusts, one in the north and a rather stronger one in the south, which were to break through the Polish positions and to meet in two places, east and west of Warsaw, thus cutting off the Polish forces west of the Vistula and encircling the Polish capital. The plan succeeded extremely well, in spite of the vigorous resistance put up by the Poles. By 3 September, the German army group 'North', commanded by General von Bock, had cut off the Polish forces in the Corridor and as one part reached the Vistula near Warsaw another advanced beyond Warsaw from the north. The army group 'South', commanded by General von Rundstedt, with its great armoured strength, had broken through the Polish forces and had forced the Poles to fall back from Kraków. By 6 September General von Reichenau, Commander of the tenth

Army of the army group 'South', which possessed the most armoured weapons, had advanced beyond Łódź and was moving past Kielce towards Warsaw. The Polish lines of defence had been effectively breached and the Polish Army had ceased to operate in a unified way, the individual units offering resistance where they could to the nearest German column.

Rydz's aim was now to withdraw what he could of the Polish forces across the Vistula, San, and Narew and to form a new line of defence. This proved impossible in the face of the rapid German onslaught and the breakdown of communications, which deteriorated still further when Rydz withdrew with most of his staff from Warsaw to Brześć on the night of 6-7 September. On 8 September one of Reichenau's armoured corps was able to break through to Warsaw after the encirclement of the Polish 'Prussian' reserve army. The following day German troops besieged Warsaw from the east while further units in the north were also converging on the eastern side of the Polish capital. After some debate, the Germans now decided that the bulk of the Polish forces had not been able successfully to retreat to the east. They thus modified their plan, and by placing most of their troops along the Bzura river, west of Warsaw, were able to cut off the Polish Poznanian and Pomeranian armies under General Kutrzeba, which found themselves forced on 9-10 September to break through the German lines. This 'battle on the Bzura', which lasted nearly eight days, at first went well for the Poles. In the end, however, German armoured reinforcements proved decisive. Only a small section of the Polish troops were able to break free of the German encirclement, while the overwhelming majority were killed or taken prisoner.

On 10 September, after receiving information that the Germans had crossed the Vistula and the Bug, Rydz-Śmigły decided on a further retreat, this time to East Galicia, where it was believed the Polish forces could be supplied from Romania. This new line of defence also had little chance of success. Already by the 9th, the number of men under arms had fallen to 400,000. The encirclement of the Pomeranian and Poznanian armies in the battle on the Bzura limited still further the number of troops at the disposal of the Supreme Commander. General Sosnkowski, who was placed in command of the South-East Army Group (rather belatedly, army group commands were established after the first week of the campaign) did, however, have some success in holding up the German advance. But he was outflanked by the deep German penetration both to the north and to the south of him. By 12 September the Germans had reached Lwów and on the 15th, the fortress of Brześć was surrounded and compelled to surrender after two days. By now the collapse of Poland was only a matter of time. It is true that the Germans were running into a certain amount of trouble because of a shortage of fuel and the breakdown of some of their armoured vehicles. But the Polish Army was by this stage so disorganized that it was in no position to take advantage of the German difficulties. Indeed from about the 14th, Rydz-Śmigły ceased to exercise any real control over the Army and local commanders were forced to act almost entirely on their own initiative. The intervention of the Soviet Union on 17 September thus did not effect the outcome of the campaign, though it did shorten its duration. The advance of the Red Army took place through territories in which there were few Polish forces and thus met relatively little resistance. On the same day as the Soviet invasion, the Polish government, together with the Supreme Commander, left

Poland for Romania and the campaign was virtually over. Warsaw, however, only surrendered on 27 September, while some other units continued to fight until 5 October.

The line of demarcation between the German and Russian zones of occupation differed somewhat from that laid down in the secret protocol to the Non-Agression Pact, by which the boundary was to be drawn approximately on the Narew, Vistula, and San rivers. Stalin renounced some parts of central Poland inhabited overwhelmingly by Poles, and in return Lithuania was assigned to his sphere of influence. His main preoccupation seems to have been to ensure the credibility of his claim that he had acted on behalf of the White Russian and Ukrainian 'blood-brothers' of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the areas incorporated in the Soviet Union had a population of 4-5 million Poles out of perhaps 13 million, and included a number of areas in which Poles constituted the majority. The question of whether a rump Polish state was to be established after the campaign had been left open in the protocol, but both Stalin and Hitler seem to have been opposed to such a step at this time ; thus Poland, the 'ugly offspring of the Versailles treaty', in Molotov's phrase, disappeared from the map. The 'reorganization' of Polish territory would, claimed the Friendship and Frontier Treaty concluded between Germany and the Soviet Union on 28 September, provide 'a firm foundation for a progressive further development of the friendly relations between their peoples'. In addition, both sides in a secret protocol pledged themselves not to allow 'Polish agitation which affects the territories of the other party', and to 'suppress in their territories all beginnings of such agitation and inform each other concerning suitable measures for this purpose.'

The Poles had received little help from the West. In terms of the Franco-Polish staff talks of May 1939, the French had agreed to undertake a limited offensive three days

after the beginning of their general mobilization, and an offensive 'with our main forces, when the principal German effort is directed against Poland' fifteen days after mobilization. Both the British and the French had agreed to bomb German military installations. As regards aerial bombardment, virtually nothing was done, apart from a British attack on the German naval base at Heligoland. British planes did, however, drop anti-Nazi leaflets over German cities!

The reasons for this failure have been variously explained. The fear of alienating neutral (particularly American) opinion, of exposing Britain and France to German bombardment, and of placing the Royal Air Force in unnecessary danger, all seem to have played a role. The land operations of the French were scarcely more impressive. The Germans had only forty-four infantry divisions on their western frontier against France's ninety-two tactical units, which included seventy-two infantry divisions. On the night of 6-7 September, a small attack was mounted, which continued on the 8th and resulted in the capture of a small area in front of the Siegfried Line. The offensive was then stopped, and on 12 September General Gamelin, the French Commander-in-Chief, gave the order to abandon offence for defence. The reasons for the French failure to act lie both in the strategic situation and in the defects of interwar French military thinking. The military situation was, in fact, by no means as favourable as the discrepancy between the armed forces of the two sides suggested. The French north-western frontier was approximately 500 miles long. But unless they violated the neutrality of Belgium and Luxemburg, the French had to advance along a narrow 90-mile-wide strip, heavily mined and defended by the best German forces. The French Army was, moreover, not suited to an action of this



type. Its mobilization was slow, so that its main offensive could not be undertaken before 17 September.

By this date, the defeat of Poland had virtually been accomplished, and any relieving action would have been in vain. Moreover French tactical principles which stipulated that any attack had to be preceded by a prolonged artillery barrage, as during World War I, hindered the adoption of a strategy of rapid movement, particularly since the French heavy artillery had to be taken out of storage, and could not be employed until the last stage of mobilization. Under these conditions, there was little effective help which the French could give to the Poles, something for which both were to pay dearly.

### **3. The Soviet Occupation of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus**

In the secret protocol of the Treaty of Non-Aggression signed on 23 August 1939, the German and Soviet governments agreed to divide much of Eastern Europe including Poland between them. This 'fourth partition of Poland' was duly implemented in the aftermath of the Polish defeat at German hands in September 1939 and of the Soviet invasion on 17 September. The final division of the spoils, set out in the German-Soviet Boundary and Friendship Treaty of 28 September, differed somewhat, as we have seen, from that in the original secret protocol. Stalin gave up all of the prewar Polish province (*województwo*) of Lublin and part of the province of Warsaw in return for Lithuania being added to Latvia and Estonia in the Soviet sphere of influence.

As a result of this Treaty, the Soviets acquired most of the eight southern and eastern provinces of Poland, making up just over half the area of the prewar state and

inhabited by more than 37 per cent of its population. This was the more backward part of the country economically, often referred to before the war as Poland 'B', to distinguish it from the more highly developed Poland 'A'. Flat and low-lying, the area partly inclined towards the Eurasian land-mass and two of its main rivers, the Dniester and the Pripet, flowed into the Black Sea. It was divided into two by the almost impenetrable marshes of Polesie, reaching in the northeast the picturesque lake-covered area around Vilna and in the South the foothills of the Carpathians.

The area was largely agricultural. In 1939 it contained only 15 per cent of Poland's industrial workers and accounted for barely 8.6 per cent of its consumption of electricity. The only major industrial concentrations were the oil wells and refineries around Borysław in the southeast and the factories (mainly textiles) around Białystok. It was also multi-national in character, with Belarussians and Poles predominating in the north and Ukrainians and Poles in the south. Indeed, one of the reasons why Stalin had pressed the Germans to alter the demarcation line between the two occupation zones had been because of his desire to diminish the number of Poles in the area he had annexed. In this way, he hoped to lend credibility to Soviet claims that the Soviet government had intervened in defence of its 'Ukrainian and Belarussian blood-brothers'. Even after these changes, however, the area still included a substantial Polish population, with Poles forming the majority in most towns, and possessing large concentrations of rural population throughout the area. According to the statistics of the wartime Polish government-in-exile, which were based on the census of 1931, the ethnic composition of these lands was in 1939 as follows:

### **Demography of Eastern Poland, 1939**

Total population	13,199 million
Poles	5,274
Ukrainians	4,125
Belarussians	1,123
Jews	1.109
Russians	0,134
Lithuanians	0,084

These figures certainly exaggerate the number of Poles and underestimate the number of Ukrainians and Belarussians. But even then the mixed character of the area and the strong Polish presence here cannot be denied.

As the shows, the Jews made up a substantial part of the population of this area. They constituted over 10 per cent of the whole and their number was considerably increased after September 1939 by the influx of 300-350,000 Jewish refugees from the areas occupied by the Nazis. They were particularly strongly represented in the towns, both large and small.

Soviet forces occupied eastern Poland in 1939 at a time when the USSR was still gripped by the Stalinist Terror. Estimates vary; but the total number of victims from forced collectivisation, from the campaign against the 'kulaks', from the Terror-Famine in Ukraine, and from the purges, may have been as many as ten million.

It is difficult, of course, to gauge how much was known about the Stalinist Terror, either by the population of occupied eastern Poland or by the Soviet occupiers themselves. The mass killings took place behind a facade of radiantly optimistic propaganda, and behind a psychological screen of ubiquitous fear which paralysed people's desire to know. At all events, they form the essential backdrop to developments following the Soviet invasion of Poland on 17 September 1939.

The aim of the Soviet 'Revolution from Abroad', as it has been described in a recent study by Jan Gross, was to integrate the annexed areas as rapidly as possible into the Soviet Union. (A special situation obtained in the area around Vilna which was handed over to still-independent Lithuania on 30 October, only for the whole country to be incorporated into the USSR in June 1940.) This integration was to be accomplished partly by the encouragement of social revolution in the region. In the early stages of the Soviet invasion, the Soviets dropped leaflets from the air inciting the peasants to a general uprising, calling on them to 'drive out the landowners with scythes and axes' and promising 'the land to the peasant who works on it'. These appeals did stimulate some partisan actions.

The bitterness provoked by earlier Polish attempts to establish their rule in these lands provoked harsh reprisals in the first days of the occupation. The Soviets were quick to bring under control all spontaneous evolutionary manifestations. Their aim was, after all, to ensure the integration and control of these lands. Soviet occupation was justified not only as the vindication of just social grievances but on the grounds that it achieved the liberation of the Soviet government's 'Ukrainian and Belarussian bloodbrothers', who

had been 'abandoned to their fate' as a result of the Polish defeat. Within a month of the Soviet invasion, assemblies were convened in Bialystok and L'viv, as a result of Soviet-style elections, which requested the incorporation of the areas into the Belarussian and Ukrainian Soviet republics. Gross has described at length the fraud and coercion involved in these elections and their ritualistic character. Peasants were given a detailed instruction on how to hold the unopened ballot paper and place it in the ballot box, involving them in this way in a humiliating ritual, of whose bogus character they were only too well aware.

Yet, although Soviet policy was concerned to create the basis for a new social order and to render a return to Polish rule impossible, it was never wholly committed to full-scale Ukrainianisation and Belarussification. Suspicion of the potentially anti-soviet nature of Belarussian and, above all, Ukrainian nationalism meant that a key role in the administration of the area was entrusted to Russian officials from the heart of the USSR, the *vostochniki* (easterners). The pace of sovietisation was also determined by tactical considerations and by the nature of Nazi-Soviet relations. Thus, until January 1940, a relatively mild policy was pursued, which maintained elements of the former economic system in a sort of NEP as launched by Lenin in 1921 and which sought to gain the support of elements of the local population, above all the Ukrainians, Belarussians and Jews. This policy hardened considerably after January 1940 with the introduction of collectivisation and large-scale nationalisation and the first major deportations of 'unreliable' elements. The sensational German victories of the spring and summer of 1940 in Western Europe created panic in the Soviet administration and led to an intensification of attempts to end all vestiges of the former social and political system.

This period also saw the end of Soviet acceptance of the nominal independence of the Baltic States, and their full incorporation into the USSR. The radical policy based on the Stalinist assumption that class conflict intensified with the creation of socialism lasted until June 1941. In 1940-41 a deterioration of Nazi-Soviet relations did lead to some attempts to win the support of the Polish element in the area who might be needed in the case of a Nazi-Soviet conflict.

The economic and social policies pursued by the new authorities were also intended to prepare the area for integration in the USSR. Decrees of 28 and 30 October expropriated landowners in Western Ukraine and Western Belarus. This brought land into common ownership and represented the first stage of collectivisation even though the introduction of *kolkhozy* (collective farms) and *sovkhozy* (state farms) was slow and encountered considerable resistance. Some land was redistributed to peasants with less than 8 hectares of land. In the transitional NEP period, only banks, factories and larger houses were nationalised. Criteria for nationalisation were only vaguely set down and often depended on the whim of locally-established committees. In many cases the former owner was allowed, or even compelled to remain as manager. Small shops and workshops continued to operate as before. However, they were not allowed to raise their prices and, as the ruble was made equivalent to the zloty, their stock was quickly bought out by Soviet officials and soldiers. (Before the war, the value of the ruble was between one third and one fourth of the zloty.) Shortages, barter arrangements and black market operations became widespread

The beginning of 1940 saw the end of the NEP period. Collectivisation was speeded up and in 1941 plans were made for its imposition over the whole area. The

uncertainty this created, as well as the arrest and deportation of landowners and better-off peasants, had a devastating effect on agricultural production. The zloty ceased to be legal tender, destroying the savings of many, while shortages forced many shops and artisans to cease business. Soviet reality, what Gross calls the impact of the 'spoiler state', was asserting itself.

As a result, the upper middle class in the area – bankers, factory owners, richer merchants, better-off lawyers – found themselves impoverished and in some cases politically persecuted. The small traders and artisans found adjustment easier, forming cooperatives and artels. Industrial production was disorganised by the inexperience of the new managers and many factories were only able to work a three- or four-day week. Generally speaking, the whole population saw the standard of living decline considerably. Indeed, in an attempt to resolve the problem of the shortage of work in the former Eastern Polish provinces, the Soviets launched a major campaign to persuade people to 'volunteer' for work in the USSR. Altogether nearly 210 000 were called up for labour service or sent to work in the interior of the Soviet Union. Most found conditions there difficult and living standards low and some even took the rash step of asking to return to the areas from which they had come.

The establishment of the new regime was accompanied by the extension to the area of the formidable Soviet apparatus of repression. The Stalinist propensity to find enemies of the revolution everywhere was intensified by a hatred and fear of all aspects of 'white' Poland, which dated back at least to the Polish-Soviet war. The desire to extirpate all vestiges of Polish rule was further strengthened by the fierce opposition the Soviet invasion had encountered in some areas, in spite of an order from the Polish High

Command not to offer resistance to the Red Army. Recent studies by Liszewski and Erickson have shown that there was considerable fighting between Polish and Soviet troops. The Soviets probably lost between 2500 and 3000 men, with an additional 4500-7000 wounded. About a hundred Soviet tanks and armoured cars were destroyed. In addition, several Polish armed groups continued to fight on after the surrender.

The Soviets took very many Polish prisoners-of-war. Determining their number is still problematic. The most credible figure is 240,000 (including more than 10,000 officers). Many were soon released but 125,000 were transferred by the Red Army to the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) and were then transported to a network of camps that was formed in the beginning of October 1939. 42,492 prisoners-of-war were handed over the Germans by NKVD between 24 October and 23 November in exchange for 13,757 prisoners-of-war held by the Germans; the officers and policemen in this group were sent to NKVD camps while the rest were released.

The Soviets separated officers and men and tried hard to exacerbate social and ethnic tensions. The number of the officers initially held in the Soviet camps is estimated as 41,000, but many were released. When the order to liquidate the camps in which officers were held (Kozielsk, Starobielsk and Ostashkov) was issued on 5 March 1940, the number of officers still in detention was 14,736. They were almost all executed in Katyn, Kharkov and Tver. 395 survived and 211 remain unaccounted. Some of these surviving officers were subsequently approached, as Soviet-German relations deteriorated, to see if they would serve in a pro-Soviet Polish military formation and a number of them were subsequently to play a key role in the creation of the Soviet sponsored Kościuszko Division and Berling Army in 1943



Of those below the rank of officer not all were released and the Soviet authorities sent around 27,000 to labour camps. Around 15,500 were sent to the Rovienski construction camp which functioned until the Nazi invasion in June 1941. When it was shut down it contained 14,101 prisoners-of-war, of whom around eighty per cent were Poles. Approximately 13,700 prisoners were sent to work in mines of Ukraine. Many prisoners came sick to the camps and many were old or handicapped. They were not provided with proper clothing, were housed in poorly heated or unheated dwellings and their diet was inadequate. They were not paid the very minimal wages that they had been guaranteed and there were many accidents. The harsh conditions led to hunger strikes and also to work stoppages.

The creation of the new order was also characterised by the arrest of those who had held office in the Polish administration and of individuals regarded as politically suspect. The range of people subject to arrest was very wide. It included officers and NCOs of the Polish Army, policemen of all ranks, landowners large and small, teachers in primary and secondary schools, entrepreneurs and businessmen (a number of them Jewish), politicians of all noncommunist parties and all nationalities, local government officials, lawyers, civil servants, better-off peasants, Ukrainian, Belarussian and Jewish activists, ex-members of the Communist Party and ex-sympathisers.

Those arrested constituted, in effect, a cross-section of the population of eastern Poland and the authorities' aim in proceeding against them was to destroy all potential opposition to Soviet rule. In the words of Nikita Khrushchev, who was a senior administrator in Lwów at this time, 'It was our view that these arrests served to

strengthen the Soviet state and clear the road for the building of socialism on Marxist Leninist principles’.

The opening of the Soviet archives have given us much more accurate estimates of the number of those arrested. According to the documents of the NKVD (People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs), between September 1939 and May 1941, 42,662 people were arrested in western Belarus and 64,478 in western Ukraine. These figures are almost certainly too low and the number of those arrested may have been as high as 130,000. They were accused of various offenses, including illegal border crossing, the betrayal of the Soviet Union, spying against the Soviet Union and anti-Soviet activity. The largest number was made up of those caught illegally entering the Soviet Union (43,464 including 32,585 people in western Ukraine). The outbreak of the Nazi-Soviet war led to the freeing of those in the camps and prisoners of Western Ukraine and Western Belarus, who then numbered approximately 18,500.

7,305 of those arrested in western Ukraine and Belarus were executed without trial at the same time as the Katyn executions. A larger number (around 10,000) were summarily executed during the Soviet retreat. The number of those who died in captivity is unknown. The mortality rate in the Soviet camps was 3.74per cent. The casualties among the Polish citizens was probably somewhat higher.

Deportation to the interior of the USSR was also widely used as means of social control. The fate of the deportees was not, of course, uniform. Deportees belonging to the ‘first category’ were directed to locations governed in the normal Soviet manner and were employed in various local occupations. In the majority of cases they were required to take part in elections. The ‘second category’ deportees were settled in locations

governed directly by the NKVD and were employed on its development projects. The 'third category' deportees were sent to labour camps, where together with the other inmates (prisoners described in the second category above) they worked on NKVD development projects. These projects were managed by Gulag (the acronym for 'The Principal Administration of Corrective Labour Camps and Labour Settlements').

The labour camps inmates (both prisoners and deportees) were called 'camp-dwellers' (*lagerniki*) and the deportees of the first and the second category were called 'special deportees' (*spetspereselentsy*). Labour camp inmates were not allowed to use the postal services, but 'special deportees' could use them in the same manner as normal Soviet citizens. This facilitated their contact relatives in their former homes.

It was in February 1940, with the end of the transitional period and the establishment of a Soviet administrative structure, that deportations began on a massive scale. In the first wave of deportations the Soviet axe fell especially on Polish settlers and foresters (perhaps to make it impossible for them to give assistance to Polish partisans in the forests), Polish officials, segments of the intelligentsia and better-off farmers, whether Polish, Ukrainian or Belarussian. This deportation, which began on 10 February 1940, was the result of resolutions adopted by the Political Bureau and the Council of the Peoples' Commissaries of the Soviet Union in December 1939. The NKVD military convoy which carried out the deportation estimated that the number of people involved was between 139,000 and 141,000 people, of whom 88-89,000 came from western Ukraine and 51,000 from western Belarus. Poles made 81.7 per cent of the deportees, Ukrainians 8.8 per cent and Belarussians 8.1 per cent. The deported were moved to seventeen districts and autonomous Soviet republics as well as to Kazakhstan. The

largest concentrations were in the Archangielsk District, in Krasnoyarsk, in the districts of Irkutsk and Svierdlovsk, in Komi and the Molotovsk District. A document issued on 1 April 1941 states that 27.7 per cent of the deportees were men (older than 16 years old), 28,7 per cent women, 8,6 per cent youths (between 14-16 years old) and 35 per cent children (younger than 14 years old). Among those deported in this way were members of the families of the prisoners-of-war in the camps at Kozielsk, Starobielsk and Ostaszkow as well as families of those arrested by the NKVD. They were sent to 'special settlements' administered by the NKVD and were deprived of certain 'privileges', among them the 'right' to vote in Soviet elections. Most were employed in Gulag forest-clearing projects.

A second wave of deportations was initiated on 13 April 1940. It included the same people as in the first deportation together with 'capitalist elements' – bankers, merchants and factory owners. Like the first deportation, it also struck at the families – defined very broadly – of those who were in Soviet prisons and labour camps (the majority), or who were POWs in the USSR or Germany, were interned in Latvia or Lithuania or had fled abroad or to the German-occupied part of Poland. The number of those involved according to the NKVD estimates was between 59.500 and 61,000. They were mainly women and children and many children died as a result of the harsh conditions en route and in exile. The bulk of the deportees was sent to Northern Kazakhstan, where earlier Polish deportees from within the USSR had been sent. Some were employed in the building of the new Admolinsk-Kartaly railway in northern Kazakhstan. Approximately 58 per cent of this group were resettled on *kolchozy*, 28 per cent on to *sovchozy* while the rest were assigned to various industrial centers. Women,

children, the elderly and the sick who came from the non-rural areas were deported mostly to the steppes of Kazakhstan. They were not used to living and surviving in the harsh climatic and geographic conditions of Kazakhstan. The Poles were the dominant group but there were also Jews, Ukrainians and Belarussians. More specific data on the national background of this group of the deportees have not been made available yet.. They fell into Vyshynsky's first category of deportees and lived among Soviet citizens, with reasonable access to the normal Soviet news media although in the harsh living conditions of Kazakhstan.

A third wave of deportations took place at the end of June 1940. It used to be thought that this was provoked by Soviet alarm at German successes on the Western Front but we now know that the order for this deportation had been issued on 2 March 1940, The bulk of the victims on this occasion were refugees from Nazi-occupied Poland, most of them Jewish. NKVD documents give their number exactly as 75,267, including 51,503 from western Ukraine and 23,764 from western Belarus. This group was deported to fourteen different districts. The largest centres in European Soviet Union were in the Archangielsk, Komi and Mariyski districts. Many were deported to Siberia. This group was made of 84 per cent Jews, 11 per cent Poles, 2.3 per cent Ukrainians, 0.2 per cent Belarussians. According to documents dated 1 April 1941 there were 29,437 men, 26,459 and 20,172 children in this group. They were sent to territories under the direct control of the NKVD and were not permitted to make use of Soviet postal facilities, although they could receive parcels from friends and families in Nazi-occupied Poland.

The worsening of Nazi-Soviet relations in the late spring of 1941 led to a final wave of deportations. A decision of the Central Committee and the Council of the

Commissars of 14 May 1941 ordered a 'cleansing operation' of the Polish territories annexed by the Soviet Union between 1939–1940. These deportations were conducted in several phases. The deportation of 22 May was made up of 11,093 people from the western Ukraine. During the night of 12/13 June action was taken against the populations of Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. 12,838 people were deported and an additional 4,663 people were deported to labour camps. During the night of 19/20 June, deportations took place from Belarus. The NKVD documents are not consistent and mention between 20,300 and 24,300 people. This purge, which was concentrated on the Baltic states and Moldova, where repression had previously been milder, included members of all previous groups as well as individuals who had somehow aroused the suspicion of the increasingly paranoid security apparatus. Most heads of families were sent to the labour camps of Sosva and Yari in the Sverdlovsk district. Families were sent to Altayski Kray and the Aktyubinsk district of Kazakhstan.

The beginning of the Soviet-German war interrupted the deportations. Bombing raids of the railway system, especially the railway center in Minsk caused problems in carrying out the deportations. Because of the bombing raids, many deportees were killed during the transportation. Altogether, between 34,000 and 44,000 Polish citizens were deported in the spring of 1941.

In all, according to the Soviet documents, approximately 315 -325, 000 Polish citizens were deported in the twenty one months of Soviet occupation. Local resettlement with Belarus and Ukraine also occurred, but on this there is only scanty information. In this period, around 138,000 people were removed from the area near the frontier and in the majority of cases were resettled in the central Soviet Union.

Declassified Soviet documents provide information about casualties of the deportations. According to earlier Polish estimates, approximately 10 percent did not survive transportation. Soviet documents provide much lower figures. According to these, no more than 15,000 died among the deported before July 1940.

On 12 August 1941, the Soviet Union Council issued a decree granting an amnesty to prisoners-of-war, internees, prisoners, deportees and their families. According to the NKVD documents there were at that time 381,220 Polish citizens in the Soviet labour camps. Recruiting for military service now began in the labour camps. By 12 September, 24,828 prisoners-of-war had signed up for the Polish Army in the Soviet Union. In early September they were sent to the army formation points in Buzuluk, Totskoye and Tatishchevo. These army formation stations were flooded with people who were enlisting. 16,674 of them were recorded in September as they were released from prisons, labor camps and deportation destinations. An additional 10,000 arrived in October.

The number of the casualties after the 'amnesty' is difficult to estimate. The mortality rate increased during the movement of the deported within the Soviet Union from 1941 until the summer of 1942. Epidemic diseases, hunger and exhaustion decimated the deported. There is a need to at least try to estimate the casualties among the deported while they were forced to remain in the Soviet Union.

What role did the Jews play in the establishment of Soviet rule? Allegations of the prominent Jewish role in establishing the new regime have aroused widespread Polish

resentment, both at the time and subsequently. According to General Anders, in his book

*Bez ostatniego rozdziału:*

I was greatly disturbed when in the beginning, large numbers from among the national minorities and first and foremost Jews, began streaming to enlist. As I have already mentioned, some of the Jews had warmly welcomed the Soviet armies that invaded Poland in 1939

How much truth is there in these allegations? Firstly while some Jews certainly welcomed the Red Army, their conduct had its counterpart among the Belarusians and Ukrainians, though not among the Poles. For many, the Red Army appeared as a saviour from Nazi occupation. The Jews were well aware of the nature of Nazi rule. During the first two weeks of September, between the German advance and the collapse of the Polish Army, the Jews were most frightened of pillaging and general violence. In this situation, the entry of the Soviet troops was welcomed, above all, as a guarantor of order.

The majority of Jews were clearly not communist, but communism exercised a powerful attraction, particularly to sections of the Jewish youth who saw no future for themselves in an increasingly nationalist Poland. Communism, they believed, would end national conflicts and would usher in a millenium in which all would be equal. The Soviet promises to end anti-Jewish discrimination and anti-semitic harassment had a wider appeal.

These responses were not universal. Those who could expect to suffer at the hands of the Bolsheviks were much more apprehensive and the general Jewish public was quite cynical about Soviet promises.

The problem of Jewish participation in the new regime is more complex. Jews certainly played a role in the militias and revolutionary committees which emerged both spontaneously and at Soviet urging, as did Belarussians and Ukrainians as well as



released prisoners. The key question is that of proportions. Because of the shock engendered by the revolutionary upheaval, their position probably seemed even more prominent to the Poles, against whom Soviet policy was above all directed.

The disproportionate position the Jews occupied in the new administration might be explained by the difficult problems the area posed for the new rulers. As we have seen, the aim was sovietisation through the encouragement of the local Ukrainian and Belarussian groups. This ruled out any significant approaches to the local Polish population, although policy did change somewhat after the fall of France. The local communists were also suspect. The Communist Party of Poland (KPP) had been dissolved as a Trotskyite organisation and the members of both the Communist Party of Western Ukraine (KPZU) and the Communist Party of Western Belarus (KPZB) which had functioned under its control were thus tainted by their association with a party in which an 'extensive provocative network, working for alien intelligence services had gained control of the leading positions'. In these conditions, the Jews, particularly in the smaller towns, could provide reliable and relatively well-educated personnel for the new administration and institutions. It should also be stressed that the establishment of Soviet rule certainly provided the prospect of new opportunities for the ambitious and energetic. Educational institutions were now much more accessible, as were many jobs in the civil service.

Yet, for the overwhelming bulk of the Jews, as for the rest of the population, even for those who had originally welcomed the new regime, the 21 months of Soviet rule was to prove a painful and disillusioning experience. Soviet policy towards the Jews aimed at eliminating all aspects of their communal and religious separateness. It was an updated

Soviet version of the policy of the French revolutionaries, expressed in the maxim, 'To the Jews as individuals we give everything, to the Jews as a group we give nothing'. The Soviets went out of their way to eliminate Zionist and Bundist activities and to discourage Jewish religious practice. Jewish communists played a large role in this process. A pervasive atmosphere of fear facilitated sovietisation.

Many of the institutions which had long been the mainstay of Jewish life disappeared without much coercion from the authorities. The kehillot, with wide powers in religious and educational affairs and enjoying the right to levy taxes, simply ceased to operate when they lost this right with the abolition of the Polish legal code. In addition, the better-off section of the Jewish community, which had provided the leading personnel and much of the finance of the kehillot feared the consequences of Soviet rule and went to ground. In Grodno, 'the board of the kehilla dissolved itself. All the board members stayed at home, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible', according to one of its members.

The destruction of the kehillot drastically undermined all other Jewish autonomous institutions, since they had provided most of the finance for the rabbinate, the synagogues, the cemeteries, religious and secular Jewish education and philanthropic bodies. Some welfare bodies did succeed in obtaining permission to function, but even they soon found it impossible to operate because of the absence of funds. Jewish religious life was officially tolerated, but placed under very serious constraints. Religious institutions, like the mikva (ritual bath), were discouraged, as were the functions of shokhetim (kosher slaughterers) and mohelim (circumcisers). Shops selling religious artefacts were closed, as were the Yeshivot, including such famous centres as Mir and

Volozhin. The Soviet-controlled Yiddish press, notably the *Bialyshtoker Shtern* was filled with anti-religious propaganda. The combination of threats and the blandishment of the new regime certainly led to a drastic curtailment of Jewish religious practice.

#### **4. The German Regime**

The Poles were a major obstacle to Hitler's plans for a great German empire in the east, and he was prepared to use the most drastic means to crush and eliminate them. Indeed he saw his rule in Poland as a prototype for the 'colonial' regime of German masters ruling over Slav helots that he intended to establish in the areas he hoped to conquer in the east. It was thus entirely in keeping that a member of the Cultural Department of the Reichs Commissariat Ukraine could remark in April 1942: 'Putting it precisely, we are here in the midst of negroes.' The occupied territory was divided into two parts. One area, comprising former Prussian Poland, the Dąbrowa basin, and the areas around Lodz and Suwałki, was directly incorporated in the Reich. The rest of Poland assigned to Germany in terms of the Soviet-German friendship treaty of September 1939 was maintained as a separate entity to which the name 'General-Government,' redolent of World War I, was given.

The areas openly annexed by the Reich were formed into two new administrative units, Reichsgau Danzig and Reichsgau Wartheland, while Polish Upper Silesia was united with the German province and the area around Suwałki was incorporated into East Prussia. The policies pursued here, like so much of what was done by the Nazis, were a grotesquely exaggerated version of proposals made before and during World War I for the administration

of Prussian Poland and for the creation of a border strip, which we have already discussed. Thus, the annexed territory, with its population of 8.9 million Poles, 603,000 Jews and only 600,000 Germans was marked out for a policy of ruthless Germanization, personally supervised by the head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler. The overwhelming majority of the Poles were seen as irreconcilable enemies whose ultimate fate was to be either expulsion to the General-Government or physical extermination. They were to be supplanted by German settlers from the Baltic states, the Soviet Union, and elsewhere. These policies could not be carried through to their conclusion during the war, but already by the end of 1944 they had resulted in the settlement of over three-fourths of a million German colonists in the area, the murder of 330,000 Poles, and the expulsion either to the General-Government or to forced labour in Germany of an additional 860,000 Poles.<sup>1</sup>

The fate of those Poles who managed to remain in their homeland was scarcely better. A small minority with German links were persuaded or compelled to abjure their nationality and declare themselves German. This ensured them preferential treatment but at the cost for able-bodied men of service in the German army. The remainder, as racially inferior *Untermenschen*, were to be reduced to the status of slaves whose sole function was to provide cheap labour. Accordingly, the German authorities first took steps to decimate the intelligentsia and deprive the population of its natural leaders. Intellectuals and former government officials were thus rounded up and many were shot, while others were put in concentration camps or deported to the General-Government.

The rest of the Polish population was subjected to rigorous controls – the speaking of Polish was not freely permitted and strict limits over movement established. Only the simplest form of primary education was allowed, and all other Polish educational and cultural activity

was proscribed. A special criminal code for Jews and Poles was promulgated in December 1941, which institutionalized this inferior status. It proposed imprisonment only for 'less serious cases' and made the death penalty the rule both by the Gestapo and by the criminal courts. Death sentences were, for instance, imposed on those who hid fire hoses, damaged agricultural machinery, or illegally slaughtered animals.<sup>2</sup>

The economy of the area was ruthlessly subordinated to the interests of the German war machine. All Polish economic enterprises were sequestered, and the Poles working in them were given a much lower standard of living than their German counterparts. In the hope of ensuring the supply of agricultural produce to the Reich and of facilitating colonization, the Germans also established a firm hold over the agricultural sector, which before the war had been very well developed and the most prosperous in Poland. From late 1940 on, many farms were seized and their owners compelled to work as labourers for newly-franchised German landlords. In addition, many younger peasants were compelled to undertake forced labour in the Reich or were deported to the General-Government.<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, these policies considerably exacerbated the already bitter hatreds in this area long disputed between German and Pole, and the Poles were to take their revenge in 1945.

The situation was equally bad in the General-Government. The Germans initially toyed with the idea of establishing a small Polish puppet state, but rejected this because of the near impossibility of finding Poles willing to collaborate with them and also because of the hostility of the Soviets to such an arrangement.<sup>4</sup> Six days before the official establishment of the General-Government on October 20, 1939, Hitler set out for the Wehrmacht high command the essence of the policy he intended to pursue towards the Poles. He explained that the General-Government was to be given a sort of 'independent' status and not directly

incorporated into the Reich. This was because ‘a period of tough struggle between the nationalities was to come and it could not be fought successfully if the German authorities were bound by any legal norms.’ German policy, he declared, had three principal aims. In the first place, the Polish intelligentsia was to be ‘prevented from taking a leadership role in the future.’<sup>5</sup> This was, in fact, a euphemism for the planned mass murder of the intelligentsia, which was subsequently defined by Frank as including ‘teachers, clergy, medical doctors, dentists, veterinarians, large merchants, large landowners, writers, and journalists as well as those who had university or high school diplomas.’<sup>6</sup> Secondly, communication lines were to be kept in good condition, so that the occupied territory could later be used for the mobilization of armed forces in the case of a war against the Soviet Union. Finally, the General-Government was to serve as a ‘dumping ground’ to aid the Reich in ‘cleansing’ itself of Poles and Jews.

These goals were ruthlessly pursued. The General-Government as originally established had a population of 12.3 million, almost exclusively Poles and Jews. After the German invasion of the U.S.S.R., east Galicia, with its mixed population of Poles and Ukrainians, was added to it, bringing the population up to sixteen million.<sup>7</sup> The other areas of pre-war Poland with their predominantly Belarusian and Ukrainian populations were administered separately by Reichs Commissariats for Ostland and the Ukraine, apart from the area around Białystok which was attached to East Prussia.<sup>8</sup>

The German administration in the General-Government was headed by a leading Nazi lawyer, Hans Frank, a former president of the German Academy of Law, who was noted for his fanatical devotion to Hitler. It was almost entirely staffed by Germans, though some vestiges of Polish local government were maintained. The prewar Polish police were also

retained, though under tight German control, and the bulk of the policing in the area fell to the German authorities. Frank claimed that his rule would be harsh but humane, but in fact he was quite unable to control the security apparatus, which believed that only brute force and violence could keep order and which established almost complete control of jurisdiction over non-Germans. In this way terror was institutionalized and special police courts (*Sondergerichte* and *Standgerichte*) dealt with all cases which could be construed as having an anti-German aspect, such as damaging the harvest, illegal slaughtering, or black market activity.<sup>9</sup>

Frank saw his principal task as ensuring that 'the backbone of the Poles is broken for all time,'<sup>10</sup> and he was particularly ruthless, in line with Hitler's directives, in his attacks on the intelligentsia. University and secondary education was banned and only a restricted form of primary schooling allowed. A large number of Polish intellectuals were arrested immediately after the establishment of German rule and many were soon to be murdered. In the summer of 1940, for instance, nearly 3,500 politicians and intellectuals were shot. The Catholic Church, too, was strongly attacked as a bulwark of Polish national sentiment.

The lot of the rest of the population was not much better. Since the goal of German policy was to drain the General-Government to benefit the German war effort, they were subjected to brutal economic exploitation. Goering's directive for the area, issued on October 13, 1939, decreed:

There must be removed from the territories of the Government General all raw materials, scrap materials etc., that are of use to the German war economy. Enterprises that are not absolutely necessary for the meagre maintenance of the naked existence of the population must be transferred to Germany unless such transfer would require an unreasonably long period of time and would make it more practical to exploit those enterprises by giving them German orders to be executed at their present location.<sup>11</sup>

This policy led inevitably to a drastic fall in the standard of living of the population. It is true that after the fall of France some efforts were made to revive the economy of the area in preparation for Hitler's planned invasion of the U.S.S.R. But this had largely negative effects on levels of consumption in the towns, since food prices rose rapidly while the German authorities froze wages at prewar levels. Survival was only possible through the black market, which expanded enormously, and malnutrition and starvation became widespread. Indeed, Frank openly declared that he had no interest in whether the Poles 'had anything to eat or not.' They were to receive whatever was left after the Germans had been fed.

The one section of the population which did benefit, at least initially, was the peasantry, who saw a rapid increase in the price for their produce. This accorded well with Nazi theory, which was prepared to tolerate a subordinate Slav peasantry, and efforts were made to drive a wedge between the towns and the countryside. Soon, however, the needs of the German war economy compelled the authorities to demand large deliveries from farmers at low prices. This, together with the bitterness aroused by the attempt in 1943 to settle German peasants in the Lublin area, completely destroyed whatever popularity the new administration had been able to acquire in the countryside.

A particularly appalling feature of the Nazi occupation was the treatment of the Jews.<sup>12</sup> In a speech to the Reichstag on January 30, 1939, Hitler had declared that 'If 'international Jewish financial circles' (*internationale Finanzjudentum*) plunge the world into war the results will not be the bolshevization of the earth and thus victory for Jewry but the annihilation of the Jews as a race in Europe.' This gruesome threat was duly acted upon. Poland was the country with the largest Jewish population in Europe and it was to be the



scene of the worst anti-Jewish massacres. During the first two years of the occupation, German policy aimed at the ruthless economic exploitation of the Jews, hoping in this way both to aid the war effort and to cause the maximum number of deaths. Thus, by a decree of October 26, 1939, all Jewish men between the ages of sixteen and sixty were made liable to compulsory labour, and forced labour camps were soon established in which Jews were compelled to work in appalling conditions for the German war effort. The logical culmination of this policy was the decree of January 26, 1940, segregating the Jews from the rest of the population in walled-off ghettos, characterized by massive over-crowding and terrible shortages. In 1941, for instance, the daily food ration for Jews in Warsaw was 184 calories, as against 669 for Poles, and 2,613 for Germans. Throughout this period sporadic massacres of Jews were also organized by the S.S. and units of the army. The result was that, between the beginning of the occupation and the middle of 1941, approximately 100,000 Jews died.

The decision to 'solve' the Jewish problem by mass murder was almost certainly taken at the same time as the invasion of the U.S.S.R. and was probably initiated by Hitler, who undoubtedly gave it his approval. At the Wannsee conference in December 1941, the administrative steps necessary to carry out the murder not only of Polish Jews but also of the Jews of the whole of Axis Europe were set in motion. Jews were to be concentrated in camps, above all the camp at the central Polish rail junction of Oświęcim (Auschwitz), and gassed. The end results of this policy are only too well known, the murder of between five and one-half and six million Jews, two thirds of those in Europe and two-fifths of those in the whole world. Of Polish Jews, over 3 million died as a result of the war and 40,000 to 50,000 managed to survive hidden in Poland or fighting as partisans. An additional 200,000 to 250,000 managed to escape to the interior of the U.S.S.R.

The end results of German rule in Poland are only too well known. The statistics are not wholly reliable but it is now accepted that due to German crimes and wartime hostilities no less than 1.5-2 million Poles and almost 3 million Poles of Jewish descent perished. In Warsaw itself, from October 1943 to July 1944, at least 8 000 persons were shot, which means that about 25 were killed daily. The losses suffered by the armed Underground from the autumn of 1939 to July 1944 (that is up to the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising) are estimated at about 60 000 -70 000 persons in the area under Nazi occupation. In the years 1940-1944, the number of people sent to concentration camps totalled at least 10 000 annually. Already the autumn of 1939 witnessed deportations of the population from territories incorporated into the Third Reich, and in the course of the first six months about 400 000 persons were affected. At the same time, the Germans initiated ‘street round-ups’ and the deportation of forced labourers; in the summer of 1944, there were some 1,3 mln. Polish slave labourers working in the Third Reich. Polish children were subjected to a denationalisation campaign - certain estimates put the number at about 20 000. Particularly severe persecutions were applied in relation to the intelligentsia - from priests to landowners, teachers and professors. In certain intelligentsia professions the losses totalled one-third. A further enumeration of the crimes and torment it is probably unnecessary although these examples by no means exhaust the list. Although the experiences of the 1939-1944 period were sufficiently dramatic, the massacre of Warsaw - first the population (180 000) and after the stifling of the Uprising, the destruction of the town itself - torched house after house - in a certain sense comprised the final act of Polish martyrology.

Not surprisingly, repression on this scale provoked large-scale resistance. Not without reason did Hans Frank complain bitterly that it was impossible to crush the Poles because of

their 'fanatical faith in the resurrection of Poland.'<sup>13</sup> German officials frequently referred to the General-Government as *Gangster Gau*. (Gangster province). The largest of the resistance groups was the Home Army (Army Krajowa) linked with the Polish government in London, which in 1944 had nearly 350,000 men under arms, and there were also smaller pro-communist and ultra-right-wing armed groups. They were involved not only in a conflict with the occupying authority but also in a bitter struggle for power in postwar Poland, a struggle whose outcome was to be decided not by the domestic constellation of forces in the country, but by the victory of the Red Army and the Western Powers' acceptance at the Teheran and Yalta conferences of a Soviet sphere of influence in Europe that included Poland.

The superficial resemblances between the German occupation regimes in Poland during the two world wars should not be allowed to obscure the far greater differences. The Germans during World War I acted like a conventional imperial power and their objectives were limited by the maintenance of some of the basic norms of political behaviour which had become accepted during the nineteenth century. They were often brutal and crude, and their goals left little scope for real independence for the Poles. But they also sought to win a measure of support for their attempt to replace the tsarist empire by a German-dominated constellation of semi-independent states in eastern Europe. During World War II, Nazi policy was subject to no restraints. The Nazis sought ruthlessly to implement their racial solution to the problems of eastern Europe in order to make possible the establishment of a Greater German land empire in which such non-Germans who survived would be rightless slaves. Not without reason was it said in Poland under the occupation, 'They are eating the Jews for lunch, it will be the Poles for dinner.' The attempt physically to destroy the Polish people created a bitter and violent

hatred that manifested itself in the widespread acceptance in Poland of the view that if Poland was to lose territory in the east to the Soviet Union, she should be compensated in the west at German expense. A ruthless policy of expulsion was thus carried out against Germans from areas that had been German for at least five centuries and in some cases longer. This implementation of the concept of collective responsibility was brutal – it led to the deaths of many innocent people and it cannot be defended on moral grounds. Yet it has led to the establishment of ‘a clear ethnic border between Pole and German. The ethnically-mixed borderland has disappeared forever. Something has been lost in the way of cultural diversity and national interaction. But against this a degree of stability has been gained.

## **5. Resistance**

Not surprisingly, repression on this scale provoked large-scale resistance. Hans Frank complained bitterly that it was impossible to crush the Poles because of their ‘fanatical faith in the resurrection of Poland.’ German officials frequently referred to the General-Government as *Gangster Gau* (Gangster province).

Departure of *Sanacja* regime and formation of government in France - headed by General Sikorski. Composed of opponents of *Sanacja*. Peasant Party, PPS, ND and Party of Labor (CD). Contact with Poland maintained - covers through Slovakia – Hungary. After entry of Italy into war, contact more by radio.

Official Policy Non-recognition of German and Soviet occupations  
Polish state argued to be in existence. Secret government, admin, army, press, land costs,

schools set up Home Army (A.K.) Piłsudski-ites among army officers. But cooperate loyally to London government.

Underground civil administration. Headed by chief delegate of government in exile. 12 depts - correspond to normal ministries. Advisory political representation - ie underground parliament. Directorate of civil resistance - to 'discourage' collaboration

War saw a significant radicalisation of political attitudes. This can be seen in the May Day proclamation of PPS now called WRN, in 1940. According to this, the future belonged to workers and peasants, Poles must live in harmony with Jews and Poles must learn to respect the aspiration to freedom of the Ukrainian and White Russian peoples.

The four parties supporting the London government made a programmatic statement on 15 August 1943. According to this the governmental authorities in the future were to be 'free of those elements responsible for the mistakes of the former regime and also free from any totalitarian leanings.' There was to be a radical land reform and far-reaching nationalisation.

## **6. Polish Society and the Holocaust**

### **1. General Issues**

On the eve of the second world war, Poland contained the largest Jewish community in Europe, second only size to that of the United States. With its population of nearly three and a half million, Polish Jewry still retained its position as one of the main centers of the Jewish world. The overwhelming majority of Polish Jewry, more than 90 per cent, lost

their lives in the Nazi genocide. Only in the Baltic states was the percentage of Jewish casualties higher.

The central issue in any discussion of the Jewish fate in Poland during the Second World War is thus clearly why so few Polish Jews survived and what responsibility Polish society bears for this situation. The primary responsibility for the massacre of Polish Jewry undoubtedly rests with Hitler, the Nazi leadership and the German people who for the most part followed their lead. Research in recent years has greatly clarified how the anti-Jewish genocide was carried out. It was implemented in three stages. Its initiation was part of the radicalization of Nazi policy which accompanies Operation Barbarossa and its final adoption accompanied the euphoria of victory in September and October 1941. In the first, mobile killing squads, the *Einsatzgruppen*, advanced behind the *Wehrmacht* killing Soviet officials and Jewish adult men and then, after a period, also Jewish women and children. At least one million Jews were killed in this way between July and December 1941. This method of murder was abandoned because of its deleterious effect on the morale of those required to carry it out it was replaced, in the second stage, by the creation of death camps, where assembly line techniques of mass murder were developed using first carbon monoxide and then an insecticide, Zyklon B. During this period of the genocide, which came to an end in late 1942, the Germans were operating in areas where there was no limitation on their absolute freedom of action. Their power was at its height and the ability of the Allies or the subject populations under the control of the Third Reich to exercise influence on their behavior was minimal. Most of the actual genocide was also at this stage carried out by Germans. It was during this period that at least another 2.7 million Jews were murdered. Most of them came from

within the pre-1939 borders of Poland and by the end of 1942, very few Polish Jews survived. In the third stage of the genocide, which lasted until the end of the war, the Nazis found themselves obliged to persuade or coerce their allies, satellites and puppets in the New Europe to hand over their Jews. By this time, both these governments, the Western Allies and virtually everybody else in Nazi occupied Europe knew that Nazi policy toward the Jews involved genocide and were obliged to articulate some sort of response.

The argument of the overwhelming responsibility of the Nazis has not stilled the claim that others also bear a great deal of the blame. Indeed, the debate about Polish involvement in the mass-murder of the Jews has been particularly bitter According to Mordekhai Tenenbaum, Commander of the Jewish Fighting Organization in the Bialystok ghetto, in his memoirs, published shortly after the war:

if it had not been for the Poles, for their aid - passive and active - in the 'solution' of the Jewish problem in Poland, the Germans would never have dared to do what they did. It was they, the Poles, who called out 'Yid' at every Jew who escaped from the train transporting him, it was they who caught the unfortunate wretches, who rejoiced at every Jewish misfortune - they were vile and contemptible.

## **2. Specific features of the Holocaust in Poland**

1. Jews here regarded themselves and were regarded by the majority population as a national and not a religious group, i.e., the integrationist process had not succeeded.
2. The period down to 1939 had seen a serious deterioration in the situation of the Jews.

This was caused by a number of factors:

1. The persistence of the Great Depression
2. The contagious effect of the success of German anti-Semitism
3. The divisions in the ruling government camp after the death of the charismatic dictator Józef Piłsudski in May, 1935.

By 1939, the two societies were largely separate. There were few organic ties between them and most Poles did not regard the Jews as part of what Helen Fein has described as ‘the universe of obligation... that circle of persons towards whom obligations are owed, to whom rules apply and whose injuries call for expiation by the community?’

3. The Poles, like the other nations of the area believed they faced *two* enemies in the war, the Germans and the Soviets. This made their situation fundamentally different from that of the Jews.

4. The brutality of Nazi rule in Poland

### **3. The Widening of the Gap between Poles and Jews in the First Two Years of the War**

This occurred in spite of the savage persecution and ghettoization which the Jews suffered in these years. During this period in Warsaw alone, nearly 85,000 Jews died from starvation or from diseases caused by malnutrition and overcrowding.

Why did this occur?



1. The German exacerbation of the Polish-Jewish divide.

a. Armband

b. Propaganda

c. Encouragement of anti-Jewish violence

2. The eruption of anti-Jewish violence

Sometimes spontaneous, generally encouraged by Nazis.

3. Polish belief that they were more persecuted than the Jews.

The Poles were certainly subject to savage repression, intended both to make permanent the incorporation of the Polish lands into the Third Reich and to deter attempts at resistance. As we have seen, Jews were also being savagely persecuted, but to many Poles the fact the Jews were allowed a degree of (spurious) autonomy and that Jewish political activity was not actively repressed seemed confirmed that at this stage the Jewish fate was not significantly worse than that of the Poles and might even be somewhat better.

4. A significant proportion of the Polish population was benefited from the Nazi expropriation of the Jews. According to a memorandum sent in the summer of 1943 to the Polish government in London by Roman Knoll, Head of the Foreign Affairs

Commission in the Office of the Government Delegate for the Homeland:

In the Homeland as a whole ...the position is such that the return of the Jews to their jobs and workshops is completely ruled out of the question, even if the number of Jews were greatly reduced. The non-Jewish population has filled the places of the Jews in the towns and cities - in a large part of Poland this is a fundamental change, final in character. The return of masses of Jews would be experienced by the population not as restitution but as an invasion against which they would defend themselves, even with physical means.

5. Anti-Semitic policies were not seriously compromised by Nazi rule.

6. Polish resentment at Jewish 'collaboration' with the Soviet authorities established after the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland in September 1939.

7. The numbing effect of the brutality of Nazi occupation also inhibited the ability of ordinary people to rise above their own predicament and think altruistically. So too did the shock of the defeat and of the effects of the Nazi onslaught. In the battle and siege of Warsaw, about one quarter of the city's buildings were totally destroyed or badly damaged. It has been calculated that fifty thousand people were killed or seriously injured. The sense of betrayal and outrage led to strong hostility to the pre-war government. It also led to a search for scapegoats, and while this led some people to rethink their views on the Jews, in others it intensified their existing anti-Semitism.

The consequences for Polish-Jewish relations were clear. According to a despatch from the Commander of the Armia Krajowa, General Stefan Grot-Rowecki, to London of 30 September 1941:

Please take it as an established fact that the overwhelming majority of the population is antisemitic. Even the socialists are no exception. There are only tactical differences about what to do. Hardly anybody advocates imitating the Germans. German methods provoke compassion, but after the merging of the occupation zones, on learning how the Jews behaved in the east, this is now considerably reduced.

#### **4. How did this Development Affect the Policy of the Political Organs of Polish Society**

1. Establishment of government in exile, first in Angers in France and then from June 1940 in London

2. Commitment of this government to equal rights for the Jews. Declaration of 5 November 1940:

The Jews, as Polish citizens, shall in liberated Poland be equal with the Polish

community, in duties and in rights. They will be able to develop their culture, religion and folkways without hindrance. Not only the laws of the state, but even more the common sufferings in this most tragic time of affliction will serve to guarantee this [pledge].

3. Why did this *not* lead to changes in attitude or significant assistance to Jews.

## 5. Polish Society and the Holocaust

1. The situation when the German genocide began was marked by the following features:

a. The almost complete isolation of the Jews.

b. The worsening of the diplomatic position of the Poles – Katyn and the breach in relations with the Soviets.

2. The attitude of the Polish Underground State to the Genocide

1. The attitude of the main line government delegation and its paper *Biuletyn*

*Informacyjny* edited by Alexander Kamiński, a well-known Polish educator and Scout leader, who before the war had become friendly with Mordekhai Anieliewicz, later the leader of the Jewish Fighting Organization (Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa) in the Warsaw ghetto. On 17 September 1942, the paper wrote:

Along with the tragedy which Polish society is having to endure, being decimated by the enemy, for nearly a year now Jews are being brutally butchered in our land. This mass murder has no precedent in the history of the world and all other atrocities known to history pale alongside it. Babies, children, young people, adults, the old, cripples, invalids, men, women, Jewish Catholics and Jews practising the Mosaic faith are coldbloodedly murdered, poisoned by gas, buried alive, thrown out of windows of high rise buildings, forced to endure agonies before their death, the hell of homelessness and the anguish of cynical ill-treatment at the hands of their executioners. The number of victims killed in this way has passed a million and is growing with every day.

Not being able actively to resist it, the League of Active Struggle protest in the name of the entire Polish nation against the crime being perpetrated on the Jews. All Polish political and social groups join in this protest. Just as in the case of Polish victims, the physical responsibility for this crime will fall on the executioners and their accomplices.

## 2. General attitudes pro and con

Among the political parties which made up the underground state, the genocide did not lead to a fundamental revision of attitudes to the 'Jewish Question.' The Information and Propaganda Bureau of the Home Army undertook a study of the views of those parties linked with the government Delegation at the end of 1943. They found that four groupings, the Convention of Independence Organizations, the Syndicalists, the Democratic Party and the breakaway section of the prewar Socialist Party 'Freedom-Equality-Independence' favored full equality for the Jews, eight other parties, some of them very small, were still in favor of the emigration of all or most Polish Jews, and one (the Confederation of the Nation) favored 'liquidation.' Opposition to the genocide and sympathy for the Jews was also expressed by the liberal Catholic Front for the Rebirth of Poland (Front Odrodzenia Polski - FON), though with some of the characteristic ambiguities of most Catholic thinking about the Jews before Vatican II.

## 3. Examples of attitudes

1. Pro: The Warsaw ghetto uprising provoked an upsurge of sympathy for the Jewish insurgents, partly because it seemed to negate the widespread stereotype of Jewish passivity in the face of persecution. According to Aurelia Wyłężyńska writing in *Nowy Dziennik*, a paper which appeared daily in occupied Warsaw, on 14 May 1943:

*Gloria Victis!* 14 May 1943. Pockets of resistance are still holding on in the hopeless battle. I approach the front line. It is rather one great cemetery. No natural disaster has

ever produced such a mass grave. Near the freshly demolished wall, some German soldiers are practising target shooting. Haven't they practiced enough? The defense of Warsaw's Nalewki Street will pass into history alongside the defense of Saragossa, Alcazar, Westerplatte, and Stalingrad, every one of them held with blood. The defenders of the ghetto succumbed not only to the brutal violence and overwhelming strength of the enemy. They have gone through an inferno of suffering, through every torment that man can inflict on man. They depart, victims of a total and complete burning. The civilized world will remember them for ever.

## 2. Anti.

At the same time the mass murder of the Jews did not lead to any significant rethinking in the main-line centre and right-wing parties, the christian democratic Party of Labour, the Peasant Party (Stronnictwo Ludowe) and the National Democrats, all of which were represented in the London government (the Endeks withdrew in July 1941: one faction, headed by Marian Seyda, re-entered the government in early 1942, while the other, led by Tadeusz Bielecki, regarded itself as a 'loyal' opposition). Even the more moderate Peasant Party (Stronnictwo Ludowe) was for 'voluntary emigration'. *Naród*, organ of the Party of Labour on 15 August 1942, combined a call to provide help to Jewish fugitives with expressions of hateful anti-semitism:

At this moment, from behind the ghetto walls, we can hear the inhuman moans and screams of the Jews who are being murdered. Ruthless cunning is falling victim to ruthless brutal power and no Cross is visible on this battlefield, since these scenes go back to pre-Christian times.

If this continues, then it will not be long before Warsaw will say farewell to its last Jew. If it were possible to conduct a funeral, it would be interesting to see the reaction. Would the coffin evoke sorrow, weeping or perhaps joy?

In one of our previous issues, we urged kindness, but today, we are faced with the following question. For hundreds of years, an alien, malevolent entity has inhabited the northern sections of our city. Malevolent and alien from the point of view of our interests, as well as our psyche and our hearts. So let us not strike false attitudes like professional weepers at funerals - let us be serious and honest...

We pity the individual Jew, the human being and, as far as possible, should he be lost or trying to hide, we will extend a helping hand. We must condemn those who denounce him. It is our duty to demand from those who allow themselves to sneer and mock to show dignity and respect in the face of death. But we are not going to pretend to be grief-stricken about a vanishing nation, which, after all, was never close to our hearts.

*Walka*, one of the papers published by the underground National Democrats, wrote shortly after the suppression of the Warsaw ghetto uprising in the spring of 1943:

From a biological point of view the Jews have lost a great deal of their power. The decline of Israel, in which Roman Dmowski once believed, has come much closer because of the biological defeat of that nation, namely, the destruction of millions of its most racially pure representatives.

Opposition to the genocide and sympathy for the Jews was also expressed by the liberal Catholic Front for the Rebirth of Poland (Front Odrodzenie Polski - FON), though with some of the characteristic ambiguities of most Catholic thinking about the Jews before Vatican II.

### 3. Government in London

1. 24 February, it reaffirmed its commitment to Jewish equality. The future Poland would be 'a democratic and republican state' in which 'the right and liberties of all loyal citizens regardless of national and religious differences would be guaranteed.

2. News of the genocide sent to London by Polish underground. By October, government knew what was happening and began to publicize genocide - 29 October protest meeting in Albert Hall.

### 3. Government statement of 27 November:

The Polish government in full consciousness of its responsibility has not neglected to inform the world about the mass murders and bestialities of the Germans in Poland and has, at the same time, done every thing in its power to counteract that terror.

We are well aware that the fundamental condition for effectively counteracting German activities , which in relation to Poland can be summarized as an attempt *to destroy the Polish nation and wipe out any trace of its existence* (emphasis in original), can only be the shortening of the period of suffering and struggle of Polish citizens in the Country and the speedy defeat of the enemy.

Thus, the earlier call from the Country for a second front and the present appeals to speed up, at all cost, the course of the war are basic guidelines for the Polish government and its activities. The development of the military situation in recent weeks, symbolised by the passage of the Allies to the offensive and their victories, has been received with great relief and true joy - the Country reacted immediately by sending congratulations to President Roosevelt and Premier Churchill.

A special page in the martyrology of Poland is constituted by the persecution of the Jewish minority in Poland.

Hitler's decision that the year 1942 is to be the year in which at least half of Polish Jews are to be done away with is being implemented with an utter ruthlessness and barbarity the like of which is unknown in human history. The figures speak for themselves. Of the approximately 400,000 Jews in the Warsaw ghetto, over 260,000 have been liquidated starting on 17 July and in a little less than three months. Mass murders are taking place over the whole Country, Polish Jews are being exterminated along with Jews from other occupied countries who have been brought to Poland for this purpose.

Forceful protests are coming from the Country against these murders and pillage. Protest is accompanied with fellow-feeling and a cry of one's own powerlessness in the face of what is taking place. Poles in the Country are fully aware, as is revealed in reports that the accelerated pace of murder which *today is taking place in relation to the Jews, will tomorrow affect the remainder of those left*(emphasis in original).

David Engel has argued that this declaration reflects both the Polish desire to subsume the Jewish tragedy within its own narrower political objectives and an unwillingness to accept the scale of what was happening. These arguments do not seem wholly convincing, since it would have been very surprising if the Polish government had not been primarily concerned with the Polish national interest as it understood it. More persuasive is the view that the declaration reflected a basic unwillingness to take any meaningful action beyond protesting. Certainly the government did protest strongly. The constant stress on powerlessness, even if it was largely true, did lead to a failure to act.

The government may also have been unwilling to press the underground authorities on a matter on which it knew there were divided counsels in Poland. When the Polish Foreign Minister, Edward Raczynski wrote to Chaim Weizmann on 3 December, he stressed his 'heartfelt compassion with the martyrdom which the German barbarians have inflicted upon the Jewish nation.' As for action, he wrote:

I can assure you that the Polish government is determined that the dehumanized perpetrators of these dreadful crimes shall receive a punishment commensurate with their guilt.

#### 4. Responses in Poland

##### 1. *Zegota*

Under these circumstances, the initiative for responding to the genocide fell to the underground authorities in Poland, civilian and military. The Government Delegation and its head, the Government Delegate, were basically sympathetic to the Jews, but aware that they lacked the power to impose their will on the various groupings which made up the underground. It was only in April 1943, that the Government Delegate issued an appeal calling on Poles to hide Jews. Before this, at the end of 1942, a Council for Aid to the Jews (*Rada Pomocy Żydom*, code name *Żegota*) was set up by representatives of the Front for the Rebirth of Poland and some underground socialist and left-wing groups, which was able to obtain a degree of support from the London government. Between 1942 and the end of the war it was granted a total of nearly 29 million zlotys (over \$5 million) which it used to provide monthly relief payments for a few thousand Jewish families in Warsaw, Lwów and Kraków. According to one of its historians, Teresa



Prekerowa, by the middle of 1944 between three and four thousand were benefiting from its financial support. In addition, it provided Jews with the false documents they needed to survive on the Aryan side and established a network of 'safe houses' where those who had an 'unfavorable appearance' could hide.

The successes of *Żegota* (it was able to forge false documents for 50,000 persons) suggest that had it been given a higher priority by the Government Delegation and the Government in London, it could have done much more. We have the testimony of one of its members, Władysław Bartoszewski, Polish Foreign Minister until December 1995, that the organization was regarded as a 'stepchild' by the central underground authorities. According to Yisrael Gutman, *Żegota*'s achievements were 'very little considering the dimensions of the tragedy' but 'considerable in light of the conditions and spirit of the times.' This assessment was shared by Emanuel Ringelblum, who wrote:

A Council for Aid to the Jews was formed, consisting of people of good will, but its activity was limited by lack of funds and lack of help from the government.

How many Jews were saved by Poles?

Under these circumstances, most of those who hid Jews were individuals acting on their own initiative, whether impelled by moral considerations or hopes of financial gain. How many Jews were saved this way? It is difficult to be exact. According to the records of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Centrally Komitet Żydów w Polsce-CK\_P) the principal Jewish body in post-war Poland, 74,000 people had registered by June 1945. Of these, 5,500 had returned from concentration camps in Germany, 13,000 had served in the pro-Communist Polish Army, established in the USSR after the withdrawal of the Anders Army, about 30,000 had made their way back from the Soviet

Union and 10,000 had been freed from concentration camps in Poland. This suggests that 20,000 had survived on the 'Aryan' side. This figure is certainly too low, since it does not include those who did not register with the CKZP, whether because they wished merely to stay away from Jewish organizations or because they were assimilated or baptized. But even if we double the figure, we still do not have more than 40,000 Jews who survived thanks to Polish assistance. Not all Jews survived the war, because of denunciations or because they were discovered in random searches. Teresa Prekerowa estimates that only half of those who moved onto the 'Aryan side' lived to see liberation. She has also attempted to assess how many Poles were involved in the rescue of Jews. According to her reckoning, because some Poles saved more than one Jew, in order to reach a figure for how many Poles were involved in the rescue of Jews one should multiply the number of survivors by two or three. This gives us a figure of between 160,000 and 240,000 Poles who, at the risk of their own lives and those of their families, helped rescue Jews. We do not know how many people died trying to save Jews. Yisrael Gutman has argued that this number is probably in the 'hundred.' How is one to assess these figures? Only one who was prepared to risk his life in this way is in a position to do so. Such a person is Władysław Bartoszewski. He has written:

The moral issue remains. From a moral point of view, it must be stated clearly that not enough was done either in Poland or anywhere else in occupied Europe. 'Enough' was done only by those who died.

### 3. Blackmailers

One of the main problems facing Jews attempting to hide were the blackmailers and *szmalcownicy* who batted on Jewish misery. What did the underground attempt to

do about this problem, whose moral consequences have been alluded to in a number of the newspapers cited in this article? The Government Delegation ordered the trial and execution of a fair number collaborators. Yet it was only in April 1943 that the Government Delegation issued a warning condemning the blackmail of Jews, a threat, which, as Ringelblum wrote, 'remained on paper.' From September 1943, death sentences began to be meted out on *szmalcownicy*. According to Prekerowa, in 1943-4 five blackmailers were put to death in Warsaw and a few in Kraków and its environs.

Ringelblum is certainly correct when he observed:

A larger number of death sentences for blackmailers, together with public announcements of these executions would certainly have some effect.

#### 4. Attitude of military underground

The attitude of the military underground to the genocide is both more complex and more controversial. Throughout the period when it was being carried out, the Home Army was preoccupied with preparing for Plan Storm (Burza), the strategy of confronting the Soviets with a political authority linked with the London government at the moment of the collapse of Nazi rule in Poland. It was determined to avoid premature military action and to conserve its strength (and weapons) for the crucial confrontation which would determine the fate of Poland. Its position was clearly set out on 10 November 1942 in an order of its Commander-in Chief, General Stefan Rowecki:

1. Polish society is apprehensive that in the aftermath of the current extermination of the Jews, the Germans may proceed to apply similar methods of extermination against the Poles. I call for restraint and for counteracting these apprehensions with reassurances. The principal German objective in relation to us could be described as the absorption of our nation. Attempts to exterminate the resistant segments of our nation by the methods applied against the Jews cannot however be ruled out.

2. In the event that the Germans do indeed undertake such attempts, they will encounter our resistance. Irrespective of the scheduled timing of our uprising, the units under my command must proceed to armed struggle in defence of the life of the nation. In the course of this struggle, we shall switch from defence to attack, with the aim of undercutting the entire network of enemy lines to the Eastern front. This decision is mine and will be communicated to all ranks of the clandestine forces.<sup>14</sup>

This document makes brutally clear the principal lines of Home Army strategy. It also brings out the fact that to the Home Army, the Jews were not a part of 'our nation' and that action to defend them was not to be taken if it endangered other AK objectives. Certainly the Home Army was not willing to absorb the Jewish partisan groups formed in the forests by fugitives from the ghettos, regarding them as unreliable and potentially communist in sympathy. There was one exception to this. In Volhynia, which was wracked by a brutal ethnic conflict between Poles and Ukrainians, the AK was eager to cooperate with Jewish partisans to defend Polish villages. It was also not, by and large, willing to accept Jews as individuals, though here too there were exceptions, such as the Propaganda and Information Bureau of the High Command. It should be mentioned, too, that the Home Army, like the civilian underground, was made up of adherents of different political orientations, some of them sympathetic and others hostile to the Jews. The AK was not sympathetic to the plight of individual Jewish fugitives, seeing them as security risks, likely to endanger its own position. Local commanders and the High Command often referred to these people (and also to communist partisans) as 'bandits', an echo of the language used by the Nazis themselves. The view of the Home Army leadership emerges clearly in an order issued on 31 August 1943 by Rowecki's successor, General Tadeusz Bor-Komorowski:

Well-armed gangs roam endlessly in cities and villages, attack estates, banks, commercial and industrial companies, houses and apartments and larger peasant farms. The plunder is often accompanied by acts of murder, which are carried out by Soviet partisan units

hiding in the forests or ordinary gangs of robbers. The latter recruit from all kinds of criminal subversive elements.

Men and women, especially Jewish women, participate in the assaults. This infamous action of demoralized individuals contributes to a considerable degree to the complete destruction of many citizens, who have already been tormented by the four year struggle against the enemy...

In order to give some help and shelter to the defenceless population, I have issued an order - with the understanding of the Chief Delegate of the Government - to the commanders of regions and districts regarding local security. I have ordered the commanders of regions and districts where necessary, to move with arms against these plundering or subversive bandit elements. I emphasized the need to liquidate the leaders of bands and not efforts to destroy entire bands. I recommend to the local commanders that they assure the cooperation of the local population and of the representative of the Government Delegate in organizing self-defence and a warning system.<sup>15</sup>

What is striking about this document is the way it conflates communist partisans ('criminal subversive elements'), ordinary robbers and Jews. There is nothing in the document which indicates any sympathy for fugitives from the Nazi genocide, no appeal to villagers to provide them with the food and shelter, which, in the absence of such assistance, they could only seize by force, and no understanding of their predicament.

These attitudes - the desire to avoid a premature uprising, suspicions about the Jewish sympathy for communism and a belief that the weapons provided would not be used efficaciously - largely explain the meagre supply of arms to the Warsaw and other ghettos. In the case of Warsaw, more weapons were supplied after the confrontation with the Nazis in mid- January 1943 had demonstrated the willingness of the Jewish Fighting Organization to undertake armed action. The smaller Jewish Military Union (\_ydowski Zwi\_zek Wojskowy) which was controlled by the Revisionist Zionists, who had some prewar links with the Polish military and were impeccably anti-communist had more success initially in obtaining weapons.

The small military formations linked with the various fascist groups, the National Armed Forces (Narodowe Siły Zbrojne - NSZ) and the Rampart Group (Grupa Sza\_ca) were openly hostile to the Jews and frequently were guilty of murders both of Jewish partisans and of Jews hiding in the villages. This situation continued even when the NSZ became more closely linked with the Home Army towards the end of the war.

The People's Guard and its successor, the People's Army, were much more willing to absorb Jews, both because in their isolation, they needed any support they could obtain and because their ideology stressed the importance of transcending national divisions. This was of course a mixed blessing, because the more Jews supported these groups, the more they seemed to confirm the belief in the Home Army (and elsewhere in Poland) that they were essentially siding with the communists.

It is probably unrealistic to have expected the Home Army, which was neither as well-armed nor as well-organized as its propaganda claimed to have been able to do much to aid the Jews. The fact remains that its leadership probably did not want to do so.

## 5. The Catholic Church

Throughout the implementation of the genocide the Catholic hierarchy on Poland made no statement on the fate of the Jews. This was partly because, persecuted as it was, the leadership of the Church feared to expose itself to additional repression. The fate of the converts, on whose behalf the Church had intervened when the question arose of wearing an armband with a star of David, may have contributed to this caution.

Certainly, nearly a fifth of Polish priests were killed by the Nazis. Many monasteries and nunneries were closed, several thousand monks and nuns were imprisoned and nearly 900

lost their lives. Different Catholic groups did express their view of the genocide, and, as has been seen with the Front for the Rebirth of Poland and the Party of Labor, often in radically divergent ways.

One area where the Church was active was in the rescue of Jews in nunneries. In all, two thirds of the female religious communities in Poland took part in hiding Jewish children and adults. The fact that the action was on such a large scale suggests that it had the support and encouragement of the Church hierarchy. We have no accurate record of how many people were saved in this way but it was certainly not less than 1,500. Two sisters of the Order of the Immaculate Conception and eight Sisters of Charity were shot by the Germans for assisting Jews and their children.

I will restrain from making many moral conclusions from these events. My view is that Polish society did not acquit itself particularly well during these tragic events, but that no other collective entity, including one composed primarily of Jews would have behaved significantly better. . I would stress the significance of the emergence of two separate societies on the Polish lands - Polish and Jewish - and to draw attention to the way the gulf between them widened in the 1930s and in the first two years of the Nazi occupation of Poland, leading to mutual incomprehension, suspicion and even hatred. The fact that the Jews were not part of the 'universe of obligation' of most Poles made the genocide easier for the Germans to carry out and also made much more difficult the task of those Poles who wished to assist the Jews.

Rather, I should like to suggest some areas where research could be advanced:

1. Are there reports about Polish attitudes we have not yet found?

2. Role of Polish Underground

3. Attitudes of Jews to Poles.

Prekerowa

Blatman

4. Is more to be learned about Jewish responses?

## **7. Polish-Ukrainian Relations in Occupied Poland**

The bitter Polish-Ukrainian conflict during the Second World War had a long pre-history. The territories in dispute were overpopulated and backward and relations between the two groups had been exacerbated by the Polish-Ukrainian War over East Galicia in 1918-1919 and the fact that a significant part of Ukrainian society saw Polish rule in the interwar period as a foreign occupation. Polish policies, which included the liquidation of the Ukrainian school system, the 'pacification' of 1930 and the destruction of Orthodox Churches in the late 1930s had worsened the situation. The struggle against the local Polish administration led to a radicalisation of a section of the Ukrainian political elite and the acceptance of terrorism as a legitimate means in political struggle.

The outbreak of violence first in Volynia and then in East Galicia in 1943 has to be understood in the context of the Soviet and Nazi occupation of these areas after the defeat of Poland in 1939. Soviet deportations in 1940 and 1941 demonstrated that it was possible to 'solve' problems by simply removing entire social groups. At the time, Polish and Ukrainian elites were decimated and younger and more radical elements came to the fore. Mykola Lebed', head of security in OUN-B (the more radical faction linked with Stepan Bandera) in



Volynia in 1943 was barely thirty three years old. The mass murder of the Jews and other Nazi crimes in the area further increased the barbarization. According to Andrzej Tadeusz Olszański:

The people of Volynia before 1943 had witnessed the crimes of the NKVD, the extermination of Jews, the starving to death of thousands of Soviet POWs, drafts for forced labor during which sometimes whole villages were burned down, the reckless barbarism of German super-humans who killed people in public without any reason.<sup>16</sup>

The massacres, which began in March and April 1943, were part of a strategy initiated by the more radical wing of the OUN (OUN-B), which established the UPA as a partisan formation in April 1943. This policy was adopted at a time when context of the weakening of Nazi control of the area was weakening which became the pretext for 'cleansing' the area of non-Ukrainian elements, which had been OUN (B) policy since May 1941. A key factor was the defection of large numbers of Ukrainians from the German-controlled police force, many of whom had already participated in the murder of Jews and which meant that there were now many fighters in the underground, which probably numbered nearly twenty thousand. They were too weak to challenge the Germans and the local Poles thus became an easy target. They may also have decided to act because of the increasing likelihood of the return of the Soviets. The policy was adopted first in Volynia and then extended to East Galicia.

The massacres took place in the years 1943-45 in Volynia and then, on a smaller scale, in Eastern Galicia and their goal was not so much genocide but to force the local Polish population to leave. The worst massacres took place on the night of 11/12 July 1943, when UPA units attacked simultaneously 167 localities, killing around 10,000 Poles. In all, perhaps 50,000 Poles perished in Volynia and another 20,000 in East Galicia. Over 10,000 Ukrainians lost their lives in Polish self-defence and reprisal actions, some of the most brutal conducted

by Poles in the German-organised police. The Greek Catholic Metropolitan, Archbishop Andrey Sheptytsky appealed for a truce between the two sides but the Polish Home Army failed to respond.

The Polish-Ukrainian conflict in the eastern of the Lublin province which began in early 1944 had its origin in a struggle between two resistance movements, one Polish and the other Ukrainian and here the two sides were much more equal than further east. Subsequently this issue was complicated by the conflict of both groups with the Polish communist government. In the aftermath of liberation, nearly 150,000 Ukrainians were 'resettled' from South-eastern Poland in the territories newly acquired from Germany in what was described as Operation *Wisła*. Some Polish historians have condemned this collective punishment meted out on Ukrainians within the borders of the Polish People's Republic . In the words of Grzegorz Motyka:

Instead of fighting against the UPA by means of decisive and well-prepared military operations, the authorities resorted to unethical mass deportations of civilians. The thesis that this was the only possibility of exterminating the UPA is untrue. [...] The real goal of Operation *Wisła* was not the liquidation of the Ukrainian underground but a final solution to the Ukrainian problem.<sup>17</sup>

A key role in the decision to 'resettle' the Ukrainians in Western Poland was taken by the Soviet Union. In the words of Ryszard Torzecki, 'We were doing the dirty work, but under pressure from the Soviet Union.'<sup>18</sup>

## **8. Conclusion**

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<sup>1</sup> J. Ciechanowski in R. F. Leslie, ed., *The History of Poland since 1863* (Cambridge, 1980), 215.

<sup>2</sup> Majer, *'Fremdvölkische' in Dritten Reich*, passim.

<sup>3</sup> On agricultural developments in this area, see A. Korbonski, *Politics of Socialist Agriculture in Poland 1945-1960* (New York and London, 1960), 33ff.

<sup>4</sup> On this see C. Madajczyk, *Generalna Gubernia w planach hitlerowskich: Studia* (Warsaw, 1961); Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okopowanej Polsce*, 1: 83-114; L. Hertzog, 'Czy Hitler chciał utworzyć buforowe państewko polskie?' *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny* 4 (1962), 295-316; Madajczyk, 'Cele wojen Rzeszy po podboju Polski,' *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny* 4 (1964), 196-205.

<sup>5</sup> International Military Tribunal, *Trial of the Major War Criminals Before the International Military Tribunal* (Nuremberg, 1949), 26, 378-79.

<sup>6</sup> H. Frank, *Okupacja i ruch oporu w dzienniki Hansa Franka*, 2 vols., ed. by L. Dobroszycki et al. (Warsaw, 1970), 1: 133. In 1975, a much more complete version of Frank's diary appeared: W. Präg and W. Jacobmeyer (eds.), *Das Diensttagebuch des deutschen Generalgouverneurs in Polen 1939-1945* (Stuttgart). There is also a short English language version: S. Piotrowski (ed.), *Hans Frank's Diary* (Warsaw, 1961).

<sup>7</sup> On the problem of the Ukrainians in the General-Government, see Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation*, 186-95; V. Kubijovych, *The Ukrainians in the General-gouvernement, 1939-1941* (Chicago, 1975); R. Torzecki, *Kwestia ukraińska w polityce III Rzeszy (1933-1945)*, (Warsaw, 1972); T. Szczesniak, W. Szota, *Droga do nikąd. Działalność organizacji ukraińskich i jej likwidacja w Polsce* (Warsaw, 1973).

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<sup>8</sup> The best account of German occupation policy in the Soviet Union is that of D. Dallin, *German Rule in Russia* (London, 1957).

<sup>9</sup> Majer, 'Fremdvölkische' in *Dritten Reich*, passim.

<sup>10</sup> H. Frank, *Okupacja i ruch oporu w dzienniku Hansa Franka*, 1: 12.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation*, 47-48 (original translation).

<sup>12</sup> The German mass murder of the Jews has given rise to an enormous literature. Some of the more valuable contributions are: G. Reitlinger, *The Final Solution: The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe 1939-1945* (London, 1953); R. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (London, 1961); A. Eisenbach, *Hitlerowska polityka zagłady Żydów* (Warsaw, 1961); L. Dawidowicz, *The War against the Jews* (London, 1975). In his biography of Hitler (London, 1977), David Irving attempted to prove that Hitler himself did not give the order for the mass murder. This issue has been discussed by M. Broszat in 'Hitler und die Genesis der 'Endlösung,' *Vierteljahrheft für Zeitgeschichte* 4 (1977), 739-75 and C. Browning, 'Eine Antwort auf Martin Broszat's Thesen zur Genesis der 'Endlösung,' *Vierteljahrheft für Zeitgeschichte*, 1 (1981), 96-109. For Hitler's speech of January 30, see A. Hitler, *Reden und Proklamationen 1932-1945*, 2 vols. (with commentary by M. Domarus) (Neustadt a.d. Aisch, 1963-65), 2:1058.

<sup>13</sup> H. Frank, *Okupacja i ruch oporu w dzienniku Hansa Franka*, 2: 142-43.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Yisrael Gutman, Shmuel Krakowski, *Unequal Victims. Poles and Jews During World War Two*, 74-5.

<sup>15</sup> *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w Drugiej Wojnie Światowej. III Armia Krajowa*, London 1950, 531-2.

<sup>16</sup> A. T. Olszański, *Historia Ukrainy XX w.* (Warsaw, nd), 183.

<sup>17</sup> G. Motyka, *Tak było w Bieszczadach: walki polsko-ukraińskie 1939-1948* (Warsaw, 1999), 482.

<sup>18</sup> *Wprost*, 28 April 2002.