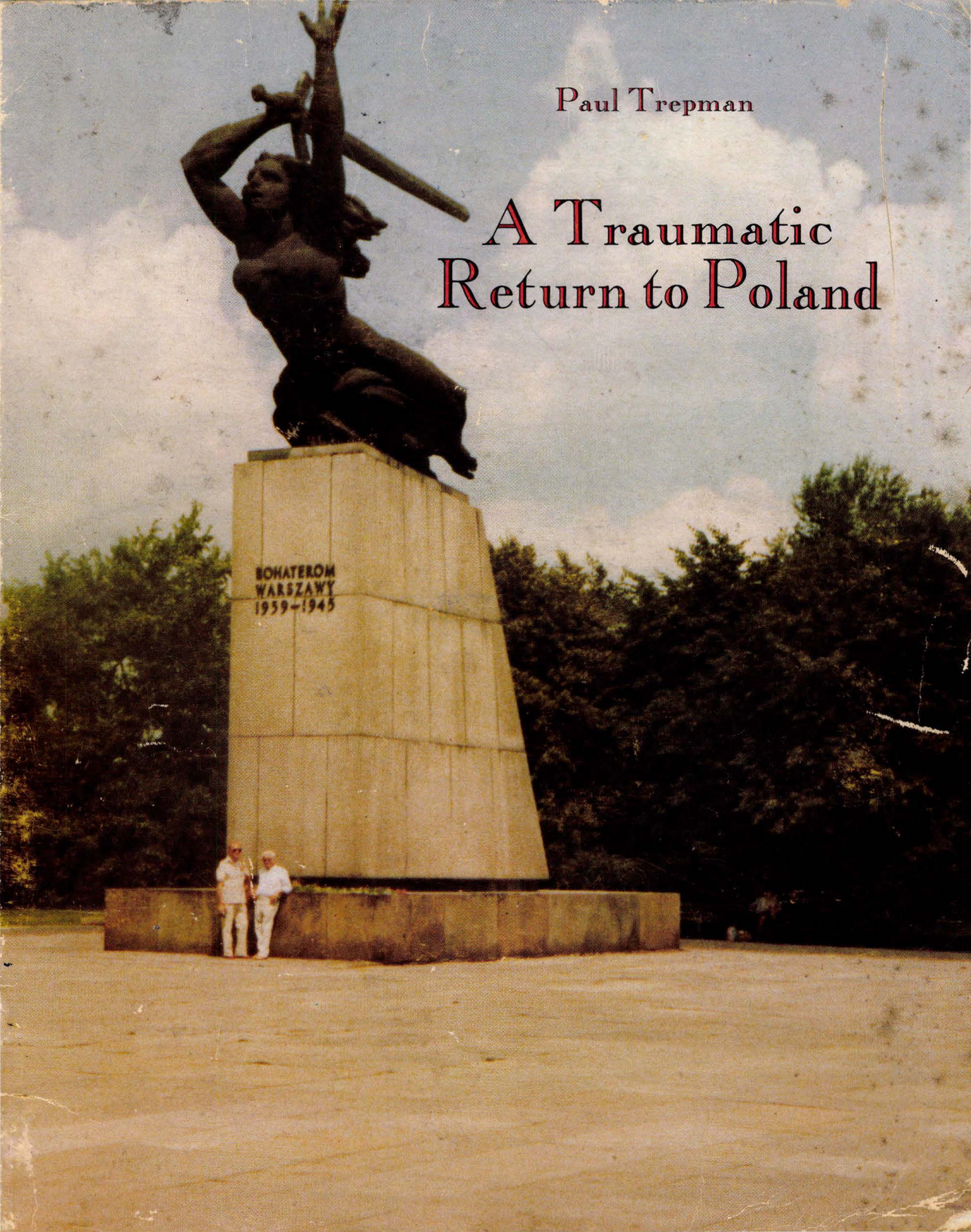


Paul Trepman

A Traumatic Return to Poland



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CONTENTS

1) Foreword	Page ii
2) Jews Without Poland.....	Page 1
3) Poland's Campaign Against The Annihilated Jews.....	Page 9
4) In the Footsteps of Jewish Destruction.....	Page 15
5) Meetings and Encounters.....	Page 33
6) Gloom Over Czechoslovakia	Page 41
7) The Final Chapter	Page 49

FOREWORD

I left Warsaw on the 6th of September 1939 along with thousands of other Polish citizens, in the wake of the Nazi invasion and bombardment. I was able to return to Warsaw periodically and pass through the towns and villages quite freely as a Polish Catholic, until my capture and deportation to Maidanek in 1943. That was the last time I saw Poland.

Thirty-six years were to pass when, as a Canadian citizen, I returned to the land of my birth on July 4th 1979 and found not a trace of my youth.

This booklet is the silent witness of my travels through Poland and Czechoslovakia, the latter a country and people whose prewar democratic ideals I had come to respect, — for Masaryk and Benes, just as Poland's Kasimir the Great and Adam Mickiewicz influenced my way of thinking.

I want to thank Rose Rosaminer for her invaluable help in preparing this booklet for publication.

P.T.

I

JEWS WITHOUT POLAND

Our present trip to Poland took forty years. True, we flew out of Montreal on a LOT airplane named KOSCIUSZKO, and the flight lasted only seven hours, but actually our thoughts, our very being, floated back in time over Polish highways and byways up to the day when we fled from our home and our birthplace as it crumbled under Hitler's bombs.

The aircraft was jammed with Polish families from all over Canada, entire families on summer vacation trips to relatives in the "OJCZYŻNA" (Fatherland) and after years of absence, to enjoy once more the Polish countryside and Polish national independence. We sat amidst these happy Polish-Canadians and our thoughts led us through Jewish streets and towns in Poland, through Jewish poverty and Jewish genius, and finally through Jewish martyrdom and death.

Nine o'clock in the morning our LOT plane, piloted by the skilled hand of Captain Machlowski, slid smoothly onto the Warsaw airport in Okęcie and I recalled that some seven kilometers from here was the location of the S.S. estate Falenty, where I was dragged during the first big "Action" in the Warsaw ghetto. (I had been smuggled into the ghetto, with the aid of a fifty zloty bribe, to visit my mother who was sick with typhus.) Eventually I escaped from the S.S. estate. The area is now a thriving town which no longer even remembers the group of Jewish slaves who worked there in the gardens.

After going through passports and customs, a procedure which lasted about two hours, we took a taxi to the home of our acquaintance who had loaned us her apartment for our three-week stay in Poland while she was away on vacation. Thus we became the only tenants in a spacious apartment on Chocimska Street near the Plac Unji Lubelskiej, where Marszałkowska Street begins. In our neighborhood is Łazienkowski Park, the Belvedere Palace, and the former headquarters of the Warsaw Gestapo on Szucha Avenue, which today is called "Avenue of the First Polish Army."

My travel companion was Joseph Slavner, who was born in Otwock and is now a well known orthopedic specialist in Montreal. Our decision to stay in a private home (as opposed to a hotel) was based on two reasons: 1) We wanted to "mix" with ordinary Poles every day -- to go down in the morning to the SUPERSAM (a big self-service market similar to Steinberg's) and buy the ingredients for our breakfast, which we prepared ourselves. This nearby SUPERSAM turned out to be the place to learn about people's real feelings and opinions concerning present day Polish life. We did not want to isolate ourselves within the four walls of a hotel, a tourist's ivory tower, far from the realities of every day life, where the American dollar covers the wrinkles as well as the rosy colors of today's Polish life. And (2) we were unwilling to pay the high price in American dollars which Westerners are forced to pay for hotels. Tourists in Poland are officially divided into two categories: KADE, (Kraje Demokratyczne), those who come from "democratic" countries such as Hungary, Romania, the USSR, etc., and KAKA (Kraje Kapitalistyczne), those who come from capitalist countries, from the West, from outside the Soviet sphere. The KAKA tourist pays four and five times more for a hotel room than a KADE tourist, and he must pay in American dollars, West German marks or Japanese yen. After a few days in Poland we realized how wise our decision had been. Not only was it cheaper to live there, but we learned a great deal more than we would have as ordinary tourists.

Nine-tenths of Warsaw was destroyed by the Germans. The Saski and Krasinski Gardens and Lazienkowski Park did remain, and several buildings and churches escaped miraculously; certain suburbs were also untouched. But the rest of Warsaw came out of the war in ruins. In Warsaw today, you are simply overwhelmed by its splendor, by its modern structures and restored historical buildings, by its up-to-date highways and expressways such as the Trasa Lazienkowska. Marszałkowska Street is four times as wide as it was before the war. Swierczewskiego Avenue runs from Wola to the end of Praga, taking in the former Chłodna, Leszno and Tłomackie, up to the former Kierbedzia Bridge, which today is called Śląsko-Dąbrowski.



On a famous Warsaw "Doroshka" in the Old City

It is a newly laid-out city, with little parks and playgrounds near every block of residences. Thousands of automobiles, almost all of them manufactured in the People's Democracies (the Polski Fiat is the leader), set a brisk tempo for this most modern, tree-lined city, which is dominated by the Palace of Culture, a gift from Stalin to the Polish people. No matter where you are in Warsaw or its suburbs you can see that cold and ungainly Tower of Babel which sticks in the eye of every Pole like a thorn. The hatred and contempt of the Poles for the Palace of Culture reflects Polish feelings for "our friends in the East".

If ever a special Nobel Prize is given for restored cities, Warsaw will surely win the contest hands down. And not Warsaw alone will deserve it, but the entire Polish people, because all Poles, even those from Bialystok, Rzeszow and Slask helped, with their labor or their money, to rebuild the capital. It was a collective effort of the entire Polish people to heal the wounds left by Hitlerism. The Poles began that healing process with the city of Warsaw.

We rode through Poland in an automobile and clocked 2600 kilometers. We were in Ryki and Bedzin, in Otwock and Lublin, in Drzewce near Naleczow, and in Katowice, and everywhere we saw tremendous construction going on. Riding through dozens of villages we saw only brick farmhouses, not the old ramshackle wooden huts with thatched roofs. In Communist Poland today the peasant belongs to the "capitalist elite" along with high government officials, electronics specialists and world-famous physicians. There are no collective farms in Poland. The farmers work their land alone or in cooperatives, and the government gives its blessing especially to the farmers in the private sector, who pay no more than ten percent of their income in taxes. With today's high prices for necessities, ten percent is an almost negligible amount, and the Polish peasant scoffs at all the professionals and their "high positions".

We spent some time with a farmer, a good friend. His oldest son is an electrical engineer; his daughter is a director of a children's home; his youngest son is an employee of a clothing cooperative in Lublin. My friend told us that his children have now decided to give up their salaried positions and work in his fields and orchards. It will pay them better than their professional positions.



On the Teatralny Plaza. In the background is the monument for the Heroes of Warsaw.

The newspapers are full of announcements calling upon young men and women to work in various fields of the economy. Yet tens of thousands of Poles are engaged in all sorts of "petit-bourgeois" occupations, and the government is powerless to change the situation. The average monthly wage is 4000 zlotys (\$130.00 according to the official rate of exchange). Anyone can open a dollar account in a bank and no one asks where the American dollars came from. The black market in American dollars or West German marks is as visible as the Palace of Culture. The illegal trade in dollars is controlled by two factors--by the sale of automobiles and by vacations abroad. The average citizen must wait up to eight years to buy a car legally, even if he has the money, but on the black market he can buy one at double the price--in American dollars. If there are plenty of cars for sale on the black market, the dollar falls from 120 zloty to approximately 100. When the government issues an increased number of permits for trips abroad, the value of the American dollar grows. People say the black market in foreign currency is discreetly and circumspectly controlled by the government itself. It is more prudent, say the experts in this field, for citizens to deposit their dollars in the PKO rather than hide them under the mattress.

Life is better for the average citizen in Hungary and Poland than in any of the other socialist republics. You do not see any beggars in Poland, although you do see many drunks. Of course you see many lines, but mostly people queue up for meat, which is a scarce item. The salesclerks in the stores look down on their customers and treat them as rich aunts do their poor relatives. It is a kind of "favor" business--they do you a big favor when they sell you something.

So it is a difficult and exhausting life. I had a conversation with an 82-year-old man in a tramway. He was riding out from Wola, to Plac Unji Lubelskiej, a distance of twelve kilometers, because he'd heard that on Bagatela Street they were selling calves' meat. This old man had some very unflattering things to say about Poles from Lodz or Lublin who pool their resources, hire a taxi and travel all night to Warsaw to buy up all the meat in the stores. According to him, the situation in the capital (and in the larger cities generally) is better than in the smaller cities, but "those provincials" come in and "pirate" the meat.

By and large, however, people in Poland don't go hungry. They can get all the bread, cheese and vegetables they need, if they have the money. There are Poles--

members of the "elite"--who can afford to take their families out to the better restaurants--Europejski, Victoria Hotel, U Bazylierek, Pod Krokodylem--in which a meal for three persons can cost as much as 2000 zlotys.

We were surprised by the PEVEKS stores, in which anyone with American dollars--Pole or tourist--can buy the best imported liquors, cigarettes, clothing, chocolate, even chewing gum! They don't ask you who you are and where you got the dollars. If you pay in American dollars you can even buy the Polish ham for which Polish hearts yearn and which you cannot obtain for love or money in any of the "normal" stores.

It could be noted that in the economic and commercial fields Poland is very democratic, especially with regard to tourists. So one sees a flood of tourists from the Arab lands, from East Germany, from the Soviet Union, and from the United States and Canada. For Soviet tourists, Poland is a paradise. When you talk to ordinary Poles, however, you may meet a man like B.Z., who has been waiting eight years for a decent apartment, who can afford only a certain type of eggs for his two children, and who is hoping that next year he might manage to buy a rover (Bicycle), so his daily trips to and from work won't be such a burden.

During our visit, Poland was still under the impact of the Pope's "home-coming". And the Pope really had something to come home to. The churches of Poland are always packed with worshippers. The Catholic Church is an important factor in Polish life, a factor which the government must reckon with. The Poles, who are well known for their sense of humor, keep inventing jokes and rhymed couplets about their present government, a government which was and still is alien to them. Thus, in free translation:

Comrade Gierak, Comrade Gierak,
Stay off the Russian Bicycle,
'Cause if your car-wheels break,
You'll meet Gomulka's tragic fate!

In the village of Garbow, on the way to Maidanek, we noted this graffiti on a toilet wall:

Here we make "ser" (cheese)
For our friends in the USSR
Here is produced miod (honey)
For our friends ze wschodu (in the east)

Does this tell us something about how the Poles relate to their friends in the east? We think it does. And we came upon many facts to confirm this folklore.

However, every Pole--even the bitterest enemy of the present regime--is proud of the tremendous construction now going on in the country after so much devastation and suffering under Nazi occupation. Every restored historical building is a cause for celebration.

And the handful of surviving Jews? They have been set apart from all this, against their will. Even the Jewish dead who rest uneasily under the historical monuments in the Gesia Cemetery have been excluded from the general picture, from the landscape of today's busy and bustling People's Democracy of Poland.

II

POLAND'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE ANNIHILATED JEWS

Let us call him Hilary Golembiowski, though that is not his name. His words were a mixture of tears, bitterness and deep disappointment as he described to us the attitude of the present rulers of Poland toward the handful of surviving Jews in the country, and more particularly, toward the Jews annihilated by Hitlerism.

Hilary was born in Lodz. His assimilated Jewish parents instilled in him a love for Poland and Polish culture. He grew up with a strong identity as a Pole, although his real name always sounded--and still sounds--thoroughly Jewish.

Hilary became a high-ranking officer in the army and later a still higher official in one of the most important ministries of the Polish government. Then came 1968, a year which he designates by the opening words of the eleventh chapter of *Pan Tadeusz* by the national poet Adam Mickiewicz--*O roku ow* ("that year"). Hilary Golembiowski still speaks reverently of Poland and Polishness; one can sense in his words an ardent love which no storm can eradicate. In "that year" he was not removed from his post thanks only to his wife's status. (For obvious reasons, we shall give no other details.)

Now he sat before us and unburdened his heart: "No doubt Poland is the most democratic of all the People's Republics, even Hungary. Look at what Poland has done in rebuilding and upbuilding her cities and villages. You think Warsaw is an exception? Go to Gdansk, Lublin; visit the Polish countryside; see for yourself. But "that year" there was a kind of terror, a Streicher-like campaign against the Jews--Communists and non-Party people alike. It was a real expulsion. They dismissed outstanding people from positions and shut their mouths with old-age pensions. The press was full of news about dismissed Jews. And if such a Jew was named Jan Kowalski, then his Jewish name was appended in bold type as Yankl Koval. It was a difficult time, a bad time.

"There was one case where they dismissed a man named Zimmerman from a ministry on grounds that he was a Jew. But he protested and proved that even his great grandfather was a Volksdeutsche. Those who fired him checked out his credentials and eventually reinstated him. A volksdeutsche, yes; a Jew, no-- and this after Poland had suffered so much at the hands of her Volksdeutschen! The leaders of the Jewish Cultural and Social Association--Communist Party members and fighters for Polish freedom--were officially and throughout the press designated as no less than the "Zionist gentlemen of Nowogrodzka Street" --a reference to the address of the Federations's office. Polish society was whipped up to a pogrom atmosphere. And the whole mess was cooked up against the Jewish leaders by their own Party Comrades!"

With tears of shame and frustration in his eyes, Hilary continued: "That's how the present rulers of Poland solved 'the Jewish problem', because in the end, most of the Jews left the country. And those who remained hide like mice in their holes--all except the leaders of the Federation at Plac Grzybowski No. 12-16. I still can't understand why the surviving Jews were treated so brutally -- even the few remaining Jewish Communists. Now the Polish government has no more Jewish problem -- with those who are alive. But there is a problem with the Jews who are dead. In a very slow and delicate manner they are deliberately erasing the Jew from the history of martyrdom under the Hitler occupation.

"Everywhere -- in the press, on the radio and TV -- you can learn that Hitlerism killed six-and-a half million Poles. But not one word about Jews. Oh, I know, when a delegation of foreign Jews comes on a visit they trot out the Yiddish signs, which hang there until the delegation leaves the country. And yet, despite all that, I stay here. Why? Because I love the Polish city, the Polish village, the Polish language and culture. And I believe that sooner or later things will change for the better".

Blessed is the believer. From Hilary's mouth to Gierek's ear.

Walking along the Warsaw streets, reading the press, watching the programs on Polish television, I came to the conclusion that there isn't another people in the world whose memory of the suffering of its sons and daughters under Hitler's occupation is so strong. Wherever you go, they preach -- "no more Auschwitzes! No more Maidaneks!". The experience of the Polish people under Hitler has entered the

curriculum of the public school system as an important subject. When we visited the sites of the concentration camps, we met thousands of children from summer camps, who listened with fear and shock to the explanations of their teachers about the murder systems of the Hitlerites. In Warsaw alone, in virtually every neighborhood, there are more than four thousand memorial plaques which recall that "on this spot the Hitlerites brutally shot, on such and such a date, so many and so many Poles". And these plaques are kept clean, and decorated with fresh flowers either by a school or a factory in the neighbourhood, or even by a passerby. I did not come across one such plaque without fresh flowers.

When you ride on the Polish highways, especially near a forest, you can see in the distance red-and-white signs with a special emblem which call your attention to a monument nearby in honor of Polish patriots who were shot here or who fell in battle against the hated Hitlerite enemy (Not "Germans"). Not a day goes by without a full-length film or a series on television about the Hitler period. The bookstores are full of fictional or memoir literature dealing with that dark period in recent Polish history. The best film for 1979, "A Hundred Horses to A Hundred Shores", is about the struggle of the Polish underground against Nazism in six countries of Europe. As one writer put it: "It will be a long time yet before Poland, the everyday life of Poland, frees itself of the effect of the extraordinary blow we received from Hitler fascism. The blow was so frightful that we still live under its impact".

There is, however, one very serious problem with this educational process. Today's education of Polish children, young people and adults on the subject of their country's agony under the Nazis is not complete; it is limited by strict party and narrow nationalist dogma. The thousands of memorial plaques speak only of murdered "Poles" and never contain a single word about Jews. At all the exhibits we visited we saw pictures of Poles shot for helping Jews, but we did not see one picture or read one line about the Polish *shmaltzovniks* or the "honorable" Polish citizens who took money from Jews and then betrayed them to the Gestapo.

Certainly the people should know about the Poles who risked their lives to save persecuted Jews, but a people must also have the courage to tell the present and future generations about the inhuman acts of their own citizens, otherwise they do not learn the lessons of history. Let us mention here, to their everlasting honor, two

people -- Professor Kotarbinski and Maria Kuncewiczowa -- who espouse quite a different view about how this period should be presented than do the leaders of today's Democratic Poland.

With all the Jewish fighters against Hitlerism in Poland, only two streets in the area of the former Warsaw ghetto were named for Jews -- Mordecai Anielewicz and Jozef Lewartowski. At almost all the martyrology exhibits we had to search very carefully to find the word "Jew". And when we did finally find it, it was so covered up and concealed that the average viewer would never notice it. And that's how it's done everywhere in today's Poland. It is a definite attack, albeit the hand that holds the sharp knife wears a white glove, against the Jews destroyed by Hitler.

And what of the Jews who have survived and still live in Poland?

An authoritative person informed us that there are now between seven and eight thousand Jews in Poland and that they fall into four categories:

(1) Those who are grouped around the Cultural-Social Federation: they have a weekly newspaper, the *Folkshtimme*, which is printed in Yiddish and Polish and edited by the genial Abraham Kwaterko; they have a State Yiddish Theater named after Esther Rochel Kaminska, whose director is Shimon Szurmiej. We saw two of their production; "Stars on the Roof" and "Good Morning, Mr. Chagall!". The latter featured Julius Berger, who has to work mostly in the Polish theater and television because the Yiddish theater does not find it necessary to use him more often, despite the fact that he knows more Yiddish than all the other actors put together.

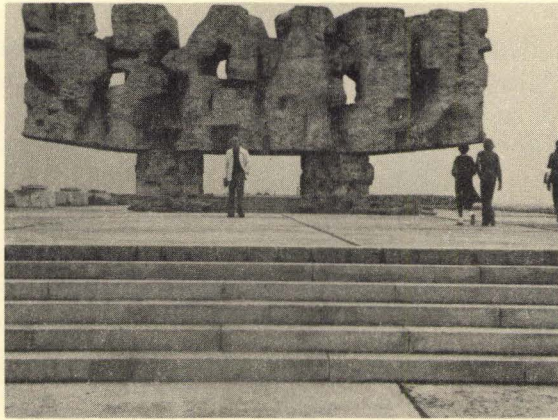
(2) Those who are grouped around the religious congregation. This congregation receives only nine thousand dollars a month from Switzerland, and for this money it distributes 60,000 free lunches a year, maintains shekhita in four cities; distributes five tons of free matzo for Passover and sells another twenty tons. (It receives the matzo from Hungary). So it is no wonder that the Nozik shul on Twarda Street in Warsaw, the only synagogue in that city, has been undergoing "renovation" for the last ten years and shows no sign of improvement. It is therefore a definite responsibility of the Polish government, with the help of the World Jewish Congress or the Claims Conference, to repair and refurbish these two historic sites.

(3) The third group consists of former important government leaders and

administrators who, up until 1968, occupied top positions in the Polish government and the ruling Party. During "that year" they were dismissed by their own comrades and now they are outside of Polish life, dispersed all over the country, living on pensions, old, rejected and alone inside the four walls of their rooms. We met with several of these unfortunate individuals.

(4) No one knows how many there are in this group except perhaps certain government agencies which (we were told) keep a sharp eye on all the Jews in Poland. Some have called this group "modern Marranos", but this is not an accurate description. These are Jews who changed their Jewish names to Polish-sounding ones, who sold their souls and categorically deny their Jewishness, who have Christian spouses and who are raising their children as good Poles (and in many cases as good Catholics.) And they are doing all this for a "pot of lentils" -- a good job, a good pension, a good apartment, a good automobile. Of the eight actors in the popular revue theater "Syrena" in Warsaw, which we attended twice, three are Jews with Polish names, and that's not counting "Lopek" Krukowski, who was famous even before the war and is now an old man.

What will this small Jewish "community" in Poland look like ten or twenty years from now? There is no prophet who can foretell that. But what world Jewry must do now is help the Jews who are still there in any way possible, and without prior conditions. At the same time, it is also incumbent upon us to help keep alive the memory of those who did not survive.....



The entrance to Majdanek



*The entrance to the
Krashinsky Park in Warsaw*



*The entrance to the Jewish State
Theater in Warsaw*



The entrance to Treblinka

III

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JEWISH DESTRUCTION

At the Warsaw Ghetto Monuments

Thursday, July 5th, the morning after we arrived in Warsaw, we went straight to the graves of our families -- the Ghetto Monument and Mila 18. In my notebook I wrote: "I am standing on hallowed ground". The Ghetto Monument is in the center of a spacious paved square. Around the square and the monument, as if on purpose, large modern apartment houses have been built, the dwelling place of hundreds of Poles. But the neighborhood is quiet and peaceful. It is two in the afternoon, and there is no one about. A light drizzle is falling. I kiss the figures on the monument, carved by the masterful hand of the sculptor N. Rappaport. The figures are lifelike. The artist shaped them from memory or from photographs of living people. Here is Salo Fishgrund, member of the Central Committee of the underground Jewish Labor Bund during the German occupation. And here is the actor Greenszpan of the "Young Theatre". And a bit to the right is Rivka Wojskowska, fighter in the Uprising. They are all alive even though they are carved out of granite, the same granite which the Nazis brought to Warsaw for a massive statue of Hitler in Saski Plaza, today called Victory Plaza. In front of the monument an anonymous visitor has hung a long piece of paper bearing the Hebrew inscription: Anu lo nishkhakh etkhem -- we shall not forget you. From my gut comes the same cry: I shall never forget you!

Our new friend and warm-hearted Jew, Yehoshua Piasek, proof-reader at the weekly Folks-Shtimme and its official translator from Polish to Yiddish, escorts us to Mila 18. It is really only a few steps away from the main monument. The entire area is unrecognizable. Here is the little mound with the tall stone over what was once the bunker of the High Command of ZOB, the Jewish Fighting Organization. In this bunker Mordecai Anielewicz, child of the Powisle poor, a student of Zev Jabotinski and later Yehuda Gotthelf of Hashomer Hatsair, together with his comrades



Paul Trepman in front of the Warsaw Ghetto Monument



*Near the site where Anielewicz, Commander of the "ZOB"
and his colleagues committed suicide.*

met the same death as Bar Kochba. The inscription on the stone tells about the fate of the Commander and his closest co-workers and fellow fighters. I cannot leave this place. I sit down and I want to stay here forever, with him, with them, with their spirit. And today, although I am thousands of miles away from that holy ground, I am still there with them.....

Treblinka

We rode past Radzymin, Wyszkw, Dlugosiodle, Ostrow-Mazowiecki and finally Malkinia. Here and there we see old-time Jewish houses with blackened walls and nailed down shutters. No one lives in them. They will stand here this way until they are torn down and in their place modern apartment houses will be put up, just like all the others in whose midst they now stand. In Malkinia, the streets are quiet. It is Sunday, the 8th of July. Inside our automobile it is also quiet. Avraham Kwaterko, acting editor of the Folks-Shtimme, and his son, the owner of the car, have stopped talking. We are approaching the railroad station at Treblinka. We are greeted by dozens of old, rusty, decrepit freight cars from which comes the sound of a silent outcry. On the station wall hangs a big sign: NO MORE TREBLINKAS! Young Polish peasant lads are playing near the trains. In the village of Treblinka there are now sixty families.

We are riding close to the railroad tracks, the same tracks which brought 800,000 Jews to the gas chambers. On these rails my mother rode to her death, along with all the other Jews from Warsaw. We leave the auto at the entrance and walk to the mass grave on which there have been erected 17,000 jagged rocks with the names of towns and cities from which the victims were dragged here. And here is a special stone with the inscription JANUSZ KORCZAK AND HIS CHILDREN.

The utter stillness here is enough to break your heart. The leaves and branches of the trees sway in the breeze as if they were chanting an eternal kaddish. The soundlessness is beyond understanding. How can it be so quiet here on this place where thousands, tens of thousands of anguished cries tore at the heavens? I turn aside and murmur the kaddish for my mother. This kaddish was one of the main reasons for my trip to Poland. Before my eyes pass the names of Jewish towns and



The author at the "death pit" in Treblinka



*J. Slawner, A. Kwaterko and myself in front of
the "Death Trains" in Treblinka*



These are the memorial grave stones in Treblinka

cities -- Warsaw, Grojec, Radzymin, Bialystok -- and the names of nine occupied countries from which the Nazis deported Jews to this place. Yisgadal v'yiskadash, names on stones....

In the center stands the massive memorial with a menorah at the top. Judea capta, Treblinka. A monument without words. Treblinka today is naked. No barracks, no gas chambers. Nothing. An empty field with a massive concrete slab from which jut the 17,000 gravestones. It was the Jewish uprising in Treblinka that burned down almost everything there, and what was left the Nazis totally destroyed.

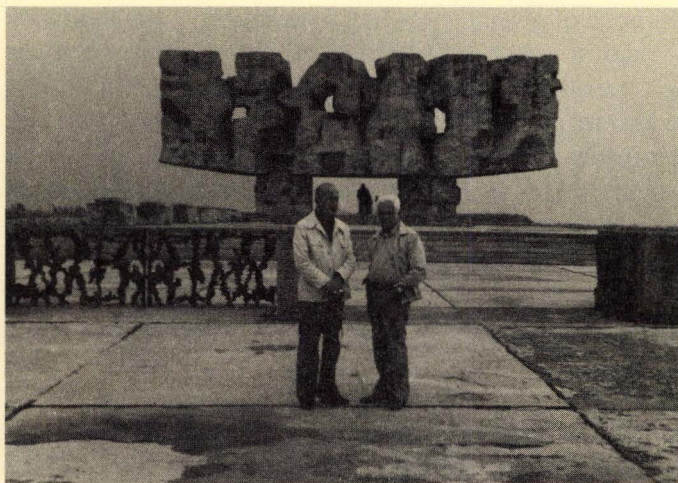
NEVER SHALL WE FORGET YOU!

Maidanek, My Maidanek.

On the way to Lublin, which is six kilometers from Maidanek, we pass through Kolobiel, Garwolin, Zelechów, Ryki -- which were once Jewish towns and are now Judenrein. How many memories they awaken in me of the days when I fled in 1939 from a Warsaw under attack by Hitler's bombers. Now we are traveling in a comfortable automobile driven by a young Pole, Andrzej Mickiewicz, a chemistry student at Warsaw University who worked in Chicago for six months on a visitor's visa, and with the dollars he earned there, bought himself an auto when he returned to Poland. He misses America very much, Andrzej tells us, but meanwhile he is earning money by driving tourists around, and not doing badly.

Lublin is unrecognizable. Lubartowska and Lipowa are big-city streets, and they are not the only ones. A broad, paved highway takes us to Maidanek. I was very apprehensive about this trip to Maidanek. How would I react to the place where I endured so much suffering?

Maidanek had six sections -- six "fields". I was a "resident" in Field 3. As fate would have it, all the fields at Maidanek have disappeared except "mine" -- it remains untouched, a museum. I walked over to Barrack No. 14 -- my barrack -- and to my bunk. Nothing happened. No heart-pounding, no trembling. Quite the opposite. I walked around Maidanek with my head high, like a conqueror, having outlived the demonic Camp Administrator Anton Tuman, who was hung by the Poles on this



J. Slawner and myself at the Memorial Entrance to Majdanek, the camp where I was imprisoned during the Hitler period.



The author and his travelling companion J. Slawner, in front of the crematorium in Majdanek.

spot in accordance with the sentence of a military court. I walked around Maidanek as a free individual, a liberated man, a victor over Hitlerism. And -- I am not exaggerating -- I spoke, yes, I spoke -- to the shoes which were left there by my suffering brothers and sisters; I spoke to the striped uniforms, to hundreds of pairs of glasses, to shaving brushes, to clothes brushes, to the thousands of pairs of trousers. And Andrzej Miyckiewicz later asked me what I was doing when I stood in the middle of Field 3 in a downpour, swaying back and forth, and recited a kaddish for all of those whose ashes have fertilized the fields surrounding Maidanek.

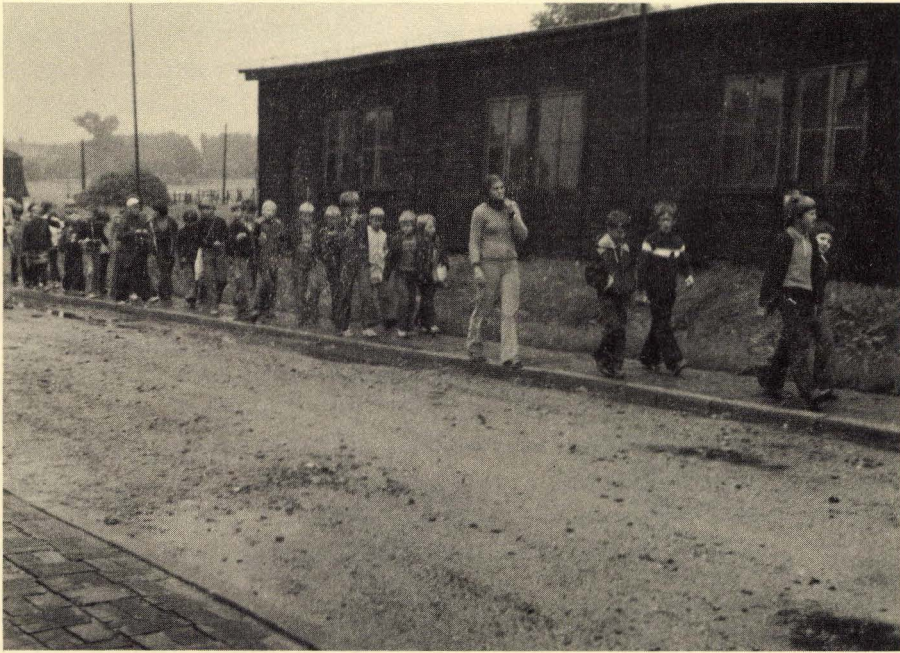
When I got into the car going back to Warsaw I burst out crying and could not hold back the flow of my tears.

Before leaving I stopped in at the archives office. The extremely sympathetic and helpful archivist, Janina Oestreich, found my document in the files, proof that I was an inmate of Maidanek at such-and-such a time. Only ten percent of these documents are extant, she explained. "You're lucky", she exclaimed happily, "that your document, Panie Kolodziejczyk, is among that ten percent".

And in a second room I unexpectedly met another "graduate" of Maidanek who had been a "resident" in Barrack #15, which was supervised by a brute from Warsaw named Janusz. We barely recognized each other, but this did not stop us from embracing and kissing. He is now professor of philosophy in a New Jersey university. His name is Jan Zaprawa Ostromecki. So in honor of this occasion Pani Oestreich (a real Pole despite her name) brought out a bottle of Polish vodka and some cookies and we all drank a toast to this chance meeting of two survivors of Maidanek.

I returned to Warsaw exhausted, not from the trip but from Maidanek itself. During the entire trip back, all the forced-labor columns in Maidanek passed in review before my mind's eye, with hundreds of familiar faces that will live within me the rest of my life!

NEVER SHALL WE FORGET YOU !



*A group of Polish school children with their teachers
visiting Majdanek*

Warsaw Where the Ghettos Were

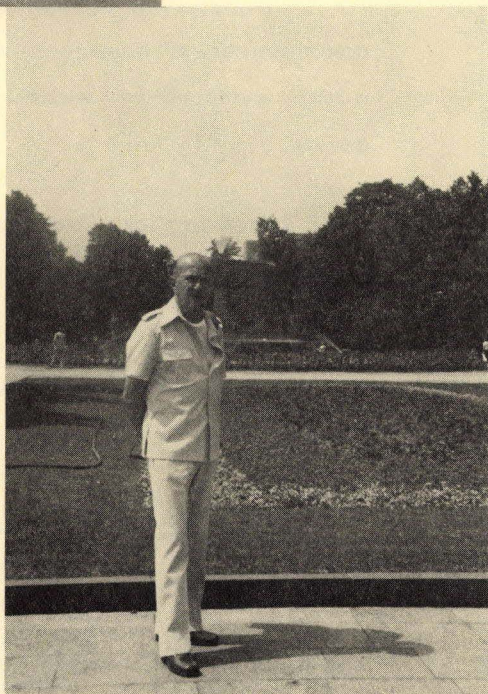
It was quite by accident that the day on which we visited the area of the "large ghetto" in Warsaw was a Saturday (July 14). We made this visit on foot -- walking slowly, with measured steps, stopping at every new building, every street sign. It took us all day, this peaceful, heart-rending walk. We entered the area from the old Saski Plaza, through the Saski Garden, Niecala, Wiezbowa, past the Opera Building, Bielanska, past the ruins of the old Bank Polski, Długa, Krasinski Park, Swien-tojerska, Franciszkanska, Zamenhofa, Stawki, Pawia, Karmelicka, Dzielna, a little part of Nalewki -- these names have remained from the old days. But aside from the names of the streets, nothing else is to be seen. A new world, new people, new stores and restaurants, run by new owners and managers. No trace of the old Jewish life. Looking at these streets and buildings, it is difficult to imagine that they once had another appearance. People tell us that this area is higher than the rest of Warsaw because the present rulers of the city built the new section on the ruins of the old Jewish Quarter. It would have cost several billion dollars to clear away the ghetto ruins and remove all the rubble. So they leveled the area and built on top of the ruins....On top of Jews who were buried alive here.

Even today, when putting up new buildings, they occasionally find skeletons and jewelry. At the end of Nowotki Street we lost our way. An old woman selling flowers had to explain to us that we were now at the end of the old Nalewki where it crossed Gesia. Today this corner is a fine park. Amidst its trees we can see the red flowers.

The next day we visited the area of the "small ghetto" in the same deliberate manner. In this neighborhood I was born and here I grew up. Remaining from pre-war days is the Hala Mirowska, the Saski Park, the church on Grzybowska Square, a shadow of the Nozik Shul and -- all of Prozna Street. Yes, it is still here, Prozna Street, with its darkened walls like mourners' clothes, an accuser and a demander. At 14 Prozna Street, at the gate, we noticed an old weatherbeaten sign: "This house belongs to the heirs of Wolanowski" -- the famous Warsaw "State Lottery", King Wolanow. And further on -- unrecognizable -- Grzybowska, Graniczna, Ciepla, Prosta (now Yitzhok Peretz Street), Panska, Sienna, Sliska, Walicow -- but where is



On Marszałkowska St. with J. Piasek



*In Saski Park where the author used
to play as a child.*



PAŃSTWOWE MUZEUM
NA MAJDANKU

Lublin, dnia 10 lipiec 1979 r.

IV-4370-563/79

Pan Trepman Paul

Montreal

2117 Scott Street

Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku stwierdza, że w materiałach dokumentalnych tutejszego Archiwum znajdują się następujące dane o niżej wymienionym więźniu byłego obozu koncentracyjnego na Majdanku:

Kołodziejczyk Paweł ur.20.10.1916 r. posiadający obecnie nazwisko Trepman Paul był więźniem obozu koncentracyjnego na Majdanku.

Podstawa informacji: APM, XII-15, s.11.



Kierownik Działu Archiwum

Z. Leszczyńska
(mgr Zofia Leszczyńska)

TRANSLATED FROM THE POLISH

STATE MUSEUM IN MAJDANEK
No. IV-4370-563/79

Lublin, July 10, 1979

Mr. Paul Trepman

Montreal

2117 Scott Street

The State Museum in Majdanek confirms that in the documentation materials of its archives, are details about the below-mentioned prisoner of the former concentration camp in Majdanek:
Kolodziejczyk Pawel, born 20/10/'16, who is presently known as Trepman Paul, was a prisoner in the concentration camp in Majdanek.

Source of information: APMM, XII-15,s.11.

Head, Archives Department

(signed)

Mgr. Zofia Leszczynska

SEAL OF THE STATE MUSEUM
IN MAJDANEK

I, the undersigned, Barbara Lerner, residing in Kirkland, Quebec, declare that I have an adequate knowledge of the Polish and English languages, and that the above is to the best of my knowledge a correct translation of the document, a photocopy of which is attached.

Blower

Declared before me
At the City of Montreal
Province of Quebec
This 9 day of August, A.D. 1979



Miriam Kage
Commissioner for Oaths

Gnojna -- my little Gnojna Street? Vanished. In its place has risen a gigantic apartment complex, with a big park and a playground, with all sorts of equipment for the neighborhood children. I could not recognize anything in the entire area. It stood before me, looked into my eyes, and did not recognize me either. We stood staring at each other like two strangers.

Farewell, my vanished Gnojna Street!

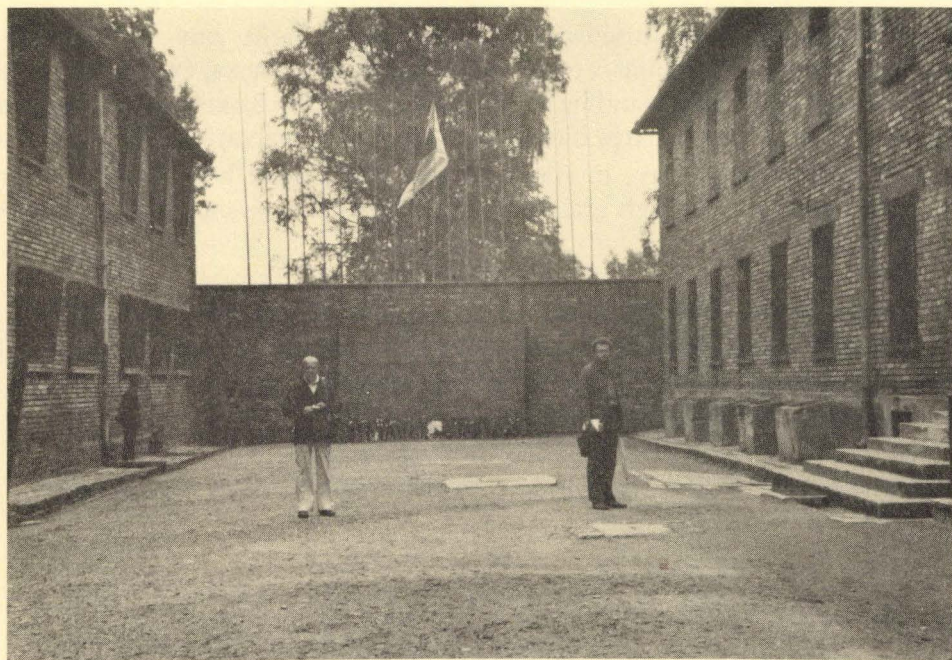
Never shall we forget you -- all of you, who once lived here and those who may be buried here underneath your high new walls -- my non-existent little Gnojna Street.

Auschwitz-Birkenau

The trip from Warsaw to Auschwitz took us approximately six hours in Andrzej Mickiewicz's car, riding on a broad highway. The green fields smiled at us with their wholesome nature-hues. Farmers follow their plows, as in the old days before tractors. Along the entire route we did not see even one farmhouse with a thatched roof. All the walls are brick or covered with tin. All along the way we are greeted by propaganda billboards of the Socialist People's Republic of Poland, in the style of -- "The Struggle for Peace and Security is the Duty of Every Pole". We pass Radomsko, Czestochowa, Jasnogora, Bedzin, Sosnowiec, Katowice, and now we are before the gates of Auschwitz, with its famous motto, ARBEIT MACHT FREI.

We step across the threshold of this excellently laid-out factory of death. That's the impression Auschwitz makes on you. Maidanek was thrown together hastily out of boards, as a temporary camp. Auschwitz was constructed solidly, according to plan, symmetrically, with architectural precision, to become the death-dealing centre for all of Europe, especially for Jews. This impression does not leave us even for a second during our visit to this vale of tears. From Auschwitz the S.S. sent out instructors of death to all the camps, after giving them their appropriate training.

We wander around the barracks like zombies. From the thousands of visitors one does not hear a sound. Only their eyes speak and cry out to the heavens. In the Jewish Pavilion a young Jewish girl weeps in a corner for her grandfather who



*Andrzej Mickiewicz and I in front of the
Firing Wall in Auschwitz*

perished here. She came to Auschwitz from New York with a youth orchestra which has performed all over Poland. Out of the death barrack #11 came tourists from East Germany, covering their faces with their hands. Where are they -- those who would deny the truth of the Hitler Holocaust? Why don't they come to Auschwitz? In the cellars of the death barracks the darkened cells cry out in pain, as do the torture machines which helped to destroy four million human beings.

Six kilometers from Auschwitz lies Birkenau -- built out of boards -- but remaining are only the chimneys of the three hundred barracks, except for the thirty barracks which were left standing as museum artifacts. Birkenau was not a death camp. In Birkenau the inmates died from exhaustion, starvation, beatings, disease. It was all planned that way. In Birkenau you can almost hear the cries from the earth, now carpeted with rich grass. The surviving chimneys pierce your eyes like giant needles.

I climb up the entrance tower at Birkenau and before my eyes stretches the horror of this sprawling field of death. My lips murmur an oath: Accursed be the people that created Auschwitz and Birkenau, Maidanek and Treblinka! I could not contain the curse within myself any longer.

Never shall we forget you -- all of you who took your last steps on earth in this unspeakable place.

The Pawiak

The Pawiak prison in Warsaw, in the heart of old Jewish Warsaw, which was also part of the war-time ghetto, the tragic jailhouse on Pawia Street inside whose walls Hitler's hangmen executed thousands of Jews and Poles -- that place no longer exists. On part of its grounds the present rulers of Poland have built a "Museum of Pain". Whose pain? On the walls of the museum hang pictures of Polish revolutionaries from the days of the Tsar, from the days of the Rzeczpospolita, the Polish Republic, as well as from the Hitler period.

Here and there you see a picture of a Polish revolutionary with a Jewish name. But not one word about the thousands of Jews who were shot to death by the Nazis right here on this spot. The museum was built below ground level, and to enter it you must go down eight steps. This creates the desired impression. You feel like you are descending into a dungeon, a pit. Of the old Pawiak there remains only a bit of the original wall, with barbed wire on top....

Avenue Szucha

During the Nazi occupation the headquarters of the Gestapo for the entire Warsaw region was on Szucha Avenue. The saying was, "From Szucha Avenue Number 9, nobody comes out alive". Poles and Jews were in mortal fear of that address. Today the street is called "Avenue of the First Polish Army". Many Poles do not know that the street's name was once "Aleje Szucha". Here are located Poland's Foreign Ministry and the "Museum of Pain".

We wandered around the cellars of the old Gestapo building looking at the torture chambers of the 20th century Inquisition. Each cell was equipped with different instruments. And here is the infamous "Tramway" -- the cell containing small, narrow seats (like in the old tramways) on which the victims were forced to sit for several days without even blinking their eyes. For the slightest movement the "Passenger" on this "tramway" was beaten senseless.

The cellars of the old Gestapo are still filled with terror, tears and blood. A monstrous place in a monstrous time.

We leave these cellars quickly, even though the pictures of the martyrs on the walls call to us, call to us....

IV

MEETINGS AND ENCOUNTERS

During the three weeks of our present visit we had an excellent opportunity to meet with all sorts of individuals -- Jews and Poles -- who were able to add depth to our experience and from whom we learned a great deal about the reality of everyday existence and the nature of Jewish life in Poland today. We shall try to describe here the people we met in a sort of photographic style, just as we saw them and as they presented themselves to us through their views and their feelings.

Shmuel Tenenblat

Editor of the *Folkshtimme*. 45 years old. Born in Horodenka, attended Jewish schools in post-war Poland. Member of the Polish Communist Party. His "non-Jewish" wife edits the Polish pages of the *Folkshtimme*. His brief conversation with us was polite but exceedingly cool, without any of that special warmth which usually characterizes a meeting of two Jewish writers who live thousands of miles apart. He did not smile once during our chat, although I tried very hard to introduce some informality and levity into our meeting in his editorial office.

Michael Freedman

Former colonel in the Polish army. Victim of the 1968 "purge". Very amiable and good-looking. Now teaches Yiddish to the non-Jewish actors in the Jewish State Theater. A good listener who curbs his own words and opinions. You can feel the pain in his silence. When he does speak, however, his words are incisive, to the point, and most intelligent.

Kazimierz (Lopek) Krukowski

Actor. Well known before World War II for his burlesque portrayal of Jews, although his longish nose and his birth certificate bespeak his Jewish origins. This time we saw him at a performance in the Syrena revue theater, still ridiculing his



*In the editorial office of the Warsaw Yiddish weekly "Folks
Shtyme" (Voice of the People). from left to right:
Gitler, Piasek, Trepman, Fridman, Kwaterko*

own people. He stood (very unsteadily) on the stage, this 84-year-old Lopek, and presented a stale, warmed over performance of his pre-war anti-Jewish shtik, in a program that was dedicated to Adolf Dymsha, the legendary Polish comedian who died in 1975.

Lopek, who fled to safety in England during the war, stood on the stage and made fun of me, in the audience, who fought against the Nazis for "his and my freedom" -- and the people in the theater guffawed and split their sides with laughter....

Piotr and Wikcia Wlodarczyk

I met them in their home in Swider, near Otwock, an old, ailing couple whose good deeds for hunted Jews are known only to a few people. They well deserve a monument during their lifetime, or at least the special medal that Yad Vashem awards to non-Jews who risked their lives during the Hitler period to save Jews. Wikcia and Piotr kept fourteen Jews hidden during the war, in the face of the death penalty by the Gestapo. Among these Jews was our close friend, the well known Yiddish writer Yehuda Elberg, who based his significant Holocaust novel, "On the Tip of a Mast", on his experiences while he and his friends were hidden in the Wlodarczyk's barn. I brought a greeting and a gift from him to the Wlodarczyks. Wikcia wept when I told her I had a message for them from "Pan Elberg". She spoke about those days with sympathy and understanding. They are saints, Polish people like the Wlodarczyks.

Mrs. Silberman

It is not important that Silberman is not her real name. What is important is that before the war she was an active Communist, and in the People's Democracy of Poland she occupied a number of very important positions. Her husband too was an outspoken Communist until -- until 1968, when they were both fired from their jobs. Her husband has since died and was buried (thanks to his Communist past) in a military cemetery. Mrs. Silberman now lives alone, bitter and defeated, and keeps her lips tightly sealed. She receives a pension from the government for the

sake of her past record -- and her present silence.

Jan Krupka

Chief archivist of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. Seventy years old, but looks fifty. During the war, he was a leader of the Federation of Polish Patriots in the Soviet Union, which was actually an organization of Jewish Communists who dreamed of liberating Poland and building a socialist paradise there. Until 1968, Krupka was the principal of a Polish high school. In the Jewish Historical Institute he has been working on half salary because he is also a pensioner. He is a most affable person, honest, hospitable and open. Although he is a member of the Communist Party, he is not in agreement with everything that is happening in Poland now.

Joshua Piasek

A product of the Warsaw CYSHO schools and the youth organization of the Bund. Today he is chief proofreader of the Folkshtimme and also translates Polish material into Yiddish for that newspaper. He is among the few people in Warsaw today who can speak and write Yiddish well. He is quite familiar with Yiddish literature, and at the same time loves Poland and Polish culture. A warm person, he embraces you in a most friendly manner at your very first meeting. It was a great pleasure to spend time with him. His information about present-day Jewish Warsaw (if one can use that expression) was very helpful.

Jan Rochweger

Administrative and economic director of the Jewish Historical Institute. Born in Cracow. Until 1968 was a high-ranking officer in the Polish military, working in the General Staff. After "that year" he was placed in the Jewish Historical Institute, where he endeavors to keep the Institute on the appropriate level. Very laconic, he is businesslike but tactful.

The Gravedigger in the Gesia Cemetery

This man, in whose hands lies the fate of the Gesia Cemetery, is a Jewish alcoholic who can hold his own with any of the legendary Polish drunkards. We saw him several times, but never sober. He reeks of whiskey, cigarets and rotting teeth. As soon as he spots an American tourist he invites him to his quarters next door to the cemetery, offers him a drink, and asks to be paid for it in American dollars. His foxy eyes size you up and he knows immediately who you are and how much he can expect from you. It is high time to rid our honored dead in the Gesia cemetery of this affliction.

Jerzy Kuncewicz

There are two people who can be called the "conscience of Poland" today -- one of them is Professor Tadeusz Kotarbinski, scholar, humanist and friend of mankind. The other is Maria Kuncewicz, whose reputation as a fine writer was established by the journalist S.L. Shneiderman in his book, "The River Remembers". Maria Kuncewicz has again become famous for her vigorous efforts to safeguard and conserve Jewish religious treasures which lie neglected in Poland today without any government supervision.

We sat in her home in Kazimierz on the Vistula and had a pleasant conversation with her husband Jerzy. Mrs. Kuncewicz was not at home and we could not wait too long because the driver of our car was getting impatient. The gray-haired old man told us about the philosophic work in which he is now engaged. He comforted us with his view that humanity will yet learn wisdom and begin to behave humanely. He showed us his ceiling-high tile oven which is 300 years old, and he explained the meaning of the ceramic pictures on each tile. Although we enjoyed our conversation with this good-natured philosopher, we regretted very much having missed the opportunity to speak with his wife Maria.

Stanislaw and Zosia Glos

Joy was unbounded when we arrived at the home of this warm-hearted peasant couple who live in the village of Drzewce, near Naleczow, in the county of Lublin.

Stanislaw is now 83 years old, suffers from diabetes and can barely stand on his feet. His wife Zosia recognized me at once. She is only 54 years old -- maybe that's why she recognized me and he didn't. When she said to him, "Look, Stashek, this is our Pawel!" he burst into tears like a baby, throwing his arms around me as we kissed each other repeatedly.

Stanislaw Glos was active in the Polish anti-Nazi underground. He had always been a prosperous farmer -- and still is. I "worked" for him as a farmhand for seven months in 1942. Zosia was 17 years old and pregnant with her first child, a boy, who is now an engineer. Their younger son and daughter manage Glos' orchards. In 1942, when I had to leave the Glos family, I gave them a watch as a parting gift, and it was this watch that served as a reminder, through all these years, of the "city farmhand" who was not too good at farmwork. They had often wondered what ever became of Pawel Kolodziejczyk, and here he was! What a surprise! "God has spared you", they said.

So we sat and recounted the sad events in our lives, but we were happy to be together again. "It's just a pity that your wife and children didn't come with you," Zosia chided me. "You could all have spent the summer with us." I had to promise that I would come back again with my whole family....And I hope I can, some day.

Abraham Kwaterko

Abraham Kwaterko, acting editor of the *Folkshtimme*, is the "address" which all Yiddish-speaking visitors come to in today's Poland. A native of Warsaw, he was a Communist before the war, and still is. And although your world view may be completely contrary to his, he is the kind of Jew with whom you nevertheless feel at home and with whom you have a common language. He is friendly, a wonderful host, and doesn't say things that are better left unsaid. He does, however, say what should be said in the present circumstances.

He is definitely the "guardian of the Yiddish Language" in a dying Jewish community. Kwaterko does very important and self-sacrificing work to keep alive the written and spoken Yiddish word, and therefore deserves the unstinting help and cooperation of us all.

Mrs. Tester

Lives in Warsaw. Rather, she lives in the hospital more than she does in her small but tastefully furnished apartment. Her body has been afflicted by a variety of ailments which give her no rest in her old age. She is an exceptionally cultured woman, well versed in Polish and world literature, has a keen view on people, things and events, and is also a gracious, elegant and attentive hostess. Before the war, Mrs. Tester stirred audiences of young students and older working people at Communist mass meetings with her fiery speeches. She believed passionately in her own words and in her Party's slogans. In short, she was a convinced Communist to the marrow of her bones.

Is she still the same today? I don't know. From her words to me I couldn't tell. I do know, however, that concerning "that year" 1968 she speaks with "gall and wormwood" and her eyes grow red with anger and indignation. It is a pity to see how she suffers from her illnesses, as well as from the disillusionment which one detects in her words.

Reb Moishe Shapiro

If you meet a Jew in Warsaw with a long beard, it probably is the shokhet, Reb Moishe Shapiro. His face is lined with all the troubles of the dying Jewish community in Poland. Small of stature, he wears a conventional suit and hat, but his beard is his passport. He is well thought of by Poles and Jews alike, even by those Jews who don't eat kosher. There still exists in Warsaw one kosher butcher shop, in Praga, and Reb Moishe is the one who slaughters five cows a month, so that the Council of Jewish Religious Congregations in Poland can supply kosher meat to several religious congregations. Reb Moishe has one problem, however. He wants very much to publish a Hebrew calendar which would help the remaining Polish Jews observe their Sabbaths and festivals and inform them about various Jewish customs and religious dates. But he cannot find the necessary means to print it. So he worries about it all the time, and his deepset eyes ask the question: From whence shall come my help?

V

GLOOM OVER CZECHOSLOVAKIA

On the 27th of July we left Warsaw. At the Okecie airport, pandemonium reigns. Tourists are fleeced unmercifully, especially those from "capitalist" countries. On every item you take out of Poland there is a "special" duty. Our protestations that the government stores had assured us we would not have to pay duty on their goods, were to no avail. "Those people don't know what they're talking about" comes the curt reply of the unsmiling young customs official. Go fight City Hall. And since you must leave the country, you have no choice but to pay up like a sucker. Again a baggage check and a passport check. Then a ticket check and more passport control. You have some zlotys left over? Deposit them here and you can claim them on your next visit to our country - without interest of course. And wherever you turn - green-capped soldiers of the border guard.

After further time-consuming border "controls", we are finally seated inside the Czech plane, a Soviet-type TU.A-134. Whatever happened to the famous skoda airplane factory, you wonder, - those Czech "birds of steel" without which even Hitler didn't dare start his war. We'll have to wait for the Messiah to answer that question....

At the Prague airport the atmosphere is just the opposite from that at Okecie. Here there is a dignified calm, and the employees are correct and polite. Everything runs with well-planned efficiency. There is no pushing and shoving, even though the various check-points take a long time to get through here too. In truth, Warsaw is generally a more dynamic city than Prague, - the tempo is much quicker. In Prague they talk less and they smile less than in Warsaw. The gloom is almost palpable. You can see it on people's faces, on the walls of buildings, in the streets, even on the spacious, elegant and always busy Vaclavske Namesti (Wenceslas Square). Wenceslas Square is not the same as it used to be - although it hasn't changed so very much, explains the Czech physician whom we met quite by accident. Sitting at the same table of a sidewalk café with this young Czech, we got into a friendly conversation, toward the end of which I said: "I was in Prague in 1934. I still remember the friendliness of the Czechs. Now I don't feel it here. The waitresses in the restaur-

ants, even in the fancy Intercontinental Hotel, don't smile at the customers. They serve the food with a kind of grim severity. What happened?"

The young man grew thoughtful, looked around to make sure no one was listening and whispered dejectedly: "You can't compare Prague today with 1934 - although I myself didn't know that Prague. I know only what I heard from my parents and our neighbours. But about the unsmiling waitresses, it's my turn to ask you a question: Did you ever stop to think, maybe they don't have anything to smile about?"

His words served to answer many other questions which entered my mind during my one-week visit to the land of Benes and Masaryk. In Warsaw (and in Poland generally) during my three-week visit, I didn't see even one Soviet Soldier. Here in Prague you see them, too many of them.

The second language in Czechoslovakia has always been - and still is - German. So you often get the impression that you're in Germany, not in a country that suffered so much at the hands of the Germans. And you see them everywhere - the rich Deutschen - although most of those you meet are "comrades" from the German Democratic Republic. For them and for their brothers from the East - the tourists from the Soviet Union - Poland and Czechoslovakia are earthly paradises compared with the daily living conditions in their own country. We came to this conclusion after a conversation with a Russian mathematics professor from Moscow University whose acquaintance we made while sitting on the same bench in the large square of the Old City. He was waiting for his wife who was dashing from store to store, buying everything she could. We also got this impression from a conversation with a German woman from Leipzig and her daughter, whom we met at a table of the outdoor café just opposite the historical astronomical clock of the old City Hall. (I remember how people marvelled at the replica of this clock at Expo '67 in Montreal).

The city of Prague was hardly touched by the Germans during the war, so it is therefore still an old European city with venerable buildings, with impressive bridges over the Moldau and with hundreds of narrow but charming little streets and alleys

which lure the tourists as a spider does flies. Once you step into this web of streets you can't get out, because your tourist temptation urges you into another, a third one, a hundredth one. It is a kind of magnetic force which emanates from the ancient, shadowy, cobblestoned little streets that go back to the Middle Ages. We too walked upon their historic sidewalks until we reached the old Jewish Quarter of Prague, around which Jewish life was concentrated in the Czech capital until Hitler destroyed some eighty thousand Czech Jews along with their centuries-old community.

In the tourist literature published by the Czech State Tourist Bureau and the Prague Department of Trade and Tourism, particularly in the tastefully printed brochures "A Month in Prague" and "Prague Cultural Summer", you can find much detailed information about trips to the Jewish Museum and the "Old Prague Ghetto". This information is always followed by a note that both places are open "every day from 9 to 5 except Saturday". In fact, the Old-New Synagogue is closed at three o'clock Friday afternoon.

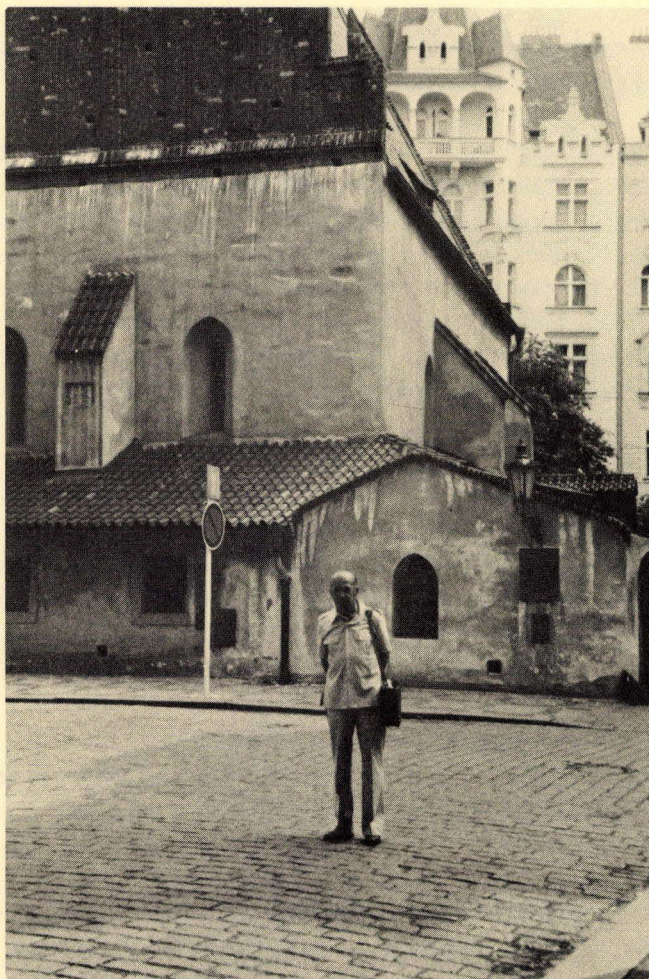
So we read with pride all this information about the Jewish antiquities in Prague and for the hundredth time we uttered words of praise for the Czech people, even for the Czech Communist government, as we recalled that our "landsleit", the Poles, even the "democratic" Poles, do not mention a word, oral or written, about the existence of the Ghetto Monument or the Nozik Synagogue or the State Jewish Historical Institute. It is quite possible that the present Polish rulers are ashamed to call attention to the poverty of "their" points of Jewish interest, or, more likely, they are attempting to eradicate even the element of Jewish history from their everyday reality.

However, it is not a "Communist line", explained one Czech when we complained about this official tactic of "playing down" Jewish points of interest. Czechoslovakia is also a Communist country, he pointed out, but it is more culturally developed and has always had a positive attitude towards its Jewish citizens. Some of this positive attitude is still demonstrated by the present government toward the cultural heritage of Czech Jewry. Thus the Polish Jankiel Cymbalista has been silenced and forgotten, but Mordecai Maisel, 16th century leader of the Prague Jewish community, is immortalized in the name of a street in the present Czech capital.

In 1950 the area of the old Jewish ghetto was designated by the Czech government as a cultural-historical site, a Jewish museum. In the literature about the museum, one reads that "the history of the Jewish religious communities is understood in the context of the religious groups which are an integral part of the population of Czechoslovakia, and not as the history of part of a so-called world Jewish people, a term invented by Zionist ideologues". In the museum we saw quite a few Jewish religious objects which actually come from Germany or Poland and which supplement the other exhibits. However, there's no use looking for a logical relationship between the political propaganda of the government and the contents of the museum. The main thing is that Communist Czechoslovakia is concerned about and allocates substantial sums of money for the upkeep of a Jewish museum - and in Warsaw we found no such concern. And then too, perhaps it is not the leaders of the Polish government who are to blame for Warsaw's neglect, but someone else?

The Jewish Museum in Prague is comprised of the following sections:

1. The Old-New Synagogue. Built in the last quarter of the 13th century. Early Gothic. It is still a functioning synagogue in which services are held every Sabbath. The day I visited the synagogue, I was one of almost forty worshippers.
2. The High Synagogue. Built in Renaissance style in 1568 as part of the Jewish Town Hall in the old Jewish city.
3. The Klausen Synagogue. Built in baroque style at the end of the 17th century.
4. The Maisel Synagogue was originally built in Renaissance style in 1590-92 by Mordecai Maisel, for his own family. After the fire in the Old City, the Maisel Synagogue was rebuilt in baroque style, and in 1893-1905 it was again rebuilt in neo-Gothic.
5. The Spanish Synagogue. Erected on the site of the oldest synagogue in Prague. The present structure was built in the 1860's in Moorish style, somewhat reminiscent of the Alhambra in Spain.



*The author in front of the "Old-New" Synagogue in Praha,
Chechoslowakia*

6. The Pinkas Synagogue. Built in 1535. In the first quarter of the 17th. century, this synagogue was again rebuilt in late Gothic and Renaissance style. Archaeologists working here turned up an old Mikvah (ritual bath). Since World War II extensive restoration work on the Pinkas synagogue has been going on, and a memorial exhibit was opened here.
7. The old Jewish cemetery. Together with the Old-New Synagogue, this is among the most important points of interest in the Old Jewish city. Established in the 15th century, it contains about 12,000 gravestones, but the actual number of people buried there is much larger. Many of the stones have sunk into the earth. Among the famous people buried here are the Maharal (Rabbi Judah Loew Ben Bezalel, 1525-1609), legendary creator of the Golem; the astronomer David Gans, 1541-1613; Mordecai Maisel, (1528-1601), head of the Jewish community. The oldest gravestone is that of the poet Avigdor Caro, which bears the date of April 25, 1493.
8. The Funeral Chapel was housed in a 19th century building adjacent to the old cemetery, though burials there had been discontinued as far back as 1787. Since World War II the building has become the principal exhibition hall of the Jewish Museum where the martyrdom of Czech Jewry, particularly in Theresienstadt, is being presented.

In the High Synagogue, the Klausen Synagogue, the Maisel Synagogue and the Spanish Synagogue, there are permanent exhibits of religious objets d'art, including the coat and banner of Shlomo Molcho, the false messiah, who was burned at the stake in Mantua in 1532.

Dr. Steiner, the old and ailing president of the Prague Jewish community, told us that the Nazi leaders had planned to gather the religious art objects of all Jewish communities of the "Protectorate" and to create a grand museum of a "vanished race."

There are anywhere from 8,000 to 12,000 Jews in Czechoslovakia today, but about half of them are registered as formal members of the Jewish community. The government supports several synagogues and cantors, and a rabbinical student,

Daniel Mayer, a young man from Prague who is studying in the Rabbinical Seminary in Budapest. The government pays his tuition and his living expenses in the Hungarian capital, where there are now some 80,000 Jews, twenty functioning synagogues (13 of them have daily services). Budapest has become "the Jewish city" of the Communist countries.

The morning after the services in the Old-New Synagogue, I travelled to Theresienstadt, about sixty kilometers from Prague (in Czech it is known as Terezin). The highway is narrow and winding; the countryside is not as green or luxuriant as in Poland. The road is monotonous and gloomy; one notes the absence of trees. Our first stop was at the fortress, Mala Pevnost (Small Fortress), which was built at the end of the 18th century and had served as a prison for military and civilian offenders against the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. In 1940 the Gestapo turned it into a prison for political victims, and in the Fall of 1941 the neighbouring town of Terezin became a concentration camp for Jews, officially called "Ghetto Theresienstadt".

We wandered around the grounds of the Mala Pevnost. Cells with bunks, the death-gate, the mass grave, the "bath-house", and again cells, cells, cells, with and without instruments of torture, and finally the underground "corridor". It took us twenty minutes to traverse this corridor in which the Gestapo tortured thousands of prisoners. Finally, we emerge into the bright sunlight - to the "Hanging Place" and the gallows. The sun streamed down, the grass was green, the silence deadly. The echo of my own footsteps across the cement awakened memories of other footsteps which used to signify the approach of death...

We literally ran out of the Mala Pevnost, the Small Fortress which bears the name of Maria Theresa. Our automobile took us quickly to the town of Terezin and the Ghetto Theresienstadt. Terezin is a pretty little town, only a short distance from the Small Fortress. The barracks and the other buildings of this former ghetto are populated by units of the Czech army and some civilians. Remaining of the ghetto is only a large cemetery with an impressive monument which was erected by the People's Republic of Czechoslovakia. There are several references here to "our Jewish brothers and fellow-citizens". The area around the cemetery and the monument is kept tidy and uncluttered. One can sense the respect and honour in which this place is held. Here was once a Jewish community which was condemned to death by Hitler;

here Jewish artists created important works; here Jewish children wrote poems about freedom, about butterflies, about parents who had "gone away". From here these children were taken to Auschwitz, Birkenau - never to return. Here lived my good friend Karl Katz from Bremen - one of the few who survived.

We shall never forget you, dear Czech Jews...

Once more I walk by the big International cemetery at the approach to Mala Pevnost. The Jewish graves occupy one third of the cemetery. There is a reverential silence. For a stranger it is inconceivable that in this place people suffered such agonies and were so barbarically put to death. The highway nearby has been deliberately paved with old fashioned cobblestones. The road is lined with tall trees. Through loudspeakers comes the sound of mournful music. I cannot hold back my tears.

May you be enveloped in eternal peace, I whisper to the thousands of graves as I take my leave.

VI THE FINAL CHAPTER

Our visit to Poland and Czechoslovakia, particularly the former, was rich in experiences. We met with many Jews and non-Jews. We have written only about a very small number of them; concerning the rest, it would be impossible to transmit our impressions without producing a thick volume. As a Polish Jew, born and raised in the land of Mickiewicz, Slowacki, Eliza Orzeszkowa, Julian Tuwim, Michal Znicz; as an heir of the Warsaw way of life; of the Ger Hassidic dynasty; as a survivor of the Holocaust; as a Jew who escaped the claws of Hitler only with the help of sympathetic and benevolent Poles who risked their own lives and the lives of their families to save Jewish lives -- as such a Jew, I visited my birthplace with the hope that I would meet with more understanding by the present government for the handful of Jews left in that country, at least for the history and tradition of Polish Jewry, which goes back a thousand years.

I left Poland, however, deeply shocked and disappointed, convinced that present-day Poland, like the Poland of the Endeks and the OZON, is endeavoring -- successfully -- to erase every trace of the Jewish presence which existed in the past and which still exists today. On my visit I met quite a few young Poles for whom the concept "Jew" is totally unfamiliar, as if Jews had never even lived here!

And I'm afraid that the result of such an official attitude toward the tiny bit of Jewishness which still exists -- and which is on the verge of disappearing -- will be to eradicate even the memory of Jewish existence from Polish soil. We are already witnesses of this process.

We are concerned, for example, about the future of the Jewish Historical Institute. At the entrance to the Institute hang two signs, one in Yiddish and one in Polish, with the words: "In this building, between 1940 and 1943, Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum (1900-44) worked and created the underground ghetto archives. He was murdered by the German invader". The present Institute occupies the entire building of the pre-war Judaica Institute, that modern center of higher Jewish education in which Professor Mayer Balaban, Professor Ostersetzer and Dr. Edmund Stein became famous. The building is located close to the area where the Tlomackie

Synagogue stood. Today on the site of the synagogue there is a magnificent skyscraper housing commercial government offices.

Entering the Jewish Historical Institute today is a saddening experience. A depressing darkness hangs over the exhibition rooms. Objects of great historical value stand like discarded furniture from a burned out house. We are told that the rooms are being "renovated". If so, why aren't the exhibits protected, at least with a flimsy cloth?

The offices of the Institute are sparsely furnished, without any of the conveniences that we saw in the non-Jewish offices that we visited in Warsaw. The staff of the Institute such as the secretary, Ida Mintzer, the librarian Adam Biletski, the researcher Abishalom Packentreger, the administrator Jan Rochweger, the deputy director Dr. Zygmund Hoffman, and particularly the archivist Jan Krupka, all try very hard to maintain the Institute on a proper level. But apparently the budget, which is covered by the government, is far from sufficient. The archive centre in Maidanek is a palace compared to the Jewish Historical Institute.

There are many Jewish treasures in the Institute. The archivist Jan Krupka leads us through the cellars, where the atmospheric conditions are bad enough to erode walls, let alone historic documents.

The archive's documents are divided into three categories: 1) prior to World War II, 2) during the war, 3) post-war.

The first group contains minutes and various records of a number of smaller Jewish communities in Poland, as well as Kehillah documents and personal papers from larger communities and from other European countries. We noted places like Zychlin, Kielce, Katowice, Vienna, Berlin. Of great interest were the Jewish materials from the Spanish Civil War, as well as Master's degree theses on Jewish themes.

The second group is the richest in content. We took a quick look at the collections of Emanuel Ringelblum, of the first and second periods. As Krupka



Destroyed gravestones in the Jewish cemetery at Gesia in Warsaw.



Near the historical but delapidated graves of the famous Yiddish writers Peretz, An-ski, Dinenson in the Gesia Cemetery in Warsaw.

explained, the third period is missing. If it exists anywhere, he adds in a choking voice, it is probably buried somewhere in the ground under a new apartment building. This group also contains materials of the Jewish Self-help organizations in the ghettos; original German documents such as posters, orders, and maps of the ghetto; documents of the Polish assistance organizations under the German occupation -- Rada Glowna Opiekuncza; Zhegota; documents about the activity of the famous priest, Brother Daniel, a converted Jew who helped many Jews and who today lives in Israel. We perused some of the countless literary works created in the ghetto.

The third group encompasses the post-war period. Here you find the archives of the Central Committee of the Jews of Poland; trial records of German war criminals; the collections of Prof. Ber Mark, who was the guiding spirit of the Institute; the noted Mrs. O. Bernstein and Janina Morgenstern who collected materials about Jewish life in the Middle Ages. An important place in this group is occupied by the archives of ORT in Poland, testimony given by victims of German crimes -- 7000 witnesses -- in Polish, Yiddish and German, as well as 215 personal reminiscences of the Hitler period.

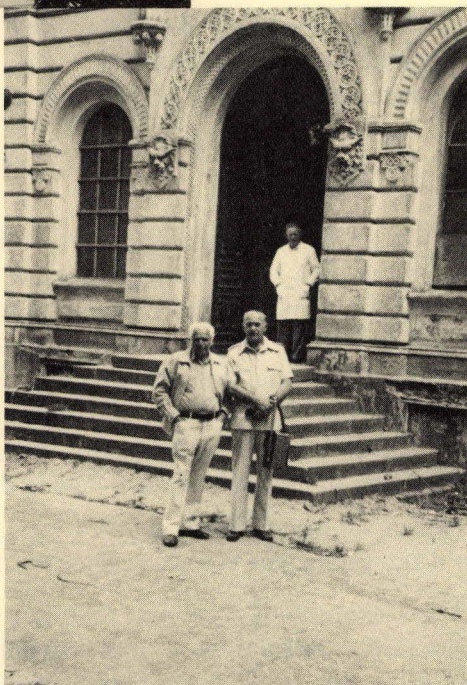
This historical treasure is now in a sadly neglected state because the atmospheric conditions are not suitable for preserving them, and secondly, it is not catalogued. Clearly, this scandalous condition is not the fault of the Institute's staff.

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I spent a day walking through the streets and avenues of the Gesia cemetery looking for my father's grave, and though I knew it was located at Ninth Street and 22nd Avenue, I did not find it. What I did find in this historical place filled me with pain, anger and outrage -- overgrown streets, broken-down gravestones, rats, dirt and garbage amidst the graves. In a word, a disgrace! Shame on the government's "Council to Preserve Antiquities!" Shame and censure on the Cultural and Social Federation of the Jews of Poland, which has the gall to ask for money from "Jews abroad" for renovating the Jewish vacation home in Srodoborow while it neglects the cemetery at Gesia. Undoubtedly the vacation home should be renovated, but the cemetery must also be taken care of. This is a national responsibility, not only a religious one, as some individuals in the Federation tried to convince me. The cemetery is one of the few remaining Jewish monuments left in Poland. At the same time, the disgrace is also ours -- and I include Polish Jews throughout the world, as well as



*Paul Trepman (left), A. Kwaterko (right)
and his wife (centre) in front of the Jewish
Rest Home in Srodborow.*



*J. Slawner and I in front of the
delapidated Nozik Synagogue in Warsaw.*

the World Jewish Congress, whose founder makes frequent trips to Poland and who certainly must have seen the terrible condition the cemetery is in. And where is the World Federation of Polish Jews, with its main office in Tel Aviv, headed by the honorable Anshel Reiss? And where is the Claims Conference, which received millions of dollars from Germany as compensation for the six million murdered Jews? Where are they all? But first of all -- where is the Polish government which inherited millions in Jewish properties?

I was forced to walk on the main street of the Gesia cemetery because the smaller streets and avenues are impassable. So far the gravestones of Peretz, Dinenson, Anski, Esther Rochel Kaminska, Beinisch Michalewicz, Abraham Morewski, I.M Weisenberg, Michael Klepfisz, Dr. Zamenhoff, Prof. Mayer Balaban, Havel Buzgan, Rabbi Jacob Krantz -- are still standing. But the tombs of famous Warsaw rabbis and Hassidic leaders and some noted philanthropists are in a disgraceful condition. What will become of all this if the present irresponsible attitude continues?

We are convinced that ways can be found to reach the appropriate Polish government bodies and demand -- yes, demand -- their cooperation in this matter. The attitude of the Czech government can serve as a good model.

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Two years ago a friend of my youth, who now lives in London, England, wrote to me that he had visited Warsaw and gone to see the Nozik synagogue where he'd been a bar mitzva. He mentioned that the synagogue was being renovated. One year ago our good friends from Montreal, Moe and Mina Aspler, also visited Warsaw and noticed that the Nozik shul at 4-6 Twarda Street, the only remaining synagogue in Warsaw, was being renovated -- they too had seen the scaffolding around the outside of the building. Now it was my turn, and in July 1979 I also saw the scaffolding -- but no sign of any actual work having been done.

When we asked about this we were told that the scaffold had already been up around the synagogue for six years -- but the work hadn't started yet!.

The Nozik shul -- at one time the second largest in the city -- is in a terribly deteriorated condition. Now it is the only synagogue in Warsaw and seems doomed to the same fate as all the others -- which were destroyed by Hitler. (The synagogue

originally built by the philanthropic Nozik family, is associated with the personalities of the Jewish historian Mayer Balaban and Rabbi Elimelech Neufeld.)

I believe it is our sacred duty to correct this disgraceful situation. Throughout the Jewish world, synagogues have been constructed costing millions of dollars. Some of them are now standing vacant because they were built not to meet the needs of a Jewish community but to satisfy the ambitions of certain individuals. We are not saying, God forbid, that synagogues should not be built even when there is no demand for them. But we certainly could omit some of the "frills" and use the money to help repair whatever historic synagogues still remain in Europe, among them the Nozik shul. It would truly be a well-earned mitzva.

We are convinced that with the help of a well organized campaign we could solve this painful problem. We talk a lot about the "testament of our six million martyrs." To maintain the surviving synagogues in a decent condition is undoubtedly part of that testament.

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The Cultural-Social Federation of the Jews in Poland owns a vacation home situated amidst the pine forests of Srodborow near Otwock (known before the war as the "Warsaw Otwock Line.") This vacation home is in the same building which once housed the Srodborowyanka -- a most elegant resort used by some of the wealthier Jews of Warsaw. The pre-war building was richly furnished and the grounds were well looked after. Today the Jewish vacation home looks like a once wealthy man who is now down at the heels. The bricks on the front of the building are loose and falling, the plaster inside is crumbling, the paint is peeling, the dining and recreation rooms are in semi-darkness, the battered chairs and tables stand around like unwanted guests.

The people there explained to me that the government has several times been on the verge of closing the place because it is insufficiently used. So far they have managed to avert the decree. The building is now used as a Jewish vacation home only two months during the year. The rest of the time it is rented either to the military or to institutions for retarded children. The building is in need of general repairs, but no funds are available for that purpose. The government does not wish to get involved in the upkeep of the place, although it is used by Jewish citizens

who once helped to establish the People's Democracy of Poland.

We saw a vacation home in Kazimierz -- what a difference! That place, however, is not a Jewish institution. We also saw several vacation homes in Nalenczow which belong to the trade unions -- the situation there is the same as in Kazimierz. The guests at the Jewish home are almost all pensioners, deserving Communists or sympathizers who suffered a great deal in the Communist cause. If one can still make excuses for the Polish Government's indifference to the Gesia cemetery or the Nozik synagogue because they are "religious" institutions, what is the reason for their callous attitude toward their comrades in the Cultural-Social Federation, or with regard to the needs of the Jewish vacation home?

We sought an answer to that question, but did not find one. We do not understand at all the view of certain leaders of the Federation that world Jewry should finance the continued existence of this summer place, which after all is designated for and used by only a particular group of Jews. The truth is that there are Jews still living in Poland to whom the doors of the summer home in Srodborow are closed.

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I have tried in these pages to give a clear and honest picture of the reality in Poland and Czechoslovakia -- a reality observed by a Polish Jew who is also a good friend of the Czech people. I wrote only about that which I saw and heard myself, and the glasses I wore were not tinted with any political coloring. I saw many beautiful things and many ugly things, many honest things and many dishonest ones. But I felt almost immediately the tremendous injustice toward Jews, Jewishness and Jewish history in the land where I was born and in which -- as Julian Tuwim said -- I felt the first stirrings of love.

I cannot help it -- I still love you, Poland, although you treated my ancestors and you are now treating my brothers and sisters, in such an insensitive, uncaring manner.....



*The railway station in Otwock,
birthplace of J. Slawner (right).*

