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“Decision to Discontinue the Investigation into the Kielce Pogrom” of October 21, 2004, and the Current State of Research into the Events of July 4, 1946 in Kielce



In recent years, more and more researchers have been studying the pogrom of Jews in Kielce on July 4, 1946. Since the announcement of the "Decision to Discontinue the Investigation into the Kielce Pogrom"

[“Postanowienie o umorzeniu śledztwa w sprawie pogromu kieleckiego”; hereinafter the “Decision”], the Institute of National Remembrance has published a two-volume study *Around the Kielce Pogrom* [*Wokół pogromu kieleckiego*]. In addition to this book, other publications have appeared, including works by Jan Tomasz Gross or Marcin Zaremba. In 2004, an important text by Arnon Rubin was published in Israel, and in 2018 Joanna Tokarska-Bakir released a two-volume book *Under the Curse. A social portrait of the Kielce pogrom* [*Pod klątwą. Społeczny portret pogromu kieleckiego*]. In addition to that, a number of articles, such as the ones by Bożena Szaynok, proved into various aspects of these tragic events. All these contributions have expanded the research field, defined many new problems, and introduced fresh explanations and interpretations.

Still, the issue which has yet to be raised is the credibility of many sources frequently used in research, such as the interrogation reports of 8-year-old Henryk Błaszczyk. Whether an 8-year-old boy could devise three different stories about his absence from July 1 to 3, 1946 remains disputable, as does the fact that he was “broken” by the interrogating security officers twice. At the end, why was only the version about the boy's journey to Pielaki village, 25 kilometres away from Kielce, considered credible? The public prosecutor's analysis also did not address the unclear and ambiguous role which Antoni Pasowski played in Henryk's disappearance.

Recent studies have shown that groups of servicemen influenced the pace and course of the events in Kielce to a bigger degree than it was

assumed in the prosecution's investigation. The arrival of the military units of the 2nd Warsaw Infantry Division (hereinafter WID) in Kielce meant that the army resolved to share the responsibility for order and safety in the city. The City Commandant's Office was to play a particularly important role in this matter. According to the report of June 30, 1946, it was staffed by four officers, five NCOs and thirteen privates. From January 7, 1946, the Commandant of the City of Kielce was Lieutenant Colonel Wasyl Taran, and from April 8 to November 13, 1946, Major Wasyl Markiewicz. The staff of the City Commandant's Office were provided by the 4th Infantry Regiment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Vasyl Kułakowski. In the "Decision" of October 21, 2004, Major Stanisław Markiewicz is named the commandant of the City of Kielce, which is a misidentification: at that time the position was held by Major Wasyl Markiewicz.

The issue of the military discipline outside the barracks also deserves consideration. From December 1945 to November 1946, the City Commandant's patrols detained 1,520 soldiers and officers for drunkenness, brawling and desertion. This number indicates high effectiveness of actions taken, not the helplessness and inefficiency of the formation. Here, special attention should be paid to an important document entitled "Pogrom in Kielce, Thursday, July 4, 1946, Data for the Report" published in the study by Aron Rubin. On page 311, the following statement was made: "9) Shots at the Committee are heard: the servicemen armed in pepeshas are firing. Major Markiewicz gave them the order to shoot! 10) The army breaks into the building; the shooting in the building begins; the army turns the hooligan action into

a pogrom (...)" . According to Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, the document was authored by Adolf Berman.

The pogrom investigators ignored important incidents involving soldiers, which is probably why no additional searches in the archives, especially in the military ones, were conducted; neither did the prosecutor identify several people who played an important role in the events. Such mistakes cast more doubts on other conclusions of the prosecutor's "Decision".

There is also no agreement between historians as to the death of an officer during the pogrom. It has not been determined beyond any doubt whether the event happened for real, was "a false flag operation", or whether it never took place and was nothing more than a product of the crowd's imagination. Information on the matter can be found in the witnesses' testimonies and in other archival records. It shows clearly that the rumour about the officer's death significantly raised the temperature of the events. The event also influenced the attitude of the crowd, particularly of the military-men, and fuelled their aggression - though it is difficult to say when it began to circulate among the soldiers. In an alternative version, apart from the officer also his child was killed, but whether it was a new hearsay or simply a mutation of the previous one remains a mystery. Similarly, nothing is known on the origins and the way another rumour spread: "Jews killed 12 Polish children, as told by the boy who was the only one to break out of the basement and survive. Moreover, the Jews killed an officer and his child, who had been found in the basement, and this is why

also soldiers are also searching and shooting”. There are sufficient reasons to believe that the “death of the officer” could be deliberate disinformation. Its goal was to strongly influence the emotions of the crowd, impose the perception of the event, cause unrest and the desire for retaliation.

An organization and the political background of activity of the “Ludwików” steelworks remains unexplored. The pogrom researchers usually ignore any references to the “Ludwików” steelworks found in the literature on the subject. This is a serious mistake from the perspective of the investigation and research into the circumstances and conditions of the anti-Jewish incidents. It may reduce the chances the historians will find the key sources concerning the “workers leaving” their workstations and leaving the steelworks that crucial day. From the beginning of 1946, the “Ludwików” steelworks was under the “supervision” of 2nd WID, and there was a German POW camp on the premises. This indicates there may be archival documents relating to the pogrom, overlooked by researchers.

In addition to the army’s involvement in the functioning of the “Ludwików” steelworks, efforts must be put into explaining why the “perpetrators from Ludwików” were never put on trial. According to a report by instructors from the Central Committee of the Polish Workers' Party of July 18, 1946, “the workers [from the steelworks] provided the PPR Committee with a list of those who incited and participated in the murders”. Therefore, premature or strong opinions on the role of "workers from Ludwików" should be treated with caution, especially

when they come from historians who do not have extensive knowledge about the labourers or the functioning of the workplace in the political reality of the period.

On July 4, 1946, killings of Jews and anti-Jewish incidents took place not only in the centre of Kielce, but also in trains and at railway stations. One of the scenes of the events was the Kielce-Herby station, and some new documents concerning the circumstances of the death of three Jews and the saving of another one have been found. Such cases challenge the claims that aggressive masses could not be effectively neutralized. An extremely important question should be asked here: how was it possible for a few people to save a Jew from death at this station despite the aggressive attitude of an unknown-in-size crowd? Why exactly, in this particular situation gun threats by a railway guard and then the presence of a Soviet soldier effectively contained the angry mob?

According to the research of Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, the greatest responsibility for the outbreak and the course of the pogrom should be placed on the militiamen, especially non-commissioned officers and officers from the Citizens' Militia [Milicja Obywatelska, hereinafter MO] station at 45 Sienkiewicza Street, and from the Voivodeship MO Headquarters. However, this assertion cannot be satisfactorily proved by sources. This interpretation also ignores some of the events that took place in the Planty Street, such as disarming the Jews, the presence of soldiers in the Committee House, or shots fired from the building into the crowd. The MO activities resulted in people gathering

around the building at 7 Planty Street, but the beginning of anti-Jewish violence should be linked to the arrival of soldiers and the actions they took.

The military units' ineffectiveness and failure to deal with the crowd can hardly be explained by general moral condition of officers and soldiers. The issue has been poorly documented in the sources, but suggestions that Soviet repressive forces did not react because they feared the Poles are unbelievable and unacceptable. Written records also reveal a completely different picture of safety on the streets of Kielce for many months before the pogrom. There were no events organised that drew large groups of people, the town was regularly patrolled by City Commandant's men, and officers and soldiers of all formations guilty of improper conduct were duly punished.

Until now, an important question has not been answered: why were the law enforcement commanders unable to stop the chaos in the Planty Street, and at the same time they managed to neutralize Jan Wrzeszcz, the public prosecutor of the Kielce Regional Court, who tried to take control of the "situation". He arrived at the scene with close colleagues and, by the power of his office, tried to coordinate activities aimed at controlling the crowd - but an unidentified officer did not allow him to intervene. A few years after the pogrom, Jan Wrzeszcz was arrested in connection with the political case of Czesław Kaczmarek, the bishop of Kielce. The collected evidence contained testimonies suggesting the presence of Soviet representatives in two key locations during the pogrom.

Interestingly, despite the decision-making chaos and helplessness of other officials, the above-mentioned unknown officer was able to refuse and prevent the intervention of Prosecutor Wrzeszcz. Whether it was a dispute over jurisdiction, or a deliberate attempt to buy time for the increasingly aggressive crowd has not been determined. Was it a situation that could be classified as “controlled chaos”?

Undoubtedly, during the pogrom on July 4, 1946, several provocative operations took place in Kielce. They occurred at crucial moments – for instance, before the soldiers broke into the building and while they were inside – which had a serious impact on the pace and course of the events. It must be pointed out that many researchers use and treat the term “provocation” too literally. One must read at least the basic literature on the subject to understand the complicated character of provocative actions. Spontaneous and stimulated actions taking place during the pogrom do not give a full explanation of the ambiguous events in Kielce. The problem which Mirosław Karwat called the distinction between “the unintended provocative effect of human activity and deliberate provocation” should not escape the researchers' attention. When are crowd actions a spontaneous activity, and when can they be called a result of manipulation? Hence, the mental state and attitudes of the crowd in particular phases of the pogrom need to be studied more thoroughly, and the groups actively participating in the murders identified. Recently discovered issues, like the problem of safety in the city in the months before the massacre, the underestimated role of servicemen, or the new information on the “Ludwików” steelworks, indicate that the pogrom must be analysed

against the background of mechanisms of building the communist regime in Poland.

Sixteen years ago, prosecutor Krzysztof Falkiewicz stated in the "Decision" that "in the course of the investigation, all available evidence was used (...) all existing and known documents related to the case were collected"; however, in the light of the points raised here, these words can and should now be considered out of date.

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