

# Institute of National Remembrance

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20.04.2024, 01:02

03.07.2020

Poles and Jews. Centuries of dialogue, disputes, conflicts. Conference: “Polish-Jewish relations in the 20th century. Research-controversy-perspectives. Colloquium IV: New research challenges.”



**RELACJE POLSKO-ŻYDOWSKIE  
W XX WIEKU**

**BADANIA - KONTROWERSJE - PERSPEKTYWY**

COLLOQUIUM IV: NOWE WYZWANIA BADAWCZE

Konferencja naukowa online

6 lipca 2020 r., godz. 10.00

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Polish-Jewish relations in the twentieth century have been arousing great interest among historians and specialists in other fields for a long time, the focal point most often being the complex times of German and Soviet occupation of Poland and the post-war period. A large number of research and popular papers have been published on the

above issues, and new works, interpretations and theses attempting to explain known and described events and processes in joint Polish-Jewish relations are still appearing.

The centuries of Jewish presence in Poland were characterized by remarkable dynamics and a multitude of phenomena ranging from unrestricted freedom of cultural development, the preservation of religious traditions, to problems of resentment and anti-Semitism. Barriers created by the differences in language, religious beliefs, customs and culture, were strengthened by stereotypes and prejudices on both sides. Contemporary Polish-Jewish relations have been shaped through the prism of the Holocaust carried out by the Germans on the occupied Polish territory, but also the pogrom in Kielce in 1946 and the events of March 1968. Discussions about providing assistance to Jews during German occupation, Polish indifference, denunciation and other reprehensible attitudes have been omnipresent in public debate not only among specialists in the field. Attempts to describe and investigate the difficult past are hardly devoid of catchy, yet unauthorized or simply false theses. It is worth emphasizing that expanding research areas and the continuous verification of accumulated knowledge are natural processes. In fact, this is the only way through which the truth about the mutual relations between Poles and Jews ought to be approached, as it ensures going beyond a stereotypical handling of the subject.

Being aware of the above, the Kielce Sub-branch of the Institute of National Remembrance and the Institute of History at the Jan

Kochanowski University is organizing a scientific conference on "Polish-Jewish relations in the 20th century. Research-controversy-perspectives. Colloquium IV: New research challenges." As part of the conference, the participants will be able to hear six papers tackling the problems of the events taking place in the first half of the 20th century with reference to Polish-Jewish relations from the 1905 revolution to Poland regaining its independence (Prof. Konrad Zieliński, UMCS), the issue of the deportation of Polish citizens of Jewish descent from Germany in 1938 in the light of American documents (Prof. Przemysław Różański, UG), the Soviet policy towards Polish Jews in 1944-1945 (Prof. Grzegorz Berendt, UG), granting or not granting Jews in the General Government aid (Sebastian Piątkowski, D.Sc., IPN Radom), new challenges and research perspectives on the Kielce pogrom (Ryszard Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki Ph.D., IPN Kielce). Last but not least, Mateusz Lisak (IPN Kielce) will deliver a paper on the image of post-war Poland and the Kielce pogrom in the light of selected international literature.

## **Ryszard Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki**

**"Decision to discontinue the investigation into the Kielce pogrom" of 21 October 2004 and the current state of research on the events of 4 July 1946 in Kielce.**

July 2020 marks the 74th anniversary of the tragic anti-Jewish incidents

in Kielce. This mass crime against the Jewish population was caused by a false rumor about Jews kidnapping and murdering a child. It was also ignited by the anti-Semitic sentiment of part of the Polish society, including the myth of judeo-communism, as well as the incomprehensible, unbelievable passivity and inefficiency of those who commanded the law enforcement and military forces, which can be considered as both consent and provocation. According to the investigation carried out by the Institute of National Remembrance, the anti-Jewish incidents (involving civilians, militiamen, Security Service officers and soldiers from various military units) led to the deaths of 37 Jews and 3 Poles. Thirty-five Jews were injured. After the pogrom the communist authorities launched an aggressive propaganda campaign against the anti-communist underground, the Polish Peasant Party, the Catholic Church and the Polish authorities in exile. The question which is still open for discussion is whether the course and dynamics of the anti-Jewish incidents in Kielce were caused by a series of provocative actions or were the result of actions of a spontaneously gathered crowd or individual groups of people.

Ryszard Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki will question the assumption adopted by many researchers that all the basic facts about the causes and course of the tragic events of 4 July 1946 in Kielce have been determined. New evidence concerning the security in the city, the role of particular communist officers and military groups, the course of events at the Kielce-Herby station, the functioning of the Ludwików Steelworks (including unclear connections with the military

administration) in the period preceding the incident and the lack of an appropriate profile of the participants of the pogrom, undermine the current state of research on the course of events during the pogrom in Kielce. Therefore, many statements contained in the "Decision to discontinue the investigation into the Kielce pogrom conducted by the District Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation in Cracow of 21 October 2004" are no longer valid. The problem of the unexplored research possibilities (including conducting targeted archival queries) during the investigation will be addressed.

**Mateusz Lisak**

### **The Kielce Pogrom and the post-war period in selected non-Polish publications**

The Kielce Pogrom has been and will continue to be one of the most controversial issues in Polish-Jewish relations. From the perspective of Polish researchers, the mass murder committed in 1946 in Kielce is a deplorable landmark in the country's history. On the other hand, in the non-Polish academic work on the subject, the Kielce Pogrom is only a component of Polish anti-Semitism, albeit marking its climax.

The Polish point of view could not be presented fully and objectively until the late 1980s. That is why the Polish contribution to the discussion does not tally with the current paradigm of the events. Polish researchers are accused of not being critical enough of their history, and alleged to be always looking at their country through the

optics of the suffering the Polish nation endured. Moreover, they are believed to engage in a constant struggle against communism, which induces them to claim that the pogrom was the result of communist provocation. However, the books and articles published outside of Poland never tell their readers that the victims of the pogrom included ethnic Poles, who are usually counted as Jewish victims.

On the other hand, the non-Polish researchers are accused of not knowing the Polish publications, lack of knowledge and an uncritical approach to the source materials in the communist-created archives. Polish historians expect foreign researchers to be acquainted with very specialised Polish-language literature. In turn, the Polish historians are accused of not considering the “general” literature on the subject. Apparently, they do not take into account the non-Polish work because of their linguistic shortcomings and their insufficiently equipped libraries. Hence, many of the Polish translations skip non-Polish studies which are the basic literature on the subject.

The current outlook on Polish-Jewish relations is based on the point of view presented in testimonials drawn up by Jewish émigrés, whose narratives tend to associate their terrible experience of the war with Polish post-war anti-Semitism. In some of these stories the Poles appear to be worse than the Nazi Germans.

Jewish poverty in the wake of the Holocaust is often presented out of context, as if poverty did not affect all the inhabitants of post-war Poland. The Catholic Church is portrayed as an ally of the communist government of People’s Republic of Poland, working hand in hand with

them to integrate the areas generally referred to as the Recovered Territories. The Church is also accused of being passive and anti-Semitic. The anti-communist pro-independence movement – if it is mentioned at all – is usually presented in the context of its reputed anti-Semitism.

It is important to remember that Western Europe and the USA did not experience the war and Nazi German occupation in the form it took in Eastern Europe. There were no post-war instances of genocide or ethnic expulsions, either. The predominant ideology in the West is anti-fascism and cosmopolitanism; while for many people in Central and Eastern Europe their concept of nationalism is not treated as an embarrassing stain on the national character. The disparity between these worldviews has led to the emergence of a contention – a debate on which evil was worse, Nazism or communism, and who suffered more, Jews or non-Jews.

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