

Press in the Warsaw Ghetto: the Right-wing groups

Summary

This volume consists of press materials produced in Warsaw by the right-wing circles, such as Agudat Israel, Betar (revisionists), General Zionists, and the so-called assimilators associated with the group *Żagiew*. The publication includes: “A col in der mid-bar” (Voice of the desert), “Hamedina” (The country), “Magen David” (Star of David), “Shviv” (Spark), “Undzer Hofnung” (Our Hope), “Żagiew”, “Biuletyn Informacyjny [information bulletin] – Żagiew”, “Komendant Główny Organizacji Żagiew. Odezwa [Commander-in-chief of the organisation *Żagiew*. Appeal]”. The text is based on materials stored in the Ringelblum Archive, as well as one several-pages-long issue of “Shviv” from October 1941, preserved in the YIVO in New York. Most likely, the publications were issued from 1941 (or 1940) until 1943.

The original material was written mostly in the Jewish languages (Yiddish and Hebrew), with about one third written in Polish.

The press, though conventionally called right-wing, was extremely diverse and was by no means a uniform group. The common denominator is the fact that these titles were published by groups that distanced themselves from leftist views, and, thematically – their unshakeable faith in the victory of good over evil and a new and better reality. In addition, each community focused on the issues and problems that were most important to them. For Agudat Israel, these were religious issues. For Zionists-Revisionists (Betar), they were related to the life and ideology of Vladimir Jabotinsky. General Zionists were primarily concerned with a future life in Palestine and the current problems of education and upbringing; much space was also devoted to the three great figures of the Zionist movement: Theodore Herzl, Chaim Nachman Bialik, and Menachem Ussishkin. Authors associated with the group *Żagiew* focused on Polish matters, the on-going struggle against the occupier, the politics of the Polish Government in London, and the post-war life in the restored Poland.

Since most publications were issued before the so-called *Grossaktion* [great operation] of the summer of 1942, relatively little space is devoted to the mass extermination of the Jewish population. The awareness that the Germans had started a systematic,

mass murder of all Jews under their dominion was emerging slowly. However, as it is shown, the press in the Warsaw ghetto had to-date information about the largest mass-scale atrocities that took place in late 1941 and early 1942: in Ponary near Vilna, in Galicia, and in Chełmno on the Ner. They also knew about mass deportations and Jews being concentrated in ghettos (the number of which was shrinking). On the eve of the deportation of Warsaw Jews to Treblinka, more and more references mentioned the threat Hitler had once made regarding the extermination of European Jews. Also cited is the leaflet issued by a Polish party in May 1942 (the Central Committee of Polish Socialists), which explicitly mentions and condemns the German plan to murder all Jews.

There are references to the issue of Polish-Jewish relations and unethical behaviour of both the Polish and Jewish people. The Zionists indicated the growing anti-Semitism among the Polish population, mainly based on the fear that rightful Jewish owners would return to reclaim their property from the Poles and the myth of Jewish collaboration with the Soviet authorities against the Polish population. They also criticised the Judenrat and its officials living at the expense of the general Jewish community and executing policy detrimental to the latter. The so-called assimilators raised the issue of Gestapo agents originating from Jewish communities and active in the ghetto and beyond. They criticised some voices within the Polish underground, which failed to understand the actual situation in the ghetto.

Material published here shows that knowledge of contemporary historiography on the internal operation of the Warsaw Ghetto leaves much to be desired. The external structure of its existence is relatively well known, especially where it was designed by the occupiers and subject to bureaucratic processes. The unofficial life, however, especially that which needed to remain secret, in hiding for fear of reprisals; that was directed against the policy of the German occupation authorities, which sought to deprive the Jews of all merits of a normal society; which sought to weaken the propaganda and offer the public some encouragement, faith in a better future and the defeat of the Third Reich – all that remains unclear to us in many aspects. The state of research on the press in the Warsaw ghetto is still substandard. Apart from the Hebrew edition (*The Jewish Underground Press in Warsaw – Itonut ha-Mahteret ha-Yehudit b'Varsha*, ed. Joseph Kermish, Israel Shaham, Vol. 1–6, Jerusalem 1979–1997), there is only a handful of articles in Polish and English and an anthology published in Italian. It is therefore to be hoped that this edition will lead to the development of research and, in the near future, publication of a monograph of such an important aspect of the Warsaw Ghetto as its underground press.

Translated by Jerzy Giebułtowski