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## Jews in the Polish Communist Movement (1918–1937)

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**Henryk Cimek**

## **JEWES IN THE POLISH COMMUNIST MOVEMENT (1918–1937)**

Jews played a dominant role in the Polish communist movement in the interwar period. Their views and activities sometimes provoked controversies. The communists of Jewish nationality were accused inter alia of breeding separatist and dogmatic tendencies. In terms of percentages, the share of the Jews in the communist movement as compared to their share in Poland's population was the highest of all nationalities. The crucial role of the Jews was especially visible in the leadership of Komunistyczna Partia Polski (KPP) [Polish Communist Party] and Komunistyczny Związek Młodzieży Polski (KZMP) [Communist Union of the Polish Youth] (until February 1930 – Związek Młodzieży Komunistycznej w Polsce (ZMKP) [Union of the Communist Youth in Poland]), as well as, albeit to a lesser extent, in Komunistyczna Partia Zachodniej Białorusi (KPZB) [Communist Party of the Western Belarus] and Komunistyczna Partia Zachodniej Ukrainy (KPZU) [Communist Party of the Western Ukraine], being autonomous organizations related to KPP.

To determine the precise number of the Jews in the years of II Polish Republic (II RP) is difficult just as it is to calculate the precise shares of the other national minorities. This applies in particular to the first years after the Polish state had been restored. It is mainly related to the level of national awareness at that time and to the specificity of the censuses that had been carried out, respectively, on 30 September 1921 and on 9 December 1931. During the first of those censuses the nationality criterion was used, while during the second of them – the language criterion. Moreover, in 1921 Poland's external borderline had been still undecided, which is why the first of the censuses had not been carried out in Górny Śląsk [Upper Silesia] and Wileńszczyzna [the Vilnius region] (Krzywicki 1922: 3 i nn.).

According to the census of 1921 (and including estimations for Górny Śląsk and Wileńszczyzna) Poland was inhabited by 27 176 717 persons, including 69,2% Poles and 30,8% members of national minorities (Rocznik 1927: 26). Among the national minorities the Jews were the second largest group following the Ukrainians (14,3%) (see table 1). They constituted the only so numerous national minority in Europe that was devoid of its own national territory.

**Table 1. Jews in Poland according to the censuses of 1921 and 1931\***

| Voivodeship            | According to the census of 30 September 1921 |      | According to the census of 9 December 1931 |      |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------|------|--------------------------------------------|------|
|                        | in absolute numbers                          | as % | in absolute numbers                        | as % |
| Poland                 | 2 110 448                                    | 7,8  | 2 732,6                                    | 8,6  |
| Capital city of Warsaw | 252 301                                      | 26,9 | 333,7                                      | 28,3 |
| warszawskie            | 163 646                                      | 7,8  | 239,7                                      | 9,7  |
| łódzkie                | 270 437                                      | 12,0 | 365,0                                      | 13,8 |
| kieleckie              | 215 360                                      | 8,5  | 284,2                                      | 10,7 |
| lubelskie              | 227 902                                      | 10,9 | 221,7                                      | 10,5 |
| białostockie           | 163 044                                      | 12,5 | 153,5                                      | 12,1 |
| wileńskie              | 79 801                                       | 8,2  | 108,9                                      | 8,5  |
| nowogródzkie           | 56 307                                       | 6,8  | 77,0                                       | 7,3  |
| poleskie               | 91 251                                       | 10,4 | 113,0                                      | 10,0 |
| wolyńskie              | 151 744                                      | 10,6 | 205,5                                      | 9,9  |
| poznańskie             | 1485                                         | 0,1  | 44,5                                       | 1,9  |
| pomorskie              | 419                                          | 0,0  | 30,2                                       | 1,6  |
| śląskie                | 4429                                         | 0,4  | 6,5                                        | 0,5  |
| krakowskie             | 77 069                                       | 3,9  | 128,0                                      | 5,6  |
| lwowskie               | 190 368                                      | 7,0  | 232,9                                      | 7,5  |
| stanisławowskie        | 90 432                                       | 6,8  | 109,4                                      | 7,4  |
| tarnopolskie           | 68 967                                       | 4,8  | 78,9                                       | 4,9  |

\* Rocznik 1927: 26; MRS 1939: 22–23.

The data in Table 1 indicate that over one decade both the number and percentage of the Jews in Poland had grown<sup>1</sup>. In the context it is to be taken into account that in 1921 out of 2 845 364 individuals

<sup>1</sup> According to the census data, the share of the Jewish population increased from 7,8% in 1921 to 8,6% in 1931. On the other hand J. Żarnowski (1973: 389) believes that this share decreased from 10,5% to 9,8%, which is a view largely shared by Jerzy Tomaszewski (cf. Tomaszewski (ed.) 1993: 159).

declaring Judaism as their religious denomination, 2 110 448 declared their Jewish nationality as well, while the remaining ones (25,8%) declared Polish nationality (Urbański 1933: 221). Most probably the majority of the more than 700 thousand Jews chose to behave differently during the census of 1931, declaring that they were speakers of Yiddish or Hebrew, which, according to Alfons Krysiński, could be explained by a considerable growth of the Jewish population in significant areas of Central Poland. This attitude of the Jewish population had been most certainly influenced by the intense nationalist agitation carried out by the Jewish press which urged them to indicate Yiddish or Hebrew as their native language (Krysiński 1933: 43; Żarnowski 1973: 36–37).

Their spatial distribution across the Polish territory was uneven. The most of the Jews lived in the area of the former Królestwo Polskie [Polish Kingdom]. The second place was occupied by Galicja in this respect, while in the territories of the former Prussian partition the percentage of the Jews was small<sup>2</sup>. They used to live mainly in big cities and towns<sup>3</sup>. As of 1931, the most of them were to be found in towns of the Poleskie Voivodeship (48,8%), Wołyńskie Voivodeship (48,6%) and Nowogródzkie Voivodeship (40,3%). As far as the countryside, the most Jews lived in the Lubelskie Voivodeship, where they constituted around 40% of the overall number of the Jewish population in that area (MRS 1939: 23; Urbański 1933: 221 and ff.; Horoch 1993: 81).

During the last decade of the XIX century, socialist ideas began to foment among the Jews in the Polish territory. Initially, socialists of Jewish origin belonged to Polish socialist parties. The first of the Jewish socialist parties was founded in 1897. This was Powszechny Żydowski Związek Robotniczy (Algemeiner Jidiszer Arbeter Bund) which was active in the whole territory of Russia, including Królestwo Polskie. In Galicja, Żydowska Partia Socjalno-Demokratyczna [Jewish Social-Democratic Party] was created in 1905, which merged with Bund in 1920 (Holzer 1974: 271).

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<sup>2</sup> Similarly, J. Żarnowski admits (1973: 389) that in the former Prussian Partition there were 1% Jews. Simultaneously he claims that 2/3 of the Jews lived in western and central Poland (ibid.).

<sup>3</sup> As of 1931, nearly one fourth of the Jewish population in Poland inhabited five cities: Warszawa [Warsaw], Łódź, Wilno [Vilnius], Kraków [Cracow] and Lwów [Lvov] (Tomaszewski (ed.) 1993: 162).

There were also Jewish workers' parties in Królestwo Polskie, which were under the influence of Zionists (Jewish nationalists) who expressed aspirations of those Jews. They manifested Jewish nationality, aiming at uniting the Jewish diaspora and establishing their own state in Palestine.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, Bund postulated that the Jewish question was to be resolved by introducing a socialist political regime in Poland that would grant the Jews national-cultural autonomy. In turn, Żydowska Socjalno-Demokratyczna Partia Robotnicza Robotnicy Syjonu (Jidysze Socjalistisze Arbeter Partaj Poale Syjon), which was created in Królestwo Polskie in 1905, wanted to combine the socialist slogans with the Zionist ones.

Similar postulates were put forward by Żydowska Socjalistyczna Partia Robotnicza Zjednoczeni (Jidysze Socjalistisze Arbeter Partaj Ferajnjgte), which was called into existence in November 1918 by the so called Zionists-socialists (Holzer 1974: 271–272).

Within the listed Jewish workers' parties ideological polarization and splits occurred as a result of which the leftist groupings either joined KPRP or created Jewish communist organizations. This phenomenon was more massive than in the milieu of Polish socialist parties. The Poale Syjon split in July 1920, giving birth to Poale Syjon-Lewica and Poale Syjon-Prawica. The former opted for Jewish emigration to Palestine, being on the other hand dedicated to socialism and internationalism. This grouping criticized separatism, believing in merits of cooperation between the Jewish socialists and all socialist parties in Poland (Holzer 1974: 573).

A Poale Syjon-Lewicy delegation took part in the proceedings of the III Congress of the Communist International (22 June – 12 July 1921). The party was ready to join KPRP, but wanted to preserve autonomy as far as Jewish issues in which the decisive say was to belong to the international organization Poale Syjon. Since October 1921 a communist fraction existed within the Poale Syjon-Lewicy – Żydowski Związek Komunistyczny Poale Syjon [Jewish Communist Union of the Poale Syjon] that joined KPRP following its exclusion of the Poale

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<sup>4</sup> The long-term aim of the Zionists was to establish their national-territorial state in Palestine. Such a program was outlined in 1897 by the World Congress of Jews that called into existence the World Zionist Organization. The nearer aim, after WW I, was to have the Jews granted equal rights and – according to, inter alia, Antoni Czubiński – to transform the renescent Polish state into a Polish-Jewish state (Judeo-Polonia). See more [in:] Czubiński 1994: 125; Parys 2005: 202 and ff.

Party in November 1921. It was headed by Saul Amsterdam-Henrykowski (1898–1937), Gerszon Dua-Bogen (1892–1948) and Alfred Lampe (1900–1943). They held key positions in the party. G. Dua-Bogen was inter alia a secretary to Centralne Biuro Żydowskie KC KPP (1922–1927), and since the I Congress of KPZB (25 June – 25 July 1928) – a member of its KC [Central Committee] (Iwański 1974: 58; *Ślownik...*, vol. I: 59–60, 486–487; Świetlikowa 1969: 145). The two other activists occupied even higher ranks in the party hierarchy being long-term members of KC KPP and of Biuro Polityczne KC KPP<sup>5</sup> [KC KPP Political Bureau].

In August 1921 KPRP was also joined by a group that branched off from Ferajngite, which was the weakest of all of the mentioned Jewish parties. Among the Ferajngite members who joined KPRP there were, inter alia, Izrael Gajst vel Geist (1888–1939) and Izaak Gordin-Lenowicz (1899–1937). The former, a member of KC Ferajngite, joined KPRP mid-year in 1919, being a member of Centralne Biuro Żydowskie KC KPRP (1919–1920) and a deputy member of KC KPP (1930–1933). The latter, Gordin, belonged to CBŻ (1923–1927) (Iwański 1974: 59; Świetlikowa 1968: 203; 1969: 141 and ff.; Gadomski 2009: 160, 276; *SBDPRR*, vol. II: 174–175).

This kind ideological exchanges took also place in Bund. The left wing of that party, created in 1918 during the III Bund Conference in April 1919, gained the upper hand over the centre and the right. The I United Bund Congress, taking place on 9–10 April 1920 in Kraków, decided on Bund's leaving the II International and on its joining the Communist International (CI). However, Bund did not like some of the 21 conditions to be fulfilled when joining the CI that were adopted during its II Congress (19 July – 7 August 1920), which is why its leadership tried the dodging tactics.

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<sup>5</sup> S. Amsterdam was elected a KC KPRP member during the II Congress of the party (19 September – 2 October 1923), a deputy member of Biuro Polityczne KC in 1930 and a BP member in 1933. He was a member of CBŻ (1923–1927). Initially A. Lampe was active in ZMK, being inter alia a KC ZMK secretary, following his election during the I Congress of ZMK in March 1922; Subsequently, he was a member of KC KPP since the IV Congress of that party (22 May – 9 August 1927) and a BP member since mid-year in 1929. Lampe was an only BP member that escaped the Stalinist repressions. This was because he was then imprisoned in Poland. Świetlikowa 1969: 145 and ff.; Gadomski 2009: 37, 119–121; 1971: 425 and ff.; *SBDPRR*, vol. I: 59–60.

The Bund issue in Poland was also discussed by the Communist International's Executive Committee on 19 March 1921. Its representatives – Grigorij Zinowjew (G. Radomyłski) and Karol Radek (K. Sobelsohn) – were of the opinion that the immediate merger of Bund with KPRP was not to be pressed for in spite of the CI's principle that stipulated that only one communist party could exist in a country. The KPRP delegates thought otherwise: Henryk Walecki (Maksymilian Horwitz) and others were against the inclusion of Bund in the IC. The aforementioned activists of the IC and KPRP were all of Jewish origin. Walecki maintained that Bund had not got rid of its nationalism. That was perceived as a threat to KPRP in a situation when at the beginning of 1920 this party counted circa 5500 members, including many Jews, while Bund had almost 10 thousand membership.

The fate of Bund's and IC's merger was decided upon by an appeal issued on 26 August 1921 by the latter which was authored by G. Zinowjew. In the appeal it was stressed that the centre of the Bund, which constituted its majority, had not accepted 5 out of the 21 conditions on which membership in the IC was hinged, including the request that the party was split. Bund's left wing was offered to form a communist fraction, which took place at the turn of September and October 1921 (Iwański 1974: 44 and ff.).

However, even Bund's communist fraction had problems with coming to terms with the IC condition that there should be only one communist party in each country. It tried to convince the Poale Syjon-Lewicy's communist fraction not to join KPRP, but merge in order to form a Jewish Communist Party Kombund<sup>6</sup>. The Poale Syjon-Lewica communists did not take up that offer. In the circumstances, mid-January 1922, a consultative meeting of Bund's communist fractions was called, which was followed by creating a new organization – Żydowski Komunistyczny Związek Robotniczy w Polsce [Jewish Communist Workers' Union] (Kombund), which, most probably, counted around 2 thousand members. On 13 February 1922, during the III Ogólnokrajowa Narada Żydowska [III Nation-wide Jewish Consultative Meeting], a contract was concluded with the KPRP. The IC leadership did not share the KC KPRP's position at that time to aim at unifi-

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<sup>6</sup> Archiwum Akt Nowych (dalej AAN), Autobiografia S. Amsterdama, t. os. 101 (b.p.).

cation as soon as possible. Moreover, on 12 June 1922 the KW MK recognized Kombund as a constitutive part of the IC, which was an organization independent from KPRP. The leadership of the latter did not want to agree to this.<sup>7</sup>

An ultimate decision regarding Kombund was taken by the IC leadership on 9 December 1922, recommending the soonest possible unification of that party with KPRP. The IC Executive Committee had not intended to create within its own apparatus any special Jewish section, even though it did consider establishing Jewish bureaus (at the central, district and local level) inter alia within Komunistyczna Partia Galicji Wschodniej [Communist Party of Eastern Galizien] and within KPRP.

The decision to merge Kombund with KPRP was taken at the Jewish consultative meeting mid-February in 1923. A temporary Centralne Biuro Sekcji Żydowskich [Central Bureau of the Jewish Sections] was then established. It consisted of representatives of Wydział Żydowski KC KPRP (which was created in 1919) and elected Kombund activists, inter alia Juliusz Majski (Izaak Zimmerman) and Pinkus Minc (Iwański 1974: 73–75).

The CBSŻ was headed by S. Amsterdam-Henrykowski, who was a former member of Poale Syjon-Lewica. He was of the opinion that it had been a major mistake „not to have completed the critique of the old ideological baggage of Kombund, which was to remind of itself later”<sup>8</sup>. The Kombund members did not break completely with Zionism, and a part of the KPRP members who were of Jewish descent did betray separatist inclinations, which were also discernible in the 1930s. It is to be stressed that the national composition of the Jewish parties was ethnically not homogenous. On the other hand, the Jews belonged to all of the revolutionary parties, both Polish and Ukrainian and Belarusian.

Radicalization similar to that in Bund, took also place within its youth organization called Socjaldemokratyczna Organizacja Młodzieży Przyszłość (Socjaldemokratisze Jugnt-Bund Cukunft). Under the impact of the leftist feelings, the II Cukunft Congress (22 May 1920) made a decision to accede to the Young Communist International (YCI)<sup>9</sup>, which was opposed by Bund. This gave rise to a split

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.; Świetlikowa 1968: 207.

<sup>8</sup> AAN, Autobiografia...

<sup>9</sup> The I YCI Congress took place between 20 and 26 November in 1919 in Berlin.

in Cukunft, as a result of which, on 2 February 1922, Komunistyczna Organizacja Młodzieży Cukunft (Komcukunft) was created – in a manner similar to the earlier process that had resulted in creating Kombund. At that time Komcukunft counted about 3 thousand members. The organization was admitted to the YCI, enjoying the rights of its section. The merger of Komcukunft with Związek Młodzieży Komunistycznej [The Union of Polish Communist Youth] (ZMK) took place in March–April 1923, following an earlier merger of Kombund with KPRP.<sup>10</sup>

The inclusion in KPRP and ZMK of the groups that had split off from Poale Syjon-Lewica and Ferajnigte alongside Kombund's and Komcukunft's accession resulted in a fairly rapid increase of the number of the Jews in the party and its youth organization. The number of the Jews in its rank and file is difficult to estimate. However, taking into account the fact that Kombund counted probably around 2 thousand members, while a few months after its accession, that is in August 1923, KPRP had a little more than 5500 members, it could be hypothesized that there were possibly more than 50% of the Jews in KPRP. Additionally, it is to be remembered that the Jews had belonged to KPRP even before it was joined by Kombund. There were some district organizations that were almost exclusively Jewish or at least with significant shares of the Jews, such as Komitet Okręgowy KPRP Lublin in which the Jews constituted 76,3% members in 1923, while in 1925 – as many as 82,4%. In turn, the KO KPRP Siedlce counted 60% of the Jews in 1923, whereas in June 1924 their share rose to more than 81% (Horoch 1993: 83–85).

This increase in the share of the Jews was even more conspicuous in ZMK which counted around 4 thousand members as of December 1922. After it had been united with Cukunft a few months later, the latter's circa 3 thousand members most probably increased that percentage to at least 60% (Cimek, Kieszczyński 1984: 102–103).

The Jews belonged also, albeit in smaller numbers, to autonomous KPRP organizations that came into existence at the end of 1923 – that is KPZU and KPZB. Those parties were dominated by peasants, but for instance in 1924 KPZU counted 13,3% of the Jewish members, while in Związek Młodzieży Komunistycznej Zachodniej Ukrainy their share

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<sup>10</sup> Krzemień 1972: 55–57; Holzer 1974: 273; Iwański (1974: 58) claims that as of January 1922 Komcukunft counted around 2500 members.

was 25% as of 1926. In November 1924 they constituted 18–20% of KPZB<sup>11</sup>.

The KPRP leadership saw disadvantages that followed from having such numerous Jews among its rank and file. They put forward, *inter alia*, an idea of Polonization of KPRP as well as tighter linkages between CBŻ's activities and those by the main party. Not infrequently the Jews who belonged to those organizations in cities and towns did not have a command of Polish, which reinforced their separatist tendencies<sup>12</sup>. A partial liquidation of CBŻ's autonomy took place as late as the beginning of 1929. Its members had not been nominated by KC KPP as was the case with all of the remaining sections, but had been elected by the Jewish party activists (Piasecka, Auerbach 1965: 45, 48). In the period 1919–1936, the CBŻ KC KPP consisted of 38 individuals, out of which three were also KC KPP members (S. Amsterdam, Aron Lewartowski and Szymon Zachariasz), while one was a deputy KC member – Szymon Gajst (Geist)<sup>13</sup>.

The number of the Jews in KPP could be estimated only for some of the years. Relevant data are included in the district committees' reports but the reports are not complete as far as particular months and years of the period. More source data concerning the national composition had been preserved for KZMP, which is evidenced by Table 2.

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<sup>11</sup> AAN, KPZU, 165/V-10, p. 1, Sprawozd. organizacyjne Sekretariatu KC KPZU za I–II 1924 r.; *ibid.*, KPZB, 163/II/1, p. 1; Krzemień 1972: 222.

<sup>12</sup> Rossijskij Gosudarstwiennyj Archiw Socjalno-Politiczeskoj Istorii (further quoted as RGA), KMM, f. 533, op. 10, d. 2265, p. 108, Sprawozd. Sekretariatu KC ZMK za XII 1924 and I I – 15 II 1925.

<sup>13</sup> The CBŻ membership included: in the period 1919–1920 – Bernard Cukierwar, Salomon Eksztajn, Izrael Gajst (Geist), Symche Segalewicz, Abram Wajcblum and Henryk Zatorski; in the period 1921–1922 – Pinkus Bukshorn, Gerszon Dua-Bogen, Pinkus Fiszer, Aron Lewartowski and H. Zatorski; in the period 1923–1924 – Saul Amsterdam, G. Dua-Bogen, Izaak Gordin-Lenowicz, Abe Szachna Kantor, A. Lewartowski, Julian Majska (Izaak Zimmerman), Pinkus Minc and Szymon Zachariasz; in the period 1925–1927 – S. Amsterdam, Jakub Dar, G. Dua-Bogen, Abe Pflug (Flug), I. Gordin-Lenowicz, A. Kantor, Józef Kawe, A. Lewartowski, J. Majska, Samuel Margolis, Liber Muszyński and S. Zachariasz; in the period 1928–1930 – Ajczenbaum-Arturski, Hersz Lejb Bekerkunst (Bekierkunst), Mojżesz Grynbaum (Grünbaum, Grinbaum), A. Kantor, J. Kawe, S. Lewin, Józef Rabinowicz and Aron Wahl; in the period 1931–1933 – Mojżesz Blank, Feliks Flam, Pinie Gelibter, Helena Gruda (Gitla Rapaport), H. Kirszbaum, Chaim Trebliński, A. Wahl, Abram Zachariasz and Henryk Żołotow; in the period 1934–1936 – Elias Goldfinger, G. Rapaport, Abram Landy, Julian Łazebnik, Dawid Richtrer and Ch. Trebliński (Świetlikowa 1969: 145).

**Table 2. The Jews in KPP and KZMP (until February 1930 Polish ZMK) in the period 1926–1935.<sup>14</sup>**

| Date     | Members             |      |                             |      | Date      | Members             |                   |
|----------|---------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|-----------|---------------------|-------------------|
|          | KPP (in total)      |      | KPP (without KPZB and KPZU) |      |           | KZMP (in total)     |                   |
|          | in absolute numbers | as % | in absolute numbers         | as % |           | in absolute numbers | as %              |
| 1926     | 6200                | •    | 2000                        | •    | VI 1926   | 3700                | 42,0              |
| III 1927 | 6967                | •    | 2500                        | •    | II 1927   | 5200                | •                 |
| VI 1928  | 5062                | •    | 2500 <sup>a</sup>           | •    | VII 1928  | 5000                | 42,0              |
| VI 1930  | 6600                | •    | 3300                        | •    | I 1929    | 6250                | 35,0              |
| III 1931 | 7050                | •    | 4500                        | 26   | II 1930   | 4100                | 50,7              |
| X 1931   | 11 600              | •    | 6800                        | 22   | VIII 1930 | 4900                | 44,2              |
| III 1932 | 15 100              | •    | 8000                        | 30   | VII 1931  | 7000                | 48,0 <sup>b</sup> |
| III 1933 | 17 800              | •    | 9200                        | 26   | XI 1932   | 14 000              | •                 |
| XII 1934 | 17 200              | 22   | 10 300                      | •    | X 1933    | 15 000              | 32,0              |
| XI 1935  | 15 900              | 25   | 8343                        | 22   | VI 1934   | 13 750              | •                 |

a – data dated as of January 1928

b – data dated as of February 1932 for KZMP excluding KZMZB and KZMZU

The data included in Table 2 indicate that the percentage of the Jews in ZMK in the period 1926–1931 was at a relatively stable and high level (43,0% – 44,2%). In the KPP (excluding KPZB and KPZU) it was usually by several percentage points higher. From 1931 onwards the share of the Jews in KPP and KZMP was decreasing to the benefit of the peasants. This resulted from the outlawing of BWR Hromada (1925–1927), ZLCh „Samopomoc” (1928–1931) and Sel-Rob Jedność (1928–1932). Some of those parties’ members, deprived of a possibility to act legally, joined KPP, KPZB, KPZU and KZMP (for more on the topic, see Cimek 1988: 98 and ff.). The case was similar as concerns the membership of youth organizations of the legal parties. In 1930 they gathered more than 20 thousand people, including over 12 thousand Jews (about 60%).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> AAN, MK, 151/VII-1, vol. 13, p. 28; tamże, vol. 16, p. 1, 25; *ibid.*, vol. 17, p. 1; *ibid.*, vol. 19, p. 19; *ibid.*, vol. 22, p. 20; AAN, KPP, 158/I-4/26, p. 66; *ibid.*, 158/I-5/12, p. 3; *ibid.*, 158/V-1/11, p. 39; AAN, KZMP, 159/II, vol. 10, p. 47; *ibid.*, vol. 74, p. 59; *ibid.*, vol. 75, p. 5; *ibid.*, vol. 80, p. 26; *ibid.*, vol. 81, p. 10; *ibid.*, vol. 82, p. 45–47; RGA, f. 533, op. 10, d. 2305, p. 9 and ff.; Cimek 2009: 10 and ff.; 1989: 312, 382–383; Cimek, Kieszczyński 1984: 150, 201; Świetlikowa 1970: 184.

<sup>15</sup> RGA, 533, op. 10, d. 2331, p. 1, 5; AAN, 159/II/79, p. 45.

The process of the peasants' joining the communist parties was inter alia hindered by the negative attitude adopted by some of the Jews – who dominated small town party organizations – regarding agitation activities to be carried out in peasant milieus. Most often they excused themselves with the peasants' anti-Semitism, even though in reality such a phenomenon was not always present. Moreover, the Jews from some local organizations regarded peasants as a „burdensome element” whose understanding is difficult to achieve.<sup>16</sup> As a matter of fact in the area covered by KO Siedlce in 1930, peasants frequently approached KPP activists of Jewish descent, requesting contacts.<sup>17</sup> Factionist politics characteristic of some of the communist activists of Jewish descent made itself known in other parts of the country as well. It was manifest, inter alia, in putting forward a postulate that the peasants should “come” to the city of their own will.<sup>18</sup>

This problem had a wider scope, applying also to KPZU and KPZB. It was broached inter alia by Wincas Mickiewicz, an activist of the CI Executive Committee, who during the IV Plenum of the KC KPZB (in July 1930) said inter alia: „those comrades were right who were talking about sui generis two parties: a Jewish one and a Polish one.<sup>19</sup> In addition, KPZU and KPZB continued to see that there was a problem of party work with the Polish peasants, which was evaluated as insufficient.

KPP and KZMP differed in terms of their national composition in the first half of the 1930s, too. In the period of 1934–1935 KPP counted around 22–25% Jews in total, whereas the remaining members were mainly Poles, Ukrainians and Belarusians. By contrast, within KZMP the Jews constituted the highest share. Since February 1930 until October 1933, this share dropped from 51% to 32%. The second place was held by the Poles, respectively 19% and 33%. There are no precise data for KPP, in which the number of the Jews in Central Poland as of Feb-

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<sup>16</sup> AAN, 158/XII-12/7, p. 6, Sprawozd. KO Płock for the period 15 XI – 15 XII 1932; *ibid.*, 158/XII-17/6, p. 9, Sprawozd. KO Siedlce for IV 1932.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 158/XII-17/4, p. 6, Sprawozd. KO Siedlce za VII–VIII 1930 r.

<sup>18</sup> AAN, 158/XII-6/8, p. 3, Sprawozd. KO Lublin, dane za I 1931 r. The Jewish communists of the KO Ciechanów area had also had to be persuaded that agitation in the rural areas was a must; *ibid.* 158/XII-4/1, p. 2, Sprawozd. z obwodu rolnego za XI–XII 1930 r.

<sup>19</sup> AAN, KPZB, 163/III-34, p. 69. Compare also Mickiewicz's speech during the V KPP Congress; *ibid.* 159/I-5/2, p. 149.

ruary and March of 1931 was estimated at 26%, while in August–October of 1931 at 22%.<sup>20</sup> The proportions in the particular district organizations varied considerably though. This is why the KZMP had difficulty in carrying out agitation in the countryside, facing problems similar to those experienced by KPP. Urban organizations in rural districts were as matter of fact – according to an evaluation by the KC KZMP secretariat – small town Jewish organizations that were „separated from the countryside by a Chinese Wall”<sup>21</sup>. Despite some exaggeration inherent in the opinion, the problem did exist.

The biggest share of the Jews was, however, found in Międzynarodowa Organizacja Pomocy Rewolucjonistom (MOPR) [International Organization of Assistance for the Revolutionaries], which had in its big city constituencies around 6 thousand members in Poland as of 1932. 92% of them were Jewish, whereas in rural constituencies this share was 88%.<sup>22</sup>

The percentage of the Jews was usually higher within KPP’s and KZMP’s leaderships than among their rank and file. During all of the six KPP congress, in total 172 KC members and their deputies were elected, some of whom had been elected more than once (Świetlikowa 1958: 96 and ff.; 1959: 31). In January 1936 the national composition of the central party authorities looked as follows: out of the 19 KC KPP’s members, 11 were Polish, 6 Jewish (31,6%), 1 was Belarusian and 1 Ukrainian; among the 15 members and deputy members of KC KPZB Belarusians were the most numerous – 7, and apart from them 6 were Jewish (40%), 1 Polish and 1 Latvian; out of the 7 KC KPZU’s members 3 were Ukrainian and 3 were Jewish (each 42,9%) plus 1 Polish. Even more Jews were to be found within the ranks of the district KPP activists in 1935 – out of 52 individuals 28 were Jewish (53,8%) and 23 Polish.<sup>23</sup>

The KPP leadership was not satisfied with that national composition, especially in the period when the battle to attract the peasants was going on. According to Sekretariat Krajowy KC KPP, at the beginning of 1936, the share of the Jews in the executive ranks of the whole party and that of KZMP was too big – 54%. Moreover, the

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<sup>20</sup> AAN, 159/II/81, p. 10; Albert 1933: 50.

<sup>21</sup> AAN, 159/II/80, s. 7. Informacje o pracy KZMP, 14 VII 1932 r.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 158/I-6/3, p. 18. Those shares were little changed in the period of 1930–1932, *ibid.* 158/I-5/7, p. 127.

<sup>23</sup> AAN, 151/VII-1, vol. 21, p. 11–13.

share of the Jews in MOPR reached 90%, in the party technical apparatus about 75%, and in the technical apparatus of the Sekretariat and the leadership of KO KPP Warszawa – 100%. Faced with the overwhelming dominance of the executive by petty bourgeoisie and industrialists who were mainly of Jewish descent, Sekretariat Krajowy decided to introduce more industrial workers in the executive structures.<sup>24</sup> It also tried to increase the number of farm workers and peasants among the activists.

Towards the end of 1936 the national composition of KPP leadership was changed even more to the disadvantage of the Poles. According to a written report by KPP leaders on the Party's activities after its IV Plenum (February 1936) in December 1936 the KPP's authorities counted 15 persons (excluding KPZB and KPZU), including 8 Jews (53,3%) and 7 Poles. Moreover, among the 15 district committees' secretaries, out of their total number which was 18, 8 were of Jewish descent (53,3%), while 7 of Polish descent. A year earlier, in February 1936, there were 30 members and deputy members of KC KPP, including 15 Poles, 12 Jews (40%), 2 Ukrainians and 1 Belarusian. Added KC KPZB and KC KPZU (excluding deputy members of KC), there were 52 persons, out of whom: 21 Jews (40,4%), 17 Poles (32,7%), 8 Belarusians (15,4%), 5 Ukrainians (9,6%) and one Lithuanian (1,9%). In the central executive, publishing apparatus and technical apparatus of Sekretariat Krajowy, the percentage of the Jews was even higher, respectively 53%, 75% and 100%.<sup>25</sup>

The share of the national minorities was growing also among the delegates to KPP congresses, resulting in decreasing participation of delegates of Polish origin who constituted 85,5% in 1923 to drop to 59,8% in 1932. Such a conclusion follows from the data included in Table 3.

The biggest increase in the share of the delegates to KPP congresses applied to the Jews: from 7 persons in 1923 to 23 persons in 1932. In reality there were many more of the Jews if one were to add on top of this a group of Poles of Jewish descent, since, as exemplified by II KPRP Congress, apart from 7 Jews, there were 14 Poles of Jewish descent there (*II Zjazd...* 1968: 310).

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 158/V-3/49, p. 22, List z domu, 13 I 1936 r.

<sup>25</sup> RGA, MK, f. 495, op. 123, d. 223, p. 67–68, 134 and ff; *ibid.*, op. 18, d. 1128, p. 216.

**Table 3. The national composition of participants in KPP congresses\***

| Nationality        | Congresses     |       |                |       |                |       |                |       |                |       |
|--------------------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|----------------|-------|
|                    | II             |       | III            |       | IV             |       | V              |       | VI             |       |
|                    | No. of persons | %     |
| Poles              | 59             | 85,5  | 44             | 73,3  | 67             | 70,5  | 44             | 65,7  | 52             | 59,8  |
| Jews               | 7              | 10,1  | 8              | 13,3  | 15             | 15,8  | 12             | 17,9  | 23             | 26,4  |
| Ukrainians         | 1              | 1,4   | 5              | 8,3   | 8              | 8,4   | 5              | 7,4   | 4              | 4,6   |
| Belarusians        | 1              | 1,4   | 3              | 5,0   | 4              | 4,2   | 3              | 4,5   | 8              | 9,2   |
| Germans and others | 1              | 1,4   | –              | –     | –              | –     | 2              | 3,0   | –              | –     |
| Data n/a           | –              | –     | –              | –     | –              | 1,0   | 1              | 1,5   | –              | –     |
| In total           | 69             | 100,0 | 60             | 100,0 | 95             | 100,0 | 67             | 100,0 | 87             | 100,0 |

\* Szczygielski 1989: 84.

The growth of the number of delegates-Jews to participate in KPP congresses was accompanied by a drop in the already small share of delegates who came from peasant families: from 8,5% at the II Congress to 7,7% at the VI Congress of KPP. In addition, only few peasants were members of KC KPP. According to data from January 1936, only one peasant was a KC KPP member, whereas there were none at all within KC KPZU. Such was the state of affairs even though the total number of the peasants in the parties had risen, for example in 1932 they constituted 50% of KZMP membership and around 49–54% of KPP membership (as a whole).<sup>26</sup>

Analyzing the national composition of KPP and KZMP, one could reach the conclusion that membership of those groupings consisted mainly of national minorities, first of all of the Jews, and to a lesser extent of the Belarusians and the Ukrainians. The share of Poles in KPP and KZMP oscillated around 30%, whereas their share in the population of the II Polish Republic was about 69%. The party data and estimations suggest that the shares of the national minorities in the communist rank and file, including the Jews, considerably varied in particular years. In 1933, when the number of the Jews in the communist movement in Poland was diminished to the advantage of the peasants, among the 32 800 KPP and KZMP members there were more than 8400 Jews in total.

<sup>26</sup> Szczygielski 1989: 85; AAN, 159/II/80, p. 26; *ibid.*, 151/VII-1, vol. 19, p. 18 and ff.

It is difficult to evaluate the role of the Jews in the communist movement in Poland in an unequivocal manner. KPP was attractive for them mainly because of its combat against class oppression and oppression driven by the nationality factor. Some of the Jewish activists creatively contributed to the development of KPP's political thought, for example as regards its revolutionary strategy and parliamentary strategy. The Jewish communists – not all of them, which is to be stressed – cherished, however, just as the Ukrainian communists, separatist and nationalist tendencies in spite of the slogans emphasizing interests of the international proletariat to which the IC was dedicated. Initially those tendencies showed in their attempts to create a separate Jewish communist party in Poland alongside KPP. After they realized that their plans would not succeed, part of the Jewish communists made efforts to preserve their autonomy within KPRP which was to be safeguarded by establishing Centralne Biuro Żydowskie [Central Jewish Bureau]. The Jewish dominance within KPP and KZMP leadership reinforced the negative attitude of the communists to the II Polish Republic, although some of the communists of Jewish descent did recognize the need to defend its independence. By contrast, some others, under the impact of factional and dogmatic tendencies, pressed for the national minorities' interests at the expense of the Polish ones. Also, they clearly manifested their unwillingness to carry out ideological work and agitation in the countryside. Incidentally, the most notorious agent of the political police working inside the communist movement in Poland – Józef-Josek Mützenmacher – was a Jew, too.

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