

## The Activities of the Council for Aid to Jews ("Żegota") In Occupied Poland

Joseph Kermish

Shortly after its establishment in December 1942, the Council for Aid to Jews (known by its code-name "Żegota") became one of the most active and dedicated organizations operating in the underground in occupied Poland. In spite of the grave dangers which its workers faced daily, and the frequent crises as a result of the discovery of the Council's clandestine apartments, the arrest of its leaders and workers, and the constant fear of the Gestapo, the Council was able to extend aid to Jewish survivors, and the cooperation between the Polish and Jewish members of the Council was very close. Thousands of Jews were saved from death as a result of the systematic and ramified work carried on by the Council until the liberation, and its cooperation with the Jewish National Committee and the Bund.

The Poles in both camps – those in Poland as well as those in exile – are proud of the achievements of "Żegota", which constituted part of the underground in Poland, and Polish historiography has greatly overestimated its accomplishments.

Prof. Madajczyk exaggerated the extent of the aid extended by Poles to Jews in order to prove that the rescue of Jews was a common phenomenon in occupied Poland. Thus he ignored the role played by certain elements of the Polish population in the deportation and liquidation of the Jews. He also exaggerated the amounts of money which "Żegota" allegedly received from the underground authorities thirty-seven million zlotys and an additional fifty thousand dollars.

Another writer, Iranek-Osmecki, exaggerated to an even greater extent. "Underground Poland", he wrote, "in spite of its being engaged in a struggle with the conqueror, established a large-scale organization [the reference is to "Żegota"] with its own administration and executive apparatus, which provided the Jews with hiding places, communications by messengers and radio with the West, and also supplied them with arms and money". The same author

also asserted that “hundreds of thousands of Poles proved their attitude to the Jews by sincere sacrifice”, and concluded that “it would not be exaggerated to state that millions of Poles had to be involved in order to save several tens of thousands of Jews”.

Even eyewitnesses who were themselves members of “Żegota”, such as Ferdynand Arczyński and Tadeuz Rek, overestimated the number of Jews saved by the organization. Another eyewitness, Witold Bieńkowski, a leader of the Catholic underground group, “Front for a Reborn Poland” (Front Odrodzenia Polski – F.O.P.), who was a member of the Provisional Committee of “Żegota” and the permanent representative of the Government’s Delegate on the Council, also exaggerated the achievements of “Żegota”. He declared that in his capacity as the person responsible for the execution of extortionists, he personally signed 117 death sentences, of which 89 were carried out, and that a total of 220 people were executed for blackmailing offences according to the statistics in his possession.

It is now possible to refute these tendentious claims on the basis not only of Jewish documentation (the reports and surveys of the Jewish National Committee and of the Blund which were sent abroad), but mainly using the records of “Żegota”, and it is our duty to do so. The documents preserved in the “Żegota” archives (copies of which are available on microfilm in the Yad Vashem Archives) include the minutes of Council meetings; reports by its representatives in the provincial cities; weekly news bulletins issued by the Council, which include figures and data on the current activities of the Council; and very important documents relating to the pressure which “Żegota” applied in order to convince the Delegate of the Polish Government-in-Exile to increase its subsidy for relief activities to help the Jews and of the need to launch a decisive struggle (including death sentences) against extortion and informing by Poles, which had become a common phenomenon. Incidentally, considerable significance was attached to the information concerning events in which Jewish underground fighters participated.

A number of important documents related to our subject, which were found in the archives of the Jewish National Committee, established by Dr. Adolf (Abraham) and Batya Berman, were published by the former in his work

“The Jews on the Aryan Side”, (Enziklopedia shel Galuyot, Vol. I, “Warsaw”, Jerusalem, 1953).

On the other hand, the archives of the Jewish Fighting Organization on the Aryan side of Warsaw (in its bases on 5 Panska Street and 18 Leszno Street) have not been recovered. They included correspondence with official bodies, letters exchanged with prisoners in the concentration and work camps, about 2,000 testimonies by Jews in the Aryan sector, memoirs, etc.

It is important to deal initially with the establishment of “Żegota” and the motivation for its creation. During the large-scale deportations, various sectors of the Polish public evinced a desire to help the Jews. The initiative came from Catholic circles and from one of the democratic groups in the underground. In August 1942, at the height of the large-scale deportations from Warsaw, the Catholic organization F.O.P. published a declaration of protest which in harsh terms condemned:

“the murder of millions of defenseless human beings which was being conducted amidst hostile general silence. The hangmen are silent, they do not exult in their deeds; England and America do not raise their voices – even the highly influential international Jewry, which was always so sensitive to every evil act directed against it, keeps silent; and the Poles are also silent...”

Under these circumstances, the proclamation continued, Polish Catholics must raise their voice in protest, although their feelings toward the Jews have not changed nor have they ceased to regard the latter as the political, economic, and ideological enemies of Poland. On the other hand, they have also noticed that the Jews hate them more than they do the Germans. Nevertheless they asserted that:

“This sensitive consciousness does not exempt us from denouncing the crime. We do not wish to be Pilates... we are unable to do anything against the murderous German action, we are unable to take action to save one person, but we protest from the depths of our hearts, full of

compassion, anger and dread. This protest is demanded of us by the Almighty God who forbade killing. It is demanded by Christian conscience”.

One of the principal initiators of the activities to help the Jews was the well-know Catholic writer Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, authoress of historical novels, who was active in the Polish underground and was later interned in Auschwitz (1943-1944). Although she was known for her right-wing, conservative, and religious views, the bitter fate suffered by the Jews made such an impression on her that she deemed it her Christian duty to help them. She set to work with great fervor and to a large extent was responsible for the formation, on September 27, 1942, of the “Konrad Żegota Committee”, a code name for the Provisional Committee for Aid to Jews. Two others who played a leading role on the Committee were Wanda Krahelska-Filipowicz (“Alinka”), a Democrat, wife of the former Polish Ambassador to Washington, and the lawyer Jozef Barski, a Catholic and conservative, who prior to the war had not been considered a friend of the Jews. He also underwent a crisis of conscience as a result of the annihilation of the Jews and personally endangered his life to save Jews.

The Provisional Committee conducted its operations on a very limited scale, as it lacked broad public support. It received a very small subsidy – practically a token sum – of 50,000 zlotys per month from the Delegate of the Government-in-Exile. The Committee assumed responsibility for 180 Jews in hiding (mostly children), 90 of whom were in Warsaw. Aid was extended to a dozen people in Cracow, and three children were brought from there to Warsaw.

The first meetings of the Committee for Aid to Jews were held in October 1942. One of the subjects discussed was the role of the Jewish representatives in the relief organization. The Committee and the Bund should have the same rights on the Provisional Committee as the representatives of the Polish organizations – F.O.P., Democratic Party (a progressive party of radical Polish intelligentsia and small groups of bourgeoisie), Peasants’ Party and the right-wing Freedom Equality Independence (Wolność Równość

Niepodległość – W.R.N.) faction of the Polish Socialist Party (P.P.S.). The representatives of the Jewish Coordinating Committee (made up of members of the Jewish National Committee and the Bund), however, believed that the relief agency must represent the entire population, Poles and Jews alike. The firm stand taken on this issue by the representatives of the Jewish underground – “Berezowski” (Dr. Leon Feiner of the Bund) and “Borowski” (Dr. Adolf Berman of the Jewish National Committee) – as well as the lack of financial means to conduct rescue activities, led to the dissolution of the Provisional Committee. At the same time, a plan was drawn up for the creation of a Council which would have the broadest possible public support.

On December 4, 1942, a clandestine Council for Aid to Jews – the “Żegota” Council – was established by representatives of the Polish parties operating in the underground – socialists, peasants, democrats, and Catholics, as well as delegates of the Jewish Coordinating Committee. Its composition was as follows:

Chairman – Julian Grobelny (“Trojan”), a veteran worker of the P.P.S. in Lodz.  
Vice-Chairman – Tadeusz Rek (“Rozycki”), editor of the underground organ of the Struggle for Victory Party (Przez walke to zwyciestwa) from July 1942, and one of the outstanding leaders of the Peasants’ Party; the lawyer Leon Feiner (“Mikolaj Berezowski”), who had won fame as a defence attorney at political trials, one of the leaders of the left wing of the Bund, a former prisoner in the Bereza-Kartuska camp, a brave and energetic person, who had a distinctly “Polish” appearance;

Secretary-General – Dr. Adolf Berman (“Adam Borowski”), who since October 1942 had been a member of the Presidium of the Jewish National Committee and served as the Director of “Centos” (Orphans’ Aid Union) in the ghetto until the dissolution of the organizations caring for Jewish children;

Treasurer – Ferdynand Arcyński (“Marek Lukowski”), an active member of the Democratic Party who did a great deal to help rescue Jews;

Members of the Council – the engineer Emilia Hizowa (“Barbara”), a Democratic Party activist, and Witold Bieńkowski (“Jan Kalski”), a Catholic publicist and F.O.P. activist, who represented the Government Delegate.

Another person who took part in the initial activities of the Council was Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, a young Catholic, who had been imprisoned in Auschwitz from September 1940 to April 1941. Bartoszewski was a member of the Information and Propaganda Bureau of the armed combat organization Z.W.Z. which eventually became the Home Army (Armia Krajowa – A.K.) and was one of the organizers of the Jewish Section in the International Affairs Department of the Office of the Government Delegate. The Catholic movement, however, only participated in the work of the Council for a brief period. The doubts and reservations within the movement concerning relief activities for the Jews became evident later on, and in July 1943, the F.O.P. withdrew from the Council.

On the other hand, Piotr Gajewski, a representative of the left wing of the Polish socialists, which at time were already known as the R.P.P.S. – Polish Workers' Socialist Party, joined the Council toward the end of 1944. It should be noted that the Labor Party (Stronnictwo Pracy) and the Syndicalists were not represented on the Council. The two most active workers in “Żegota” were the General Secretary and the Treasurer. They employed two secretaries, the lawyer Dr. Paulina Hauzmann (“Alicja”), and Janina Wasowicz (“Ewa”), both of whom were members of the Democratic Party. In addition, tens of dedicated and loyal supporters of the Polish underground took part in the Council's various activities. Many Polish underground activists in the provincial towns cooperated with the Council in the operations to rescue Jews.

The Council had at its disposal six secret apartments in which it conducted its office work and held meetings. From December 1942 to January 1945, the Council held 61 plenary sessions, over 100 meetings of the Presidium, more than 30 meetings of the Control Committee, and a large number of meetings of the Council's special departments and committees. To ensure secrecy, the Council changed its residence from time to time. It also had secret mailboxes, as well as hiding-places for the storage of documents.

During the initial months of its existence, the Council extended aid only to Jews living in the Aryan quarter and the ghetto, but it later extended the scope of its activities. The Council had two basic goals in expanding its work –

material aid to Jews living on the Aryan side, and aid in “legalization”, i.e. obtaining Aryan documents for the Jews in hiding.

The large majority of the Jews on the Aryan side were unable to earn a living because they had a distinctly Jewish appearance, did not know Polish well enough, were afraid of extortionists, etc. Only a small number of Jews had substantial material resources, but they were usually soon depleted due to the numerous expenses involved in living in hiding and the rising prices. The majority of the Jews who fled to the Aryan side during the days of the large-scale deportations were poor people, members of the working intelligentsia, laborers, etc.

The many acts of blackmail economically ruined hundreds of people and were it not for the relief afforded by the Council they would have died of hunger. Indeed all those who approached the Council for aid were helped – either directly or through the organizations represented on “Żegota”. The average subsidy was 500 zlotys per person per month. It was by no means a large sum, nor could it even assure a minimal existence, but in any event it did help those in need. In special cases, such as impoverishment due to extortion, or if public or cultural leaders were involved, larger grants were provided. There were also instances, however, in which the Council, plagued by financial difficulties due to the tremendous increase in the number of the needy, was compelled to reduce the average monthly grants to 300-400 zlotys per person.

During the initial stages of its work, the Council received funds for its relief activities only from the Delegation of the Polish Government in London. Due to the pressure and urgent demands of the Council, the Delegation raised its monthly remittance from 50,000 to 150,000 zlotys, and later to 300,000-400,000 zlotys and more. Yet even this amount was merely a drop in the bucket. The Council could not expand the scope of its activities until July 1943 when the Jewish organizations – the Jewish National Committee and the Bund – began to receive relief funds sent directly from abroad. (In spite of the many secret messages, warnings, and appeals to the Jewish organizations abroad, no aid was sent for many months and the first payments from abroad arrived only in June 1943). From that time on, the Coordinating Committee of

the Jewish National Committee and the Bund gave the Council 100,000 zlotys per month for its relief activities, and eventually significantly increased this amount. (In its memorandum of September 5, 1943, the Council reported that the Coordinating Committee had increased its monthly grant from 100,000 to 150,000 zlotys).

Both the Jewish National Committee and the Bund conducted their own large-scale relief operations. It should be noted that during the period of the most intensive activities (in May 1944), the Jewish National Committee, the largest Jewish relief organization in Warsaw, had over 100 cells which cared for 5,000 Jews. Incidentally, it is estimated that the number of Jews living on the Aryan side of the capital city in 1944 was at least 15,000, and if we take into account the Jews living in the environs of the city, the total reached 20,000. The Committee also dealt with relief activity for the Jews in camps in the provincial areas and undertook to rescue the more important leaders who were interned in the camps. Until funds were received from abroad, the Jewish organizations received grants from the Council for their relief activities, but from June 1943, they allocated grants to the Council out of their own funds.

After the liquidation of the ghetto, in the latter half of 1943 and in 1944, when the number of those requiring assistance increased, the Council's budget was again greatly augmented. In addition, the Council, like other Jewish bodies, extended aid to Jews in the rural areas (see below).

The task of preparing "Aryan" documents for Jews was also very important. During the initial phase of its activities, the Council was aided by "legalization cells" of the underground organizations, which employed about ten people for this purpose. The method used, however, proved to be inefficient and consequently, upon the initiative of Arczynski and under his supervision, the Council organized a separate cell, which was headed by Leon Weiss ("Leon") and which employed six "professionals". They produced thousands of birth certificates, identity cards (Kennkarten) issued by the occupation authorities, residence permits, a variety of work permits, etc. For certain very important cases, the Council used government documents issued by the German authorities and even S.S. and Gestapo certificates. The



workmanship on these documents was on a very high level. The Secretariat of the Council collected thousands of orders from all the Polish and Jewish organizations and the relief cells connected with the Council.

The staff of the Legalization Office were constantly in danger. They always worked with their weapons nearby ready for use, and more than one of them fell at his post. The head of the Council's documents "factory" was a former district governor (starosta) of one of the cities in Poland, who had professional experience in this field. He worked diligently and loyally until he fell into the hands of the Gestapo and was shot. The Council distributed thousands of Aryan documents free of charge to Jews in Warsaw and the vicinity; thousands were sent to the provincial towns and camps as well as to Jews in hiding in other cities.

It should be noted that the Jewish National Committee, besides sending substantial sums of money to the secret committees active in the Poniatowa and Trawniki concentrations camps, smuggled – together with "Żegota" – scores of sets of "Aryan" papers, stamps (to fill out the documents properly), cameras, crucifixes, Catholic medallions, prayer books, and New Testaments into these camps in order to help fleeing Jews conceal their identity.

The Council was particularly concerned about the plight of Jewish children, toward whom the Germans were especially cruel. On January 30, 1943, the Council urged the Delegate to take the thousands of Jewish children who had survived the previous liquidation operations out of the ghetto, but the appeal remained unanswered. While the ghetto was still in existence, many Jewish parents tried to save their children by sending them over to the Aryan side. The number of youngsters involved reached sizeable proportions during the first Aktion and especially immediately afterwards – during the latter half of 1942 and the beginning of 1943. A number of parents were able to get their children to the Aryan sector by paying large sums of money to Polish smugglers, policemen, and the like. Others turned to the Polish underground, especially through its leaders, who were connected with the Social Aid Department of the Warsaw Municipality, the Child Care Section of the Central Council for Social Aid as well as to Catholic organizations which had access to the Child Care Councils of the Church, monasteries, etc. In this way,

hundreds of Jewish children were smuggled out of the ghetto to the Aryan side.

The function of “Żegota” special department for children, established in the wake of a proposal made by Dr. Berman at a meeting held on July 10, 1943, was first of all to care for orphaned and abandoned children and place them in institutions or with families. Irena Sandlerowa (“Jolanta”), and excellent underground leader and one of the members of the staff of the Social Aid Department. Under her professional and vigorous direction, and with the assistance of a bevy of other female workers, the Council’s projects for children developed successfully in spite of the many obstacles. Due to the bold and exemplary assistance rendered by the author Jan Dobraczyński, Director of the Child Care Section in the Social Aid Department of the Warsaw Municipality, the Jewish children were secretly placed in Polish orphanages and monasteries.

According to information gathered by the department, there were about 600 Jewish children in various institutions in Warsaw and its environs by the end of 1943, among them 53 children in municipal establishments, 22 in institutions of the Polish relief organization – Central Council for Social Aid (Rada Główna Opiekuńcza – R.G.O.) – and over 500 in public and ecclesiastical institutions. In addition, there were many children scattered in other institutions. In addition, there were many children scattered in other institutions throughout the country. The department’s report stated, for example, that in September 1943 it had dealt with the placement of 58 children. On December 23, 1944, the Council applied to the Delegate with regard to granting aid to hostels in which there were 100 Jewish children.

The Council set up a separate department headed by Stefan Sendlak, a P.P.S. leader, to handle the relief operation in the provinces. The department worked together with the Jewish National Committee, which was in close touch with the Jews in a number of camps. It also sent special couriers in order to maintain contact with Lodz, to which access was extremely difficult, and with other towns such as Radom, Kielce, Piotrków, etc. from whence they were able to reach the work camps (in Czestochowa, Radom, Piotrków, Skarżysko, Starachowice near Kielce, and Plaszów near Cracow) and bring a

certain amount of aid to the Jewish inmates. One of the most active messengers in this area was the poet and journalist Tadeusz Sarnecki (his pen-name was Jan Wajdelota) who was connected with the Democratic Party. He and his wife Ewa served as contacts with the Jews of the ghettos and concentration camps in the vicinity of Radom and Lublin.

The extension of activities throughout Poland, however, encountered serious difficulties. It was only in April 1943, that upon the initiative of the Central Council, a district council was established for the city and region of Cracow. The Council in Cracow gave aid to 91 Jews – including 79 wards of the W.R.N., three of the Popular Peasant Party, two of the Democratic and seven of the Delegation – and also kept in touch by messenger with a number of ghettos and camps in the area. The Council in that city received a monthly subsidy of tens of thousands of zlotys. The allocation for May 1943 was 30,000 zlotys (individual subsidies were 400 zlotys and in June they received 50,000 zlotys, at a time when 320,000 zlotys were required to cover relief needs and rescue the Jewish survivors in the city of Cracow).

In September 1943, a district council was formed in Lwow and it was allotted 60,000 zlotys, but the grant did not reach its destination because the female courier was arrested. There was also a relief committee in Zamość, which at first helped ten Jews in hiding, but later extended relief to 100 individuals. At the beginning of 1943, there were 193 children in hiding in the Zamość-Lublin district but at the end of that year the number of those requiring assistance had risen to 220. The cooperation given in the Lublin area by the socialist combat organization, Socjalistyczna Organizacja Bojowa (S.O.B.) in the Lublin area, within whose ranks quite a few Jews hid, is noteworthy.

The Council established a special medical department in order to ensure that the hideouts of the Jews who fell ill would not be detected. Reliable doctors, who were fully acquainted with the nature of this clandestine operation, visited and treated the patients. Prior to entering the lodgings where the Jewish patients were hiding, the doctors used prearranged passwords to prove that they were not strangers, but members of the underground.

The problem of housing was most difficult due to the German terror, and the fact that anyone caught concealing Jews was sentenced to death. Moreover, there were many cases of extortion and blackmail. The exorbitant rents also impeded a solution of the housing problem. Consequently, the Council had to devote much time and extensive means to alleviate the situation, and it even set up a special department for this purpose. Nevertheless, the aid in this respect was insignificant. The purchase of apartments was too expensive and did not always solve the problem, since if the dwelling were discovered by blackmailers it could no longer be used. Thus those who sought to hide themselves or others were compelled to operate on their own, with the help of personal acquaintances or friends, in order to overcome these difficulties.

The Propaganda Department of the Council, which had been set up in order to influence the public to extend aid to Jews, issued four leaflets during 1943, three of which were addressed to the Polish population (25,000 copies). The fourth was published in German (8,000 copies), under the pretense that it was issued by a clandestine German organization. These leaflets were distributed among the houses, posted on walls in Warsaw and provincial towns, and sent to various offices. In addition, the Council published underground bulletins on what was happening to the Jews and about Jewish acts of resistance – information it reprinted from journals published by the Socialists and the Democrats.

The Council, it should be noted, also did a great deal to distribute underground publications on Jewish subjects – for propaganda purposes and to help Jewish relief operations. According to the minutes of the Council meeting of November 27, 1943, all 4,000 copies of the now-renowned bulletin, “Before the Eyes of the World” (*Na oczach świata*), which deals with the martyrology and armed struggle of Warsaw Jewry and was published by the *Armia Krajowa*, were distributed. As a precautionary measure, the place and date of publication were listed as “Zamość 1932”. The Catholic authoress Maria Kann, wrote and assembled the material, which included a series of documents and reports by Polish and Jewish eyewitnesses and observers, and it had a great effect on Polish readers. Special mention should be made

of the evaluation of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in the chapter “In the Steps of Bar Kochba”. Nonetheless, Jewish underground leaders who were on the Aryan side – Dr. Emmanuel Ringelblum, Yitzhak Zukerman (“Antek”), and Dr. Adolf Berman – saw fit to convey their critical comments on a number of inaccuracies which appeared in the bulletin regarding the history of the Jewish people, as well as general tendencies which they considered fallacious, to the “Żegota” Council and the Government Delegation.

In May 1944, the Coordinating Committee published a frightening booklet entitled “A Year in Treblinka”, written by Yankel Wiernik, one of the participants in the Treblinka uprising. This publication (3,000 copies) was also circulated with the help of “Żegota” and was smuggled abroad.

The Propaganda Department of “Żegota” also circulated a small book of poems (22 pages) by Polish and Jewish poets on the struggle and destruction of Polish Jewry, which was published by the Jewish National Committee in the early months of 1944. This small collection of poems, made up of ten poems and one elegy, “Lament After the Death of Martyrs”, was sent to Batya and Dr. Berman through the channels of the Jewish and Polish resistance, with the help of the Polish author of Jewish origin Adolf Rudnicki. Five thousands copies were printed in the printing works of the Polish Democratic Party with the aid of “Marek” Arcyński, the treasurer of “Żegota”. (According to the minutes of the meeting of November 27, 1942, all the copies were distributed).

The Council was powerless in the face of the plague of blackmailing, which became a serious menace for all the Jews in hiding on the Aryan side, due to the refusal of the underground leaders to help in the struggle. Following the liquidation operations in the ghetto, the scourge of blackmail and extortion became even more severe. Large gangs of blackmailers called Schmatzowniki, as well as informers, roamed through Warsaw and its environs and lay in wait for Jews concealed on the Aryan side, as well as for those who provided them with shelter. Polish policemen who were members of the extremist anti-Semitic organizations joined these gangs, as did Polish agents of the Gestapo and the Kripo, smugglers, speculators, and various criminal underworld types. The victims were ruthlessly stripped of their belongings and robbed of their cash, jewellery, and clothes. At best, the Jews

would lose their dwellings and be compelled to flee for their lives; more than once the victims would return to the ghetto, as long as its existed, and die there. The most dangerous blackmailers and informers were the members of the Polish anti-Semitic fascist organizations such as Szaniec (The Wall) and Miecz I Plug (Sword and Plough), who did their despicable work for its own sake, without any remuneration.

The Gestapo and Kripo offered cash rewards for any Jew caught hiding. Hardly a day passed without Jews being blackmailed and, in many cases, being forced to relinquish their last possessions. It often happened that individuals or families were victimized by extortionists time after time and very often these Jews either committed suicide or were killed by the Germans after being handed over by the blackmailers.

The “Żegota” Council repeatedly appealed to the government representatives to undertake a systematic and rapid campaign against the blackmailers (see, for example, the letters of the Council to the Government Delegate dated the end of March and April 6, 1943), and called upon them to publicly announce that anyone caught engaging in blackmail would be sentenced to death. Indeed, official announcements of this sort were published several times in the underground press. The Command in Charge of Civilian Struggle, (Kierownictwo Walki Cywilnej – K. W.C.) which was under the control of the Government Delegate, published an announcement on March 18, 1943 condemning those who blackmailed Jews and/or Poles who aided Jews. A strongly-worded article also appeared in the March 1943 issue of Prawda, the journal of the Catholic Front, inveighing against blackmailing. Similar articles were published in the official underground organ Rzeczpospolita Polska (March 6, 1943): the journal of the W.R.N. (March 21, 1943); and in Nowas Droga (February 7, 1944). In addition, the Council itself issued leaflets from time to time censuring acts of blackmail and robbery and calling upon the public to help the Jews against the extortionists.

The pressure of the Council and Jewish organizations in regard to this issue was so strong that, in August and September of 1943, two proclamations appeared one after the other signed by the “Polish Independence Organizations”, (which were actually bodies represented on

“Żegota”), concerning the blackmail operations and the need to aid the Jews. Both manifestos were circulated in large numbers among all sectors of the Polish population.

Nonetheless, the warnings issued by official circles in March 1943 and on January 31, 1944, which stated that acts of extortion against Jews were punishable crimes in accordance with the laws of the Polish Republic and that the punishment for extortion would in certain cases be carried out on the spot, remained on paper alone. The execution of death sentences against the blackmailers responsible for the deaths of ten of thousands of Jews and notices posted on walls as well as in the underground press, would certainly have made an impression, but this was never done.

On April 6, 1943, in view of the tremendous increase in the cases of blackmail, the Council appealed to the Delegate to least publicize – as widely as possible by street posters – a number of fictitious death sentences, but this request also went unanswered.

On July 12, 1943, the Council asked the Government Delegation to provide a list of the cases of blackmail which were referred to the Special Tribunal (the number of verdicts handed down and how many had been executed). On August 9, 1943, the Council received a reply that only eight such cases had been submitted to the Tribunal. On September 4, 1943, Witold Bieńkowski (“Wencki”), the representative of the Government Delegate on “Żegota”, informed the Council of the execution of Boris Pilnik, the leader of a blackmail gang who had previously been sentenced to death by the underground, and the confiscation of important material found in his possession. It should also be noted that the Polish underground also executed Jacek Gonczarek, a Kripo agent and blackmailer. Several death sentences passed against blackmailers and informers were announced in November 1943. Several others verdicts were handed down and executed in 1944 “for the crime of collaboration with the conqueror in the persecution of Polish citizens of Jewish origin”. (The execution of a death sentence handed down by the Special Civilian Tribunal against a Pole convicted of killing two Jews was announced on March 9, 1944).

It should be noted that there were very few blackmailers and informers who persecuted Jews among the thousands of collaborators executed by the Polish underground. The Council, as well as the representatives of the Jewish resistance movement, more than once expressed their dissatisfaction with this state of affairs, and they were especially perturbed because these sentences were not announced on street posters, but only in the underground press.

The failure to punish the extortionists led to more wild behavior on their part and an increase in the scope of their criminal activities. Following the suppression of the Warsaw Ghetto revolt and the bloody destruction of the ghetto, the situation on the Aryan side deteriorated noticeably. As more and more Jews made their way to the Aryan sector, the Gestapo and Kripo sent squads of plainclothesmen to the streets to hunt down the Jews and those who gave them refuge. A new wave of anti-Semitism swept the city and the plague of blackmail became much worse. This atmosphere was reinforced by the political changes which took place in the Polish underground. General Rowecki (“Grot”), commander of the underground Z.W.Z., the combat organization that united military groups and organizations, was arrested by the Gestapo at the end of June 1943 and was replaced by General Bór-Komorowski.

The Prime Minister of the Polish Government-in-Exile, General Wladyslaw Sikorski, was killed in a plane crash over Gibraltar under mysterious circumstances on July 5, 1943. He was succeeded as Prime Minister by Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, the leader of the Peasant Party, and as Chief of Staff by General Sosnkowski. This development immediately had strong repercussions in the underground movement in Poland. The Z.W.Z., which had become the Home Army (A.K.), was under the influence of the Sanacja political bloc and anti-Soviet political elements. The ranks of the National Armed Forces (Narodowe Sily Zbrojne – N.S.Z.), which had been founded at the end of 1942, began to swell. It was the adherents of the National Radical Camp (Oboz Narodowo-Radykalny – O.N.R.), the “Falanga” group, and other organizations who sowed the seeds of blatant Nazism in Poland. There was little difficulty in disseminating propaganda against Jews and Communists in this poisoned atmosphere, under the patronage of the Nazi authorities. Under



these conditions, the Catholic “Front for Polish Rebirth” withdrew from “Żegota”.

It should be noted that the attitude of the Government Delegate, Jankowski, a leader of the Labor Party, toward “Żegota” was, according to its chairman, generally restrained, and increasingly “cool” according to the minutes of the Council meeting of November 27, 1943. The Council, however, did not cease to demand redress from the Delegate. In its letter of September 9, 1943 to Jankowski, the Council praised the contributions of the Jewish organizations in “Żegota” – initially 100,000 zlotys a month and subsequently 150,000 zlotys a month. The Council therefore requested that the budget be increased to one million zlotys, the amount required to cover its most minimal needs. During interviews with the Delegate, Council representatives expressed their dissatisfaction with the inadequate allocations, which made it impossible to distribute essential relief, even to those who were already under the Council’s care. They also warned of the hostility vis-à-vis the activities to aid Jews. Dr Berman. Declared during an interview on October 28, 1943 that:

“The Germans murdered three millions Jews and the Council is giving its help to no more than 1,000-1,500 people. It is a drop in the ocean”.

During the same interview, Tadeusz Rek, the Deputy Chairman of the Council, declared that the Council’s budget made it impossible to meet the great and growing needs and that the aid given by the Council had shrunk to 300-350 zlotys per individual per month.

In a letter written to the Delegate on the same day, the Council emphasized the fact that due to the devaluation of the currency and the increases in the prices of the essential food commodities, the relief grants given to the needy were in effect merely symbolic. “It should be objectively stated”. Rek asserted bitinglly at that interview, “that the overwhelming majority of Polish society are hostile toward those extending relief [to the Jews]”. The Council representative insisted that the Delegate should create a more favorable atmosphere, vis-à-vis this operation through the underground press and by means of propaganda.

No response was made to these demands. The Delegate exploited the occasions when the Council representatives came to see him to express his surprise at “the lack of response” by world Jewry to the Holocaust. The first time the Delegate made such a statement, was on April 28, 1943, in a conversation with “Żegota” representatives during the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. He subsequently repeated these allegations at his meetings with them on October 28, 1943, and in April 1944.

It must be pointed out that the Jewish survivors were preoccupied with the question of why the great democracies were not prepared to exert the slightest effort to save the remnants of the Jewish people. That was the reason that Zsmul Zygielbojm, the Bund leader, committed suicide in London during the Warsaw Ghetto revolt. His intention was to protest against the indifference of the Allies toward the destruction of the Jewish people, and his act made a deep impression on the Jewish survivors in occupied Poland. The Jewish National Committee gave appropriate expression to these sentiments in its message to Jewish organizations abroad toward the end of 1943:

“Vengeance for the blood of three million Jews will be sought not only from the Hitlerite beasts of prey but also from those indifferent and reluctant circles who, apart from hollow words, did nothing to save a people condemned to extermination by the Hitlerite assassins. No one among us will forgive or forget this”

Unfortunately, the repeated demands of the Council to the Government Delegate regarding the need to increase the monthly subsidy were to no avail. Under these circumstances, the Council turned directly to the Government-in-Exile in London in February 1943 and demanded that it raise its monthly allocation to six to eight million zlotys, “if the relief project is to be something concrete and not a fiction”. The appeal did not elicit any response. On May 12, 1943, the Council appealed by cable to the Ministry of Social Welfare of the Government-in-Exile, emphasizing that they had not received a reply to their previous appeal to the government. This appeal, however, was also to no avail.

The Polish Government-in-Exile played an important role in establishing the policy which determined and influenced the events in Poland, and therefore should be considered responsible for those actions of the underground which affected the fate of the Jews in occupied Poland. A Polish source (A. Wyleżynska) declared:

“The Polish Government in London failed to stand by its Jewish citizens here [in Poland], although it initiated relief for Jewish refugees who had fled from France to Switzerland”.

We know that the Council received the following remittances from the Government Delegation in 1943: January – 150,000 zlotys; February – 300,000 zlotys; March – 250,000 zlotys; April-October (at a rate of 400,000 zlotys per month) – 2,800,000 zlotys.

Following the outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, the Council expanded the scope of its activities in order to aid additional Jewish survivors. After making urgent demands to the Government Delegation, the Council received an additional one-time allocation of 500,000 zlotys. This grant enabled the Jewish organizations to expand their activities. In its memorandum of September 9, 1943 to the Delegate, the Council demanded a minimum subsidy of one million zlotys a month, but it received only 1,500,000 zlotys a month on behalf of the provincial towns and cities (Cracow, Lwow, Siedlce, Ostrowiec, etc.) The total sum received by the Council during 1943 was 6,550,000 zlotys. In addition, 600,000 zlotys were received from the representatives of the Jewish Coordinating Committee, and in November 1943 the Delegate gave the Council the one-time sum of \$25,000 that had come from the International Organization of Polish Jews in the United States and was earmarked for Jews hiding in the Aryan sector. (The Council gave \$2,000 out of this sum to Polish farmers who had been banished from the Lublin District). With these allocations, the Council was able to spend the peak sum of two million zlotys during the month of November 1943 for relief and social welfare.

During the period of January-July 1944, the Council was given one million zlotys per month by the Government Delegation. An additional million zlotys was received in April 1944 (500,000 from the Delegate and 500,000 from the Jewish Coordinating Committee). Prior to the outbreak of the Warsaw revolt on August 1, 1944 and at the end of 1944, the Council received two million zlotys a month.

The Council deeply sympathized with the plight of the Jewish underground groups that lacked financial support. In its December 15, 1944 memorandum to the Delegate, the Council noted that it had received no assistance from the Jewish Coordinating Committee for the past six months, and therefore asked the Delegate to double the monthly budget (to four million zlotys), since the value of the zloty had dropped in comparison with the period prior to the outbreak of the revolt. It also requested a one-time grant that had been promised by the Delegate as early as July 1944.

The Jewish underground organizations suffered a financial crisis at the beginning of 1944. The remittances sent from abroad did not reach their destination. Having no alternative, the Jewish National Committee was forced to reduce its grants and to limit the scope of its relief activities. People faced starvation, the loss of their dwellings, and even death.

The massive Soviet offensive in the spring of 1944 and the entry of Soviet forces into areas which had formerly belonged to Poland brought about a change in the course of the war. The survivors of the Holocaust pinned their hopes on the victories of the Soviet armies. Yet during this period, the Gestapo persistently searched for Jews in hiding on the Aryan side. (Thus, in April 1944, it surrounded a large part of the Żolibórz quarter in which many Jews were concealed; 50 Jews were apprehended and shot). A reliable Jewish source described the situation in those days:

“In the Aryan quarters, the fear of death persisted day and night. People lived constantly under the shadow of the Gestapo beast of prey, the S.S. and the gendarmerie, the Blue Police, the blackmailers and informers... Not a single day passed without scores of people in Warsaw being killed due to these saboteurs”.

The front-lines were getting closer. The decisive battles between the Soviet Union and Germany and the growing influence of the Polish Communists led to the increase of political tension in the Polish underground and considerable nervousness among Government Delegation circles and in the Home Army. The influence of the extreme nationalists mounted daily in these circles. A rapprochement took place between the Sanacja and Endecja parties and such openly anti-Semitic factions as the National Radicals. The gangs of the National Armed Forces officially joined the Home Army in March 1944 and were received warmly by General Bór-Komorowski. This fact angered the Democratic underground movement and aroused the fears of the Jewish survivors. (Moderate democratic elements in the A.K., such as the “New Paths” group, also rebelled against his gesture).

In addition, the Jewish organizations had learned that in the spring of 1944, Roman Knoll, the Director of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Government Delegation (who had formerly served a Polish Minister in Berlin), had, in an official Delegation journal, advanced the assumption that after the war there would still be “too many Jews” left and that it would be necessary to set up a special “closed area” for them in the East. According to Knoll:

“The prevailing mood throughout the country is one which leaves no openings for the return of the Jews, in however small numbers, to their previous businesses and workshops. The non-Jewish population has taken the place of the Jews in the cities and towns and their return would be regarded not as restitution but as an invasion to be resisted by physical force”.

Moreover, the Delegation rejected the proposal submitted by Jewish organizations to the National Minorities Department of the Government Delegation regarding the exchange of civilians – mainly Jews – for German civilians living in the Allied occupied areas of Poland. According to their reply:

“Polish citizens of Jewish nationality do not constitute a separate community with special prerogatives on whose behalf it will be possible to conduct talks in the international sector, other than those concerning Polish citizens of Polish nationality”.

This was written at a time when the Germans were engaged in wiping out the remnants of Polish Jewry!

Reports about Jewish soldiers “deserting” the Polish Army commanded by General Anders in the Middle East, Palestine, and Great Britain were used by official circles as a pretext for launching an overt anti-Semitic campaign. It was clear to the Jewish underground organizations that these “desertions” had been provoked by the anti-Semitism rife in General Ander’s army. The National Minorities Department of the Delegation endeavored to persuade the Jewish Coordinating Committee to publish a declaration condemning the deserters, but the Committee immediately rejected the proposal out of hand. A proposal by the Government Delegation that the Jewish organizations should join the Council of National Unity, which was to be a sort of substitute clandestine parliament alongside the Government Delegation, was similarly turned down.

This policy still further cooled the relations between the Delegate and the Jewish underground movement, as well as between the former and the “Żegota” Council.

The strained relations reached a climax when a shocking report was received that a unit of the Jewish Fighting Organization in a village near Koniecpol in the Czestochowa district had been attacked by a band of the N.S.Z. or the A.K. under the command of “Eagle”. Eleven of the 24-man unit were murdered. The Coordinating Committee and the Jewish Fighting Organization protested to all the organizations in the Polish underground movement. “Żegota” immediately sent a letter to the Government Delegate (May 1944) in which it expressed its anger at the murder of the Jewish fighters, as well as at the murder of 200 Jews who had been in hiding in the area of Czestochowa, Radom, and Kielce. It should be noted that N.S.Z.

bands also killed Polish Democratic activists linked with the A.K., particularly those of Jewish origin.

Considerable resentment was aroused in “Żegota” circles and among the members of the Jewish organizations by the fact that anti-Semitic attacks were frequently featured prominently in official publications of the Government Delegation. This situation motivated the Council to request another meeting with the Government Delegate, which took place on July 17, 1944. The representatives of the Council for Aid to Jews emphasized that the atmosphere regarding the Jewish question had been poisoned and that the Jewish relief activities had of late encountered increasing difficulties. One of the reasons was the attitude displayed by a certain section of the Polish underground press which engaged in anti-Semitic propaganda. Several publications of the Government Delegation, such as the *Nowy Wspólny Dom* (The New Cooperative House), published by the Agricultural Division of the Delegation, contained anti-Semitic passages. Anti-Semitic tendencies were also evident in a booklet called “The Imperialist War” published by a group supported by the Delegation. The representatives of the Council stated that it was essential to act against the anti-Semitic campaign being waged in the underground press.

Detailed factual reports regarding the acts of murder perpetrated by N.S.Z. gangs were presented at the meeting. However, the alarming protests sent by the Jewish Fighting Organization and the Coordinating Committee about the killings near Koniecpol, the murder of a group of 18 Jews in the village of Wygoda, and other killings brought no results. The Jewish representatives also stated that member of the N.S.Z. had organized a special group at Josefow near Warsaw to search for Jews and kill them.

The “Żegota” envoys demanded that an end be put to these abominable murders by the N.S.Z. and proposed that the Government Delegate publish an announcement condemning the murderous acts, and the A.K. issue an “Order of the Day” on the same subject to all units in Poland. (After the N.S.Z. formally joined the A.K. in March 1944, however, the actual responsibility for its acts rested with the Home Army). The Jewish envoys added that the

declaration must also denounce all anti-Semitic manifestations. The publication of such a statement would help to ease the hostility.

Another matter dealt with at the meeting was the problem of the camps. At that time, there were 20 camps for Jews in occupied Poland, which had a total of approximately 20,000 Jewish inmates. There were also other concentration camps with both Polish and Jewish prisoners. The Council representatives stated that during the turn about in the course of the war, it would be imperative to take extraordinary measures to protect the camps in order to save tens of thousands of people from certain extermination. They suggested that the Allies be approached to help in this matter.

As far as increased aid for relief activities, the Jewish representatives stressed that the National Committee was caring for 5,600 people in Warsaw. Together with those being aided by “Żegota” and the Bund (about 2,000 Jews), the number of those receiving relief was about 12,000, apart from those in the provinces.

In response to the demands of the “Żegota” representatives, the Government Delegate rejected the contention that anti-Semitic tendencies were increasingly evident in official publications. As for the general atmosphere regarding the Jews, he asserted that this matter was dependent on both sides. The frequent instances of Jews disclosing the names of their Polish protectors to the Germans or their collaborators had aroused great resentment. The behavior of Jewish partisan units in the rural areas (where they were forced to steal food from the peasants in order to survive) had also evoked negative reactions among the population. Reports of Jewish soldiers “deserting” from the Polish Army, especially the “desertion” of 2,000 Jewish soldiers from the Second Corps in the Middle East, had added fuel to the fire, since these acts were considered anti-Polish demonstrations. The Government Delegate added: “The recollection of the behavior of the Jews in the areas occupied by the Soviets also influenced the hostile attitude toward them”.

Incidentally, the complaint about close collaborations between the Soviet authorities and the Jews, and the charges that the Jews had “taken an active part in the Communist governing bodies that had been set up by the



conqueror [the Soviet Union]”, was leveled every time the Jewish underground leaders met with their Polish counterparts. A trenchant reply to these charges was given by Mordechai Tennenbaum-Tamaroff in his letter of April 2, 1943 to the Bialystock Regional Command of the Civilian Struggle (in which the commander of the Jewish Fighting Organization asked for 200 handgrenades and a few dozen revolvers):

“Had the time and conditions been different, I could prove to the Poles that all the organizations which make up the “Jewish National Committee” were disbanded and [their members were] tortured in the Soviet Union, and their leaders were banished to Siberia”.

As far as the camps are concerned, the Government Delegate declared that it would be extremely difficult to protect them. He would discuss the matter with the Commander of the A.K. and would refer appropriate suggestions to London. In addition, the Delegate promised to respond to the murders by the N.S.Z. and the cases of blackmail, but he did not promise to publish any declaration in this respect since, “He did not believe that the present time was right for such action”. As far as financial problems, the Delegate promised at the meeting, “which was conducted throughout in an atmosphere of coolness mixed with tension and a mutual lack of confidence”, to increase the allocation.

In mid-1944, alarming reports from the international underground in Auschwitz of the murder of hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews began reaching the organizations of the Polish underground and especially the Council for Aid to Jews. “Żegota” immediately sent a message to the Government Delegate urging him to arouse world opinion by radio and call for immediate intervention in order to halt the slaughter. However, no significant action was taken by the Government Delegation this time either; the Council’s plea remained un-answered.

At their next meeting with the Government Delegate, which took place in December 1944, the Council representatives categorically reiterated that the Jewish organizations had not received the amounts, which according to prior

reports had been dispatched, and as a result had not received any financial support from “Żegota”. (It should be noted that the funds sent by Jewish organizations abroad for the Jewish underground in Poland were transmitted via the channels of the underground of the Polish Government-in-Exile in London). It is clear from the letters sent by Feiner, the Bund representative, to the Government Delegate in May and June of 1943, as well as in February 1944, that part of the sums intended for the Bund were in effect frozen by the Government Delegation.

On August 11, 1943, Feiner again sent a request to the Delegate to release the sums that were being held by the latter - \$5,000 of a total remittance of \$15,000 which had arrived in February 1943, and \$25,000 out of \$38,000 which had been received from London in April 1943.

During the period from June through September, the Jewish National Committee received \$40,000, which was converted into 3,030,550 zlotys. The sum apparently included £15,000 which had been remitted by the Jewish Agency prior to July 1943. Larger amounts began arriving in November 1943. Thus \$100,000 was received from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in December 1943 as the first installment of the \$500,000 which it had earmarked for the Jewish National Committee. The Jewish Agency was supposed to send an additional \$200,000 and £10,000 on this account shortly thereafter, but these funds were “tied up” en route.

The failure – from January 1944 onward – to deliver the funds to the Jewish organizations was denounced by Aleksander Kamiński (“Juliusz Gorecki”), editor-in-chief of the official underground organ *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, in his sharp letter of May 18, 1944 to Jerzy Makowiecki, (“Malicki”), head of the Information and Propaganda Department of the Government Delegation.

It seems that the funds from overseas were not delivered due to a controversy that broke out between the Jewish organizations, and the Government Delegation and the A.K. The Jewish organizations used the funds received from abroad not only for relief activities but also to purchase arms for the Jewish Fighting Organization and to prepare resistance activities in the concentration camps. Thus according to a brief financial report

presented by Dr. Berman at the Council meeting held on July 10, 1943, most of the funds received from Poalei Zion and the General Zionists abroad were spent on the acquisition of arms, part of which were sent to Zaglebie and Czestochowa; 130,000 zlotys were sent to the Poniatowa camp, and 100,000 to the camp at Trawniki. It should also be noted that on September 27, 1943, the Council received a report that the situation in the Poniatowa camp had deteriorated and that the German guards had found arms in one of the huts.

The Government Delegation and A.K. command vigorously and consistently opposed the acquisition of arms by the Jewish underground organizations. It should be noted that the underground military authorities refused to recognize the Jewish partisan movement, support its organization by the youth who were saved from the liquidated ghettos, or to maintain contact with the so-called “wild” groups in order to ensure that they would not be forced to resort to robbery. The Delegation insisted that the Jewish bodies observe this condition as a sine qua non for continued receipt of the financial grants which arrived from Jewish organizations abroad. The representatives of the Jewish Fighting Organization and the Coordinating Committee declared that they would not accept this condition under any circumstances. As a result of the firm and unequivocal position they adopted, the withholding of remittances from abroad was stopped shortly thereafter; they payments were resumed and they reached their intended destination.

Unlike the Government Delegation and the A.K., “Żegota” supported the purchase of arms by Jewish organizations. As early as the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, the Council earmarked a special grant of 500,000 zlotys, received from the Government Delegate, for the purchase of weapons. This allocation was in line with the Council’s policy vis-à-vis “acts of resistance”, which were initiated in Warsaw Ghetto on April 19, 1943. The Council had immediately voiced its “full solidarity with the justice of the cause of those who fell for the dignity and freedom of man”.

In its letter of April 30, 1943 to the Government Delegate, the Council urged him to issue “a protest for the whole world which would shock the conscience and heart of the entire world”, as well as a manifesto to the Polish public, “which will express not only the official attitude of the Polish

Government in regard to that terrible murder, but primarily the emotional reaction of the Polish people to Jewish martyrdom”.

On May 6, the Government Delegation published a statement in its official organ, in which it “displayed a sense of honor and feelings of solidarity with the Jews who were defending themselves and feelings of contempt vis-à-vis their German murderers”. The Polish population was also called upon to extend aid to the persecuted Jews. An appeal signed by “The Organizations of Polish Independence” appeared at the beginning of May 1943. It contained the announcement made by General Sikorski (repeated by his Delegate in occupied Poland), and stated inter alia that:

“Under the given conditions all help extended directly or indirectly to the Germans in their murderous activities is a most heinous crime against Poland. Any Pole who collaborates in their acts of murder, whether by extortion, informing on Jews, or by exploiting their terrible plight or participating in acts of robbery, is committing a most serious offence against the laws of the Polish Republic”.

Unfortunately, however, these statements did not command proper attention and, in effect, no concrete aid was given to the ghetto fighters.

A special meeting of the Council dealt with practical steps to extend help to those Jews and Jewish fighters who would succeed in reaching the Aryan side, such as the preparation of sufficient documents, financial aid, etc. Council members tried to obtain a map of the Warsaw sewer system in order to carry out rescue activities.

“Żegota” widened the scope of its activities in order to care for the groups of Jews who reached the Aryan side. According to the information which the Council received, approximately 500 Jews remained underground in troglodytic conditions after the suppression of the revolt. After making insistent demands, the Council received an additional one-time grant of 500,000 zlotys from the Government Delegation in September 1943, and thus the clandestine Jewish organizations were able to extend their activities.

In addition, it should be noted that the Council solemnly observed the first anniversary of the ghetto uprising at a special meeting, held in mid-April 1944, by passing the following resolution:

“The most appropriate way to honor the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto battles and the memory of the fighters who fell holding their weapons and of the millions of murdered Polish Jews is by giving the greatest possible help in order to enable the remnants who survived to go on living and to continue the common struggle for liberation”.

The resolution was sent to the Polish and Jewish underground organizations. A letter was also sent to the Government Delegate suggesting that he issue a proclamation to the Polish people on the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto revolt. However, no official statement was made by the Delegate or by the Armed Forces Command – an omission that caused great resentment among the Jewish leaders on the Aryan side.

The Council also wrote to the Jewish Coordinating Committee “expressing words of admiration and respect for the memory of the heroes of the Jewish Fighting Organization who fell in the unequal fight against the German wildmen”, as well as its “admiration and respect for the memory of the millions of defenseless Jews in Poland who were savagely murdered by the German barbarians”. Finally, the Council expressed its readiness and desire to present an official proposal, “even now during the period of occupation... to name the streets of Warsaw which witnessed the glorious battles of the Jewish Fighting Organization for the leaders of the armed struggle and the battle of valor”.

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The motivations for the establishment of “Żegota” and its beneficent activities were defined by its leaders. According to a letter which the Council sent to the Coordinating Committee on the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto revolt:

“The cooperation between the Council for Aid to Jews and the Coordinating Committee [of the Jewish National Committee and the Bund] was based on the most noble, Christian and humanitarian

motives, and it began during the most tragic hours for our two peoples. It is of lasting value and will serve as a cornerstone for mutual relations in liberated Poland”.

The Chairman of the Council, Julian Grobelny, declared in a statement made in March 1943:

“The rescue of people condemned to death by the brutal conqueror is a duty of conscience for the [Polish] nation and is required for the good name of the state”.

The Deputy Chairman of the Council, Tadeusz Rek, on the other hand, made no effort to conceal his view that the major motivation for the creation of “Żegota” was the realization that “it was needed for the good of Poland”.

There are very significant differences between Polish and Jewish sources on the number of people helped by “Żegota”. Rek declares that at least 40,000 Jews in Poland (including the camps) received aid from “Żegota”. According to Arczyński, 50,000 Jews benefited from the various forms of assistance – financial, legalization, medical, child care, and help against blackmailers. Jewish sources (Dr. Berman, Yitzhak Zuckerman, and Yaakov Zelemenski), on the other hand, assert that during the years 1943-1944, over 4,000, out of a total of 20,000 Jews in hiding in occupied Warsaw, received direct assistance from “Żegota”. Emmanuel Ringelblum, who followed the work of the Council, was aware of the fact that it failed to fulfill the expectations of its founders. Nonetheless, it “had 300 Jewish families under its wing, who were on the Aryan side and whose existence was solely dependent on the aid of the Council”.

In summation, the Council was not given the opportunity to develop large-scale relief activities due to the lack of funds (a fact that was emphasized by Rek and Zrczyński, who reiterated categorically that the Government Delegation consistently refused to make significant sums available to “Żegota”) as well as the lack of assistance by government circles, which did nothing to save the surviving remnants of Polish Jewry. The government even

allocated ridiculously small amounts to stimulate the cultural, intellectual, and communal activities of Warsaw Jewry, whereas nothing was done to find safe lodgings for various people. (Thus, for example, there was no money to arrange a hiding place on the Aryan side for the noted historian Dr. Yitzhak Schiper). As a result, the small nucleus of scientists, authors, and political figures, who had survived the previous deportations, were eventually murdered.

Despite the limited funds allocated to the Council by the Government Delegate, and the political and ideological differences among its various components, the Council vigorously undertook many activities attaining an unusual degree of harmony. Despite the fact that its members risked their lives daily, they continued to operate with great dedication, under all conditions, until the liberation. Great fear was aroused by the frequent official German announcements which threatened that anyone who hid or lodged Jews and all the tenants of houses in which Jews were found hiding would be executed. In many cases, the German butchers carried out their threats and shot the “offenders”. Nonetheless, thousands of Poles, headed by the personnel of “Żegota” extended aid to Jews, many without any thought of recompense.

Ringelblum praises the dedication of the Poles who risked their lives to save Jews. He wrote:

“There are thousands [of idealists] like these in Warsaw and the whole country... The names of the people who do this, and whom the Poland which shall be established should decorate with the “Order of Humanitarianism”, will remain in our memory as the names of heroes who saved thousands of human beings from certain death by fighting against the greatest enemy the human race has even known”.

Dr. Berman also stressed “the noble stand of a significant part of the Polish intellectuals, party leaders, and other classes, and many ordinary and good people”.

The rescue of Jews by their removal from the ghetto to the Aryan side was done by individuals, and was not carried out in an organized manner. This conclusion by Ringelblum has found corroboration in Arczyński's assessment that "the aid given in saving Jews was based on humanitarian principles and was an individual effort which manifested itself in providing shelter, help in legalization, etc."

Nonetheless the ramified activities of the Council for Aid to Jews – in addition it should be noted that, besides their public functions, each of the members of the Council personally cared for several Jews – constitute one of the most brilliant chapters in the efforts to extend relief to Jews.



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