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The Socioeconomic and Political Status of the Jews in Central Poland

Urban Industrialism; Rural Feudalism

Although there were many common elements in the Hasidic movements of central Poland and Galicia, a distinct Hasidic doctrine was fashioned in Przysucha (Pshiskhe) and Kock (Kotsk) which differed from that fostered at the courts of the zaddikim in Ropczyce and Żydaczów, Rymanów and Bełz. The socioeconomic, political, and cultural conditions out of which this Hasidism grew were also marked by definite and distinctive characteristics.

The overwhelming majority of Jews in Poland were concentrated in central Poland, which was known as the Kingdom of Poland or the Congress Kingdom because the Congress of Vienna proclaimed it an independent kingdom under the rule of the czar of Russia. The Jewish community was one of the largest in the entire Diaspora, second only to that in the Ukraine. There were almost twice as many Jews in the Kingdom of Poland as in nearby Galicia. In 1827 there were 377,754 and in 1843 there were 523,396. In those sixteen years the percentage of Jews in the total population rose from 9.1 to 11.1.

The specific economic significance of the Jews in Congress Poland reflected the fact that they constituted a large part of the urban population. According to the census taken in 1843, the Jews ac-

counted for about 41 percent of the total urban population. In three of the eight districts—Lublin, Podlasie (Siedlce) and Augustów—the majority of the total urban population were Jews. By 1827 the Jews were the majority in four of the nine largest cities in the state: Lublin, Hrubieszów, Zamość, and Kalvarya. In the remaining five (Warsaw, Kalisz, Płock, Częstochowa, and Ozorków) at least 20 percent of the population were Jews; and even in Warsaw, the capital city, the Jews, despite restrictions, accounted for 23 percent of the total population (30,702 out of 131,484).¹

The situation of the Jews in the Kingdom of Poland was determined not only by the economic and social development of the country but also to a great extent by the particular policy of the government toward them.

When the Kingdom of Poland was first established, the regime was still a feudal one. In 1816 the urban population accounted for only 19 percent of the total population.² However, from an economic viewpoint, most of the urban centers, even in their external appearance, resembled the villages. For example, in 1827, of the 80,239 houses, only about 10 percent were stone; the remainder were wooden houses or thatch-covered clay huts.³ Most of the Christian residents earned their livings by farming and only some of them were artisans, taverners, shopkeepers, and traders. Among the latter, most traded in pigs and many in horses and cattle. According to an official report of the “inspector of the cities” in the Lublin district in 1820, “the majority of the Catholics in the cities are engaged in agriculture and there is no other national group able to engage in trade except the Jews.”⁴ According to a report of the same year issued by the inspector of the cities in the district of Płock, the Gentiles in the cities of Ciechanów, Mława, and Maków earned their livings solely from agriculture.⁵ Even in Kalvarya, one of the larger cities in the state, there was a correlation between religion and occupation. According to an official report in 1820, all 1,315 of its Catholic inhabitants were farmers, a number of the 237 Lutherans were artisans; while the majority of the 2,426 Jews were engaged in “skilled work,” and the minority were traders.⁶

By the 1820s capitalism had already developed considerably in this backward country, and it gathered momentum in the 1840s. In contrast to Galicia, important industrial centers kept springing up, thus allowing for the penetration of capitalism even into the field of agriculture. The discovery of coal and iron, as well as zinc and lead, in the southern section of the country was exploited to establish industrial enterprises. In 1840 more than seven hundred workers were engaged in coal mining.⁷ A number of the large metal-smelting enterprises which were to become well known in the twentieth cen-

tury, such as Huta Bankowa and Strachowice, had already been established by the 1830s. With the establishment of factories for agricultural machinery, which was accelerated by the development of farming estates, the need for iron grew ever greater. In 1829 there were more than one hundred workers in the largest of these factories, that of the government in the Solec quarter in Warsaw; by 1839, their number had increased to five hundred.⁸

The main industrial product in the field of agriculture continued to be alcoholic beverages, but here, too, the means of production were improved. Also, the use of potatoes and rye as raw materials became widespread. The first sugar factories were established in the 1820s and by the end of the 1840s there were more than thirty of them.⁹

Textiles, the main industry in Poland, was concentrated in the provinces of Kalisz and Mazovia. A very considerable factor in its rapid development was the open market with Russia, the result of political ties between the two countries. In 1822, for example, the tariff border between the Kingdom of Poland and the Russian Empire was abolished, and all of Russia was opened up to the export of Polish textiles. Among other factors which furthered the development of this industry were the imposition of high tariffs on goods imported from the West, the imperial army's great need for textiles, and the immigration of expert weavers from Germany and Silesia. Besides the many small workshops—some independent, others dependent upon contractors for credit—large factories sprang up, each employing hundreds of workers. By 1829, 35 million zlotys' worth of woolen textiles was being manufactured. In this same period a cotton factory was established which, by 1825, was supplying one-fourth of the country's needs; and in the four following years, its production increased more than fourfold (from 848,000 yards to 3.7 million yards). In 1832, after the failure of the Polish insurrection, the tariff border between Poland and Russia was reestablished, and consequently the manufacture of woolen textiles declined. In contrast, the production of cotton textiles flourished. At that time, it was concentrated in and around Łódź: Zduńska Wola, Ozorków, and Pabianice. The number of looms increased between 1836 and 1850 from 7,300 to 61,300. The linen output also increased with the development of the large center in Żyrardów, south of Warsaw.¹⁰

This industrial development was accompanied by a major shift of the urban and peasant populations. Between 1816 and 1855, the urban population more than doubled, from 527,332 to 1,116,768 persons, and its percentage of the total population of the country rose from 19 to 24.¹¹ This process of industrialization and urbanization was directly linked to the social changes in agriculture. Just as indus-

try increased and capitalism developed, so the power of feudal relations in the village declined and the proletarianization of the peasants deepened. Moreover, the peasants who were dislodged and uprooted from their soil were converted into an industrial reserve force, a condition essential for the development of industry.

Capitalism was introduced into the villages by means of a paragraph in the constitution of the Duchy of Warsaw of 1807 which abolished serfdom. But this rescission was interpreted merely to mean freedom of movement, allowing the peasants to leave the village and estate owners to drive the peasants from their farms. Not only did it never occur to the authorities to adopt a program of reforms such as the proposal of Kościuszko of 1814, regarding the granting of ownership of the farmsteads to the emancipated peasants, but even the substitution of forced labor by payment of a crop tax to the owners of the estates was not implemented except in a few of the large estates and under conditions imposed by the owners. Indeed, the very government which had proclaimed this plan desirable sabotaged it in various ways: it increased the payments of the peasants settling on royal land ("the national estates"); and, on the eve of the rebellion of 1830, it initiated the sale of estates belonging to the treasury, thereby making the plight of many of these peasants as bad as that of the peasants on private estates.

The majority of the peasants remained serfs like their forebears and the yoke of servitude, both in labor and payments, became even heavier than in the past. The government itself intensified the exploitation of the peasants by imposing special taxes which replaced the *corvée* (road repair tax) and by raising the price of the monopolies on salt, tobacco, and liquor. In their memoirs, the nobles confessed that the peasants became steadily impoverished and were unable to buy even those necessities which were available in the eighteenth-century village. But the worst evil for the peasants was the wholesale eviction from their land by the landowners. By 1827 the number of landless peasants reached 800,000, or 30 percent of the total village population. Many of the evicted peasants remained in the villages, increasing the legions of hirelings on the estates which had adopted the system of intensive farming. Those who wandered off to the cities were not readily absorbed into service, handicraft, or factories. The number of vagabonds, paupers, and beggars multiplied dramatically.¹² The sorry spectacle of the early accumulation of capital in the England of Shakespeare's time was a recurring phenomenon here as well, and cruel measures were decreed by the government against paupers, including the penalties of expulsion and hard labor. To be sure, there was also a novel aspect to these decrees characterizing the absolutism of the

government: by its order of 1840, mendicant children were penalized by being turned over to the army as cantonists.¹³

Government as the Instrument of Oppression

This essentially feudal socioeconomic system found its appropriate instrument in the political regime of the Kingdom of Poland. According to the Constitution of 1815, which was patterned after that of the Duchy of Warsaw of 1807, the right to legislate was given to the *Sejm*, which consisted of the czar-king, the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. The Senate was composed exclusively of the upper aristocracy, the clergy, and the castellans. The Chamber of Deputies consisted of seventy-seven members elected by the nobles in the *Sejm* and fifty-one chosen at communal assemblies. In addition to the nobles, estate and factory owners, merchants, and skilled workers could participate in these assemblies.

In the *województwo* (provincial councils), the nobles, emissaries of the *Sejm*'s members, were also assured of a decisive majority. The executive power was placed in the hands of the Administrative Council (*Rada Administracyjna*), composed of ministers and councillors, over which the viceroy presided.

The nobility, which held power together with certain financial magnates, was compelled to keep the reins of government in its own hands. Thus, in the Administrative Council, the decisive vote was given by the constitution to the viceroy. Furthermore, the viceroy, Prince Józef Zayonczek, did not move without the approval of the czar's brother and the commander of the army, Grand Duke Constantine, and particularly, without the approval of the czar's commissar, Senator Nicolai Novosiltzev. After the death of Prince Zayonczek in 1826, no new viceroy was appointed, and Novosiltzev, assisted by the czar's brother, remained the supreme authority.

Just as the political regime of the Kingdom of Poland was essentially a continuation of that of the Duchy of Warsaw, the policy toward the Jews was dictated by the same aims but was far more discriminating than before. Decrees against the Jews which had not been fully implemented by the Duchy of Warsaw, either because it was short-lived or out of consideration for the constitutional principle of civil equality, were now implemented in the Kingdom of Poland. Indeed, all the hypocrisy and cant of the Holy Alliance of the Metternich era, the alliance of the three reactionary powers of Europe which pretended to act in the name of "the principles of Christian love for man," became evident in the government's policy toward the Jews.

It is well known that, in order to discharge its obligations in connection with its professed statements of principle, the Congress of Vienna in 1815 decided to include in the constitution for the Federation of Germany a paragraph regarding the Jews. Paragraph 16 of the final draft required the German Federation to show regard for the improvement of the civil status of the members of the Jewish faith and to confirm the rights already granted to them by the individual states of the federation. Parallel to this resolution of the Congress, Czar Alexander—in the basic guidelines of the constitution for the Kingdom of Poland, elaborated by Prince Adam Czartoryski in paragraph 36 concerning “the members of the Old Testament faith”—proclaimed that “those civil rights which had already been assured to the Jewish people through existing statutes and enactments shall be preserved. Special ordinances shall determine the conditions by which it will be made easier for the members of the Old Testament faith to attain a greater share in the common welfare.”¹⁴

From the outset, both decisions confirming the existing rights were significantly undercut by the particular wording in the Congress’s resolution concerning the Jews of Germany: the preposition “of” (“of the Federated States”) was substituted for “in” (“in the Federated States”), which served to nullify all the rights granted the Jews of Germany by the governments established by Napoleon, such as those in the Kingdom of Westphalia, in Frankfurt, and in the Hanseatic cities. These governments were not recognized by the Congress, and thus the rights of the Jews were not regarded as granted “by the states.” Similarly, the granting of “civil rights” for the Jews of the Kingdom of Poland was intended expressly to deny what was seemingly being affirmed, namely, civil rights. For ten years, the government of the Duchy of Warsaw had suspended the political rights of the Jews which had been granted them by the paragraph in the constitution regarding the equality of all natives. The “basic guidelines” of the new constitution of 1815 nullified these rights permanently.

In those basic guidelines, the paragraph relating to the Jews was preceded by the one concerning “the numerous and useful class of peasants.” They were guaranteed “the protection of the law,” “true justice,” and “paternal concern,” with the aim of advancing them gradually toward attaining “a good and improved status.” However, in the constitution itself, which was signed by the czar (acting as king of Poland) on November 27, 1815, all mention of obligations toward peasants was omitted, as was any mention of the Jews. In order to dispel any misunderstanding regarding the rights of the Jews, paragraph 11 of the constitution expressly stated that all *Christians*, irre-

spective of differences in their beliefs, were to benefit from equal rights, both civil and political.

The blatant violation of the principle of civil equality as it concerned the Jews was particularly evident in the area of taxation. In addition to the burden of direct and indirect taxes carried by the entire populace, the Jews bore special taxes, some having come down as a legacy from the Duchy of Warsaw and some having been newly decreed. The kosher meat tax, decreed by the Duchy of Warsaw in 1809, amounted to six grosz per pound, which together with payments to the community increased the price of meat to double that of nonkosher meat. It goes without saying that this was especially burdensome to the poor Jewish population. Similarly, a "recruits' tax," which had been introduced in 1812 as compensation for the exemption of Jews from military service, remained in effect until 1844. Special new taxes in the Kingdom of Poland were the *Billet*, or "ticket tax," needed for admission to Warsaw by Jews from outside the city; and the "*consens* tax," or the taverner's license fee, which was required only of Jewish innkeepers. The extent of the discrimination in these taxes can be appreciated by comparing them with the kingdom's income from general indirect taxes. At a time when the kingdom's entire income from the monopoly on tobacco in the beginning of the 1820s did not exceed one and one-half million zlotys,¹⁵ the Jews paid that same amount in kosher meat taxes and also for the *consens* tax.

But the goal of the two new taxes—the *Billet* and the *consens*—was not merely fiscal; rather, the taxes were from the beginning intended as an instrument of the government's economic policy toward the Jews. With respect to the village Jews, this policy was motivated by the interests of the ruling class of nobles; and with respect to the urban Jews, by the aim of strengthening and fortifying the competitive position of the dominant middle class.

A Case Study: The Elimination of Jewish Innkeeping

These two aims of government policy were combined in the decrees against the Jewish tavernkeepers which deprived myriads of Jewish families of their livelihoods. In 1812, the last year of its existence, the government of the Duchy of Warsaw succeeded in issuing a decree prohibiting Jews in the cities and villages from being tavernkeepers. In the cities, the purpose of this decree was to transfer the liquor business from the Jews to the Polish townsmen. As for the Jews in the villages and the private towns, the edict had a twofold aim: (1) to concentrate

the management of all aspects of the economy of the estate in the hands of the estate owners and to raise the level of its efficiency along capitalist lines; (2) to demonstrate that the government was concerned with improving the lot of the peasants; that is to say, by making liquor less accessible, it was helping to allay the acute problem of drunkenness among them.

These goals were a guide also to the government of the Kingdom of Poland, but it decided to implement them gradually out of consideration for the landed estate owners. In 1814, when the edict of 1812 was to be implemented, certain officials called to the attention of the provisional government the losses which would accrue to the owners of the villages and towns if the edict were to go into effect immediately; the landlords would not be able to establish distilleries or set up the necessary equipment.¹⁶ It was also possible that the taverns would not be frequented. These considerations were more effective than the efforts of the Jewish representatives (who continued throughout to send "gifts" to Senator Novosiltzev),¹⁷ and in 1814 the edict concerning liquor was postponed for a year and in 1815 for an additional year.

In 1816, with a postponement in effect for still another year, an edict was issued by the viceroy prohibiting Jewish taverners from providing liquor to peasants on credit or in exchange for produce. This prohibition, which was intended to appease the peasants, was modeled after the law promulgated in western Galicia in 1804 by the Austrian authorities, but with this essential difference: The Austrian law included in the prohibition gentile as well as Jewish taverners, whereas the prohibition issued by the authorities in Poland affected only the Jewish taverners.¹⁸

From this time on, the implementation of the prohibition against Jews' dealing in liquor was postponed annually, but as of 1814 this postponement was contingent upon the Jews who continued to engage in the sale of liquor, innkeeping, or tenancy obtaining a *consens*, the fee for which varied according to the size of the village or city. This fee was continually raised so that by 1824 it was eight times higher and by 1830, it was almost twelve times more.¹⁹

As a result of this oppressive fiscal measure leveled against the Jewish taverners (gentile taverners were exempt from both the *consens* requirement and the payment attached to it) the government gradually attained its goal. The Jewish taverners and innkeepers in the villages worked unsparingly to eke out their meager livings: Their wives assisted them in the inn, their children served the wayfarers for a few grosz and the men themselves also worked as coachmen.²⁰ But with all this, it was hard for Jews in both cities and villages to meet the high

consens fees; thus the number of taverners compelled to seek other sources of livelihood grew. As though the *consens* edict were not enough, the dispossession of the Jews from innkeeping in the villages—at the instigation of the estate owners—also increased. The Jewish innkeepers on government property had been evicted in accordance with the edict of 1812, and by 1822 the number of those evicted amounted to 649 families. By that year, 5,797 Jewish families had been expelled from the estates of the nobles. During the first eight years in which the Kingdom of Poland was in existence, a total of 28,985 Jews had been driven from the villages. Similarly, between 1814 and 1822, the overall number of Jews in the cities and villages engaged in the production and sale of liquor declined from 17,561 to 3,996 heads of families. Even this remnant of the Jewish innkeeping class was viewed with disfavor by the government, and during the next eight years restrictions on obtaining the *consens* were gradually increased so that by 1830 only 2,088 Jewish heads of family possessed a *consens*.²¹

The fate of the few remaining Jewish innkeepers who survived in the villages was sealed by the government's decree of 1844: as of June 18, 1845, Jews engaged in the manufacture and sale of liquor were forbidden to dwell in the villages. In 1848, village Jews were prohibited from engaging in the liquor business, which included mead, beer, and wine.²² Thus, by the middle of the nineteenth century all Jewish innkeepers, except for a few farmers in the Jewish agricultural settlements who clandestinely engaged in the liquor business, were cleared out of the villages.

Although the absolute ban on innkeeping did not apply to the urban Jews, the already small number of Jewish innkeepers dwindled, and in 1850 only 1,675 heads of Jewish families made their livings in this way.²³ Instead of issuing a total ban, the government carried out its scheme, as it had in the earlier period, by constantly increasing the fee on the *consens* as well as making it more difficult to obtain. Some of the lords of the towns demonstrated the same harshness toward their Jewish subjects as they did toward the Jewish taverners in the villages. Thus, in their memorandum to the viceroy Paskevich in 1832, the Jews of Końska Wola complained that after the death of Prince Czartoryski, his son and heir removed all thirty Jewish innkeepers from their inns in the town.²⁴

The Ghetto

While the restrictions on innkeeping mainly hurt the Jews of the towns and villages, the decree of the *revir* (the Jewish quarter) hurt

urban Jews. Just as the decree on innkeeping was intended to take the manufacture and sale of liquor away from the Jews, so the *revir* decree was to give the Polish burghers advantageous conditions for competing in the areas of trade, handicrafts, and manufacture. Again it was the government of the Duchy of Warsaw which took the first steps. It decreed a special Jewish quarter, initially in the city of Warsaw (1809) and later in such cities as Wschowa (Fraustadt), Płock, Maków, and Przasnysz, in addition to the existing Jewish ghetto in the city of Lublin. This government also kept in force the ban on Jewish settlement in the cities privileged "not to tolerate Jews" from the time of ancient Poland. The provisional government which was constituted in the duchy after Napoleon's defeat continued along the same lines, establishing *revirs* in additional cities such as the one in Radom in 1814.²⁵

The institution of *revirs*, which, under the rule of the Duchy of Warsaw, had been limited to only a number of cities, was systematically developed by the government of the Kingdom of Poland. In the controversy over the Jewish question which had started in 1816 in the newspapers and in special pamphlets, many venerable statesmen came forth with plans for concentrating the Jews in special cities and quarters. None of those who proposed these plans concealed the economic reasons behind them. The most liberal among them, Ludwig Lentowski, the author of the pamphlet about the Jews in Poland (which he dedicated to the viceroy Zayonczek), called for the assignment of special cities to the Jews which only they would inhabit after the Gentiles had left; that is they would be permitted to reside only in the suburbs of Warsaw and Lublin. In his opinion, this was the only way to stave off the danger of the total domination of trade and industry by the Jews.²⁶ In a newspaper article that same year, Raymond Rembielinski, who was later appointed head of the *województwo* of Mazovia (the province of Warsaw), argued for the setting up of *revirs* for the urban Jews "as an urgent need to remove Jews from the urban markets, which are the most likely sites for trade and innkeeping."²⁷ The veteran diplomat and member of the government Stanislaw Staszic could see only one option to rescue the nation from the "peril" of the Jews, whom he depicted as dominating all branches of the urban economy: "Either expel them from the country . . . but it is now too late for us to do this, or assign to them within the cities residential areas, set completely apart."²⁸

Not many years passed before these demands, expressed by prominent statesmen in the kingdom and intimates of royalty, became government policy.²⁹ Again, the first to feel it were the Warsaw Jews, whose continued growth was seen by the authorities as representing a

danger: the judaization of the capital city. In 1821 the area of the city in which Jews were permitted to reside was further restricted, by adding about ten streets in the center of the city to those which had been forbidden by the edict of 1809. These included Żabia, Graniczna, Nowy Świat, Leszno, Marszałkowska, Chłodna, and Elektoralna. The new Jewish quarter of Warsaw was established in the northern section of the city, in the neighborhood of Nalewki and Franciszkańska streets. On May 7, 1822, the czar issued an edict which stated that in the future special Jewish quarters should be established after the pattern of Warsaw in other cities in the Kingdom of Poland. The decision regarding each individual city was to be made by the viceroy in accordance with the suggestion of the Committee for Internal Affairs. As if to add irony to the plight of the deprived Jewish population, the stated reason for the decree was the government's concern about urban overcrowding which might increase the danger of contagious diseases, fires, and other troubles. Accordingly, it was decreed that in Jewish houses no more than one family could reside in each room; in all district towns and other larger towns permission to build new houses would be granted to Jews only if the houses were built of stone and not of wood, the roof made of slate and not thatched.³⁰ Thus, the government sought to attain two goals at the same time: to isolate the urban Jews in special quarters, and to expand construction in the cities at their expense, since they perforce would have to build houses for themselves.

By this decree, the Jews were thrust into *revirs* over the next eight years, up to the rebellion of 1830, in many of the larger cities throughout the kingdom, such as Łowicz (1820), Włocławek (1823), Suwałki (1823), Zgierz (1824), Sieradz (1825), and Częstochowa (1829)³¹ and even in some of the small towns. For example, by 1830, *revirs* were established in nineteen towns in the *województwo* of Mazovia.³²

The hypocrisy of the government's justification for the decree establishing the ghetto was exposed by the Advisory Chamber of the Committee for the Affairs of Old Testament Believers (which consisted of Jews and was headed by a Pole). In its 1826 memorandum to the committee, it points out that while the government pretended to be preventing overcrowding in the cities by this decree, it was precisely within the *revirs* that the overcrowding of the Jews had reached unbearable proportions. To aggravate the suffering, the authorities insisted on bringing the decree into effect at its designated time even in cities where the new section allocated to the Jews did not have a minimum number of dwellings to house them or did not have any houses at all. In the city of Bodzentyn (in the province of Kielce) the

mayor, in a humane gesture, requested that the authorities of the *województwo* postpone the implementation of the decree lest those expelled be left without roofs over their heads.³³ His request was rejected with the threat of a penalty for each delay in the implementation of the decree. Such pleas were routinely dismissed as being nothing more than "customary Jewish moanings and groanings."³⁴

As for Warsaw, the decree of the *revir* was not considered sufficient by the government. In order to block the increase of Jews in the city through immigration and to further limit their ability to compete in trade, a decree was issued in 1824 renewing the *Billet*. Like the decree issued in the last decade of the existence of the old Kingdom of Poland, every nonresident Jew entering Warsaw was obliged to pay the *Billet*, which permitted him to stay in the city for one twenty-four-hour period. The payment was fixed at twenty grosz per diem, plus ten grosz for the stamp.³⁵ This decree obviously made it especially difficult for the impoverished—peddlers, petty traders, and laborers—to come to the capital in order to provide bread for their households.

The Polish revolutionary government abolished the humiliating *Billet* decree over the objections of the municipal authorities, mainly because of the demand for Jewish craftsmen to supply the needs of the revolutionary army. However, the government did not abolish the decree concerning the *revirs*. On the contrary, even though the government had decided against establishing new *revirs* before the uprising of July 14, 1830, the revolutionary government nevertheless complied with the suggestion of the authorities of the *województwo* of Kalisz and introduced a *revir* in the city of Szadek.³⁶ After the collapse of the uprising, even the institution of the *Billet* was restored in Warsaw.

The Pale of Settlement of the Jews in Congress Poland became even more restricted with the Border Zone decree of 1823 which ordered the expulsion (as of the beginning of 1824) of all village Jews living within a three-mile zone along the borders of Austria and Prussia. The reason given for the decree was the prevention of smuggling and only craftsmen, laborers, farmers, and dairymen were exempt.³⁷ In 1834 and 1836 this decree was extended to include the village Jews living in the border zone between Poland and Russia.³⁸

The observations of Count Anton Ostrowski, written in exile after the failure of the Polish rebellion, give a vivid picture of the harsh conditions under which the Jews of Congress Poland lived:

Everywhere [in every part of Poland] they were allowed to sustain themselves under duress. . . . The laws and regulations of the administration constantly and ubiquitously militated against them and the lot of the Jews depended

upon the arbitrary machinations of the rulers. They were harried out of the villages into the cities and from the small cities to the big ones, and within the cities proper—from street to street. [The authorities] scrutinized minutely the number of families and persons allowed to occupy this dwelling or that and set all kinds of conditions in permitting them to engage in certain occupations for their livelihood. Everywhere they harassed the Jews and terrified them so that they knew no rest. . . .³⁹

*The Consequences of Ghettoization:
Poverty, Plague, and Polarization*

The initial development of capitalism in central Poland caused a deepening social polarization within the Jewish population similar to that within the general population. The accumulation of wealth by holders of large estates, manufacturers, merchants, and bankers was also a factor in the growing misery of the Jewish shopkeepers, traders, and artisans. The large numbers of Jews who depended for their existence on the owners of estates were especially affected by the changes in the economy of the state. For the impoverishment of some of the estate owners, who were unable to incorporate the new farming methods, in turn brought the impoverishment of the Jewish merchants, middlemen, and shopkeepers who were their business agents. The decline in the export of wood, grain, and other crops in the wake of high tariffs (of neighboring Prussia, as against the Polish tariffs on the import of manufactured products) indirectly affected the Jews, who marketed the yield of the estates. But beyond all the economic factors, there were the discriminatory decrees coupled with the heavy burden of special taxes that steadily ground down Polish Jewry.

The severest of these decrees, the one ordering the expulsion of the Jewish innkeepers from the villages, not only brought suffering to the families involved; but also, having been uprooted from their villages, they streamed into the cities and towns and added to the already overcrowded conditions of their fellow Jews. All too soon the inevitable consequences of such miserable living conditions became evident—hunger, and in its wake, contagious diseases. In the early 1820s, the government was alerted by the authorities of various districts of Poland about the danger of plagues spreading from the Jewish quarters to the entire country. The direct initiative for the introduction of *revirs* in 1822 came as a consequence of such a memorandum by the commission of the *województwo* of Cracow in Kielce. In 1820 this commission informed the government's Committee for Internal Affairs and Religions that

the many adherents of the Old Testament, who migrate to take up residence in other towns after losing their taverns in the villages, may readily cause the spread of plague among themselves which will even become infectious among the Christians. When reports reached the Committee that in the cities of Chęciny and Będzin a disease had appeared which the doctors referred to as typhus, doctors were sent promptly to those locations.⁴⁰

In the fall of 1822 such alarming reports arrived from Siedlce about the plague which had erupted among former Jewish innkeepers who had been driven out of the villages that both the government and the commander in chief, Grand Duke Constantine, found it necessary to deal with the situation with particular urgency. It is worth noting that in an exchange of letters with Viceroy Zayonczek, the duke expressed the opinion that the Jewish innkeepers did not deserve to be in this grievous situation, as they were no worse than the Christian innkeepers. Later, in its report of November 15, 1822, the Committee for Internal Affairs allayed the concern of the viceroy, asserting that the situation in Siedlce was not so perilous, for only 76 of the 2,388 Jews in the city were stricken with the plague.⁴¹

The center of the gravest distress was the province of Augustów, on the Lithuanian border. In 1819 the commission of the *województwo* of Suwałki had urged the committee to begin settling the evicted innkeepers on royal lands, since "every delay in this matter will lead to heavy outlays for the support of any vagrants seized, or . . . will beget many criminal acts, brought on by the hunger and deprivation endured by these people, who remain without any means of sustenance or roof over their heads. . . ." ⁴²

The hunger of the innkeepers who had been uprooted from the villages brought attention to the distress of the multitudes of Jews in the cities and towns who were engaged in small business, trade, handicrafts, and brokerage. In 1826, when the Committee for the Affairs of Old Testament Believers took up the question of establishing schools for Jewish children, it received a plan from its Advisory Chamber accompanied by this pessimistic comment: "For the time being there is no hope that members of the Jewish faith will be able to maintain the schools from their own financial resources, inasmuch as nine-tenths of them are sunk in poverty."⁴³ This estimate was not greatly exaggerated, as demonstrated by other testimony from parties having no concern in the matter. For example, at the session of the revolutionary *Sejm* on May 26, 1831, the delegate Jakób Klimontowicz declared, "We are aware that in the cities the Jews constitute the majority of the population, of which three-fourths are without a means of livelihood and sustain themselves by questionable kinds of small trade and by acting as middlemen." On the basis of this estimate, the dele-

gate demonstrated that the imposition of the conscription tax on the entire Jewish population was a crying injustice to the poor, and he suggested imposing the full tax only on those who were richer, that is, on one-fourth of this population.⁴⁴ However, Klimontowicz was incorrect in saying that the decisive and impoverished majority in the Jewish population was that engaged in "questionable kinds of small trade and acting as middlemen." According to the official census of 1843 no less than one-third of Jewish heads of family in the Kingdom of Poland were artisans or were engaged in other kinds of productive work. However, his estimate of the number of poor Jews was based on contemporary sources.

Corroboration of Klimontowicz's estimates can be found in the reflections on the Jewish question by Count Ostrowski, "That which we define as an ample livelihood implies whatever is necessary for proper living, without too much difficulty, and in tranquillity. Now, it is my opinion that I do not err in asserting that four-fifths of the Jews of Poland do not have it within their means to live in this fashion, and they must perforce engage in questionable small trade."⁴⁵ He went on to observe:

It is indeed true that the Jews of this status, really the *lazzaroni* of the north, garner, by their deceit and trickery, only very meager profits; they can barely satisfy their hunger and with difficulty provide the payment of one-fifth and at most one-third of the rent money; they are pressed into one room, in which, for the greater part, a number of families crowd together, an atrocity to the eye and to the sense of smell. One actually beholds a picture of human deterioration, shocking poverty, all black, sad, gloomy. Lacking everything, dirty, naked in part or altogether, the children cry. . . . Properly, only one should be eating what has been prepared for five and as a result Jews on this level are emaciated, without a healthy glow on their faces, and they have neither desire nor strength for any sort of work. They keep themselves alive from day to day with a slice of bread. . . .⁴⁶

He then remarked on the fact that those who cry out for bread are clad in rags

. . . holes upon holes and holes on top of patches; this is the dress of the poor among the Jews, while the rich go about in silk caftans . . . often a delight to the eye; but for the rest, the simple folk—in the full sense of the term—they are an offense to the eye and even provoke a sense of shame. What poverty! The heart is rent apart from a sense of pity.⁴⁷

The depth of the poverty of the Jews in the towns is similarly depicted in the *Yearbooks of the Economy of the State* (1842), an organ of the aristocrats and the nobles:

Let us look into the terrible habitations of the Jews in the towns, which are stricken with contagious diseases. Let us recognize them in all their details and we will then be convinced that the clothes of all the members of the family are, for the greatest part, merely filthy rags, and their daily food—some onions, bread and potatoes. It is deemed a sign of plenty if to all this is added, in the summertime, a goat in the marketplace which is overgrown with grass. . . . A Jew who could afford to own a cow is thought to be one of the notables.⁴⁸

The most shocking picture of the abject poverty of the Jews was drawn in the beginning of the 1840s by the most prominent nobleman in the district. In his anonymous pamphlet *On the Reform of the Jews*⁴⁹ he proposed the establishment of a Jewish state in the steppe of the southeast of European Russia:

Surely there is no wretched race under the sun such as the poor Jewish people who dwell in our towns. To convince oneself of this, it is enough to visit some of the towns—Pińczów, Daleszyce, Działoszyce and the like. With the minor exception of a few with greater means, there dwell in one small room which is stricken with a plague-ridden miasma, over a dozen Jews, begrimed, half-naked, who lie down at night in actual layers one over the other in hammocks, engaged in an almost incessant struggle with hunger, illness, and all too often even with death, without help or hope in this world, save for the courage imbedded in the heart by reason of strong faith despite all the many afflictions which bedevil them. There is indeed no uglier sight than these towns ridden by this plague; nothing touches one's heart more than the poverty of this people over whom the curse holds unrestrained sway in a manner so plainly visible. Observing the multitude of gloomy faces of Jewry wending its plodding way in our towns, the thoughtful person will ask, perforce, on what does this poor people sustain its life?

In the writer's opinion, one cannot compare this terrible poverty with the poverty of the peasants. For "our peasant, although he is poor, does have for the wintertime, some grain, a store of potatoes or other vegetables; he has his hut, a small piggery or a barn. At the same time more than half of Poland's Jews have none of this; inasmuch as in their wretched dwellings they do not even have a breath of clean air."

The pamphlet concludes that "the entire Jewish population, with some very minor exceptions, subsists among us in grinding poverty, without any certainty of a daily livelihood and without any future whatsoever."⁵⁰

At the other extreme were the wealthy Jews who accumulated their capital mainly through trade. Indeed, most of the large wholesalers and merchants in the provincial towns were Jews. Even within Warsaw, the majority of merchants were Jews. For example, in 1849, of the 441 merchants, 231 were Jewish.⁵¹ Some of the agents of the

nobles also had amassed great wealth. According to the testimony of Count Ostrowski, there was hardly a landlord who was involved in business dealings without the participation of "his court Jew, as it were; Levek, Itzik, Hershik, or Moshke." The agent would provide the landlord with whatever merchandise he needed, and it was he who marketed the farm produce.⁵² According to the official reports of a number of the country's districts in the early 1840s most of the export of grain, cattle, hides, wool, textiles, and wood was concentrated in the hands of Jewish agents and merchants.⁵³ As in earlier centuries, the Jewish merchants had almost complete control over the overland export of goods. Hundreds of Jews would journey from Poland to the Leipzig fairs, whereas the number of Christian merchants from the entire Kingdom of Poland attending those fairs amounted to less than fifty, and in the 1830s dwindled to about twenty or even a mere dozen.⁵⁴

Owing to their diligent business activities, the Jews also played an important role in the development of manufacture, particularly of textiles. Jews exported Polish textiles to Russia, and through collaboration with Russian merchants, these textiles went from there to China.⁵⁵ The owners of the textile mills would get the wool from abroad, mainly through Jewish merchants. An even greater role was played by the Jewish merchants in importing cotton yarn, which was brought directly from England or from Hamburg and Breslau. In 1844 there were fifty Jewish merchants among the sixty-one owners of large cotton warehouses in Poland.⁵⁶ By virtue of their dealings in raw materials, the Jewish merchants, like the Christian manufacturers, hired home laborers for the manufacture of textiles on a credit basis. They would provide the weavers with cotton on credit which would be applied against what they produced. These Jewish contractors were to be found in Łódź and a number of other cities in the region—Pabianice, Zduńska Wola, Konstantynów, Kalisz, and Częstochowa.⁵⁷

There were also Jewish capitalists, especially in the 1840s, who invested all or part of their money in establishing factories. Members of the Epstein family were among the first to establish sugar, paper, and candle factories. Members of the Bergson family owned textile mills in Warsaw. In 1829 an Austrian Jew, Ignatz Bondy, set up a cotton mill in Ostrołęka. The factory which had been established in 1823 in the village of Kuchary, in the Płock district, by Solomon Posner, one of the leaders of the Warsaw community, employed 150 laborers at the beginning of the 1840s. Unlike the other factories owned by Jews, all its workers were Jews. During those years, Jews established about six textile mills in Łódź, among them the large

cotton spinning mill owned by the merchant from Kalisz, David Landau.

In the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century, the banking establishments of Kronenberg and Rosen were already well known for their industrial activities. In addition, scores of Jews were engaged in small-scale manufacture. According to a census taken in 1843, the overall number of Jewish factory owners in the Kingdom of Poland was 115, of whom 41 were in the paper industry (including 8 lessees of factories), 32 were in textiles, 20 in glass, 18 in iron, 3 in chinaware and 1 in the production of silver and gold objects.⁵⁸

Chapter 7

1. The figures for the year 1827 are given in B. Wasiutyński, *Ludność żydowska w Polsce w Wiekach 19 i 20* (Warsaw, 1930), pp. 37–38; the list of the large cities in Poland is found in Ryszard Kołodziejczyk, *Kształtowanie się burżuazji w Królestwie Polskim (1825–1850)* (Warsaw, 1957), p. 50; the census of 1843 is given in A. N. Frenk, “The Number of Jews and Their Occupations in the Kingdom of Poland in 1843,” *Bleter far Yidisher Demografye, Statistik un Ekonomye* vol. 3 (Berlin, 1928), in table 1; the percentages were computed by Ignacy Schiper, *Dzieje handlu żydowskiego na ziemiach polskich* (Warsaw, 1937), p. 394.
2. Kołodziejczyk, *Kształtowanie*, p. 65.
3. Ibid., p. 50, quoted by Rodecki, table 2.
4. Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Komisja Rządowa Spraw Wewnętrznych (hereafter A.G.A.D., K.R.S.W.), 3195, p. 8.
5. A.G.A.D., K.R.S.W., 4206, pp. 50, 84, 90.
6. A.G.A.D., K.R.S.W., 4761.
7. Kołodziejczyk, *Kształtowanie*, p. 25.
8. M. Orlowski, *Zelazny przemysł hutniczy na ziemiach polskich* (Warsaw, 1931), pp. 28–93; Kołodziejczyk, *Kształtowanie*, pp. 31–32.
9. Jan Rutkowski, *Historja gospodarcza Polski (do 1864 r.)* (Warsaw, 1953), p. 355.
10. Ibid., pp. 354–55; Kołodziejczyk, *Kształtowanie*, pp. 13–23.
11. Rutkowski, *Historja*, p. 280; Kołodziejczyk, *Kształtowanie*, p. 65.
12. According to the report of the governmental Committee for Internal Affairs and Police, 6,946 “floaters,” lacking identification documents, were caught and imprisoned in 1823 throughout the entire country; see in Kołodziejczyk, *Kształtowanie*, p. 72.
13. For the condition of the peasants in that period, see Z. Kirkor-Kiedroniowa, *Włościanie i ich sprawa w dobie organizacyjnej i konstytucyjnej Królestwa Polskiego*; A. Brücker, *Dzieje Kultury Polskiej* (Warsaw, 1946) 4:252–56; Kołodziejczyk, *Kształtowanie*, pp. 70–74.

14. For the Congress of Vienna and the Jewish question in Germany, see Salo Baron, *Die Judenfrage auf dem Wiener Kongress* (Vienna, 1920): "The Basic Lines of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Poland" was published by M. Handelsman, in *Trzy Konstytucje* (Warsaw, 1915), pp. 34–40. It is true that the "basic lines" of Poland's constitution were signed by Czar Alexander in Vienna on May 25, 1815; however, the constitution of the German Federation was not approved by the Congress until June 10 of that year. But the analogy between the two documents is evident even in the combination of the approval of existing rights and the assurance of an improvement in the situation for the future. There is therefore no doubt that Prince Czartoryski and his master, the czar, took for themselves as a model the stand of the Congress toward the Jews of Germany. Despite the many different versions, this attitude found expression in the deliberations concerning the constitution of Germany which had already begun in the autumn of 1814. At all events, Czar Alexander himself was not only well versed in the deliberations of the Congress regarding the Jews of Germany but also had a positive influence on those deliberations. This was prompted by his financial ties with the House of Rothschild and other Jewish bankers in Germany, as well as by his desire to appear in the eyes of European Jewry as a kindly, liberal ruler preferable to Napoleon. For this role of Alexander at the Congress of Vienna, see S. Askenazy, "Ze spraw żydowskich w dobie Kongresowej," *Kwartalnik . . . Żydów w Polsce* 1:3:14.

15. Rutkowski, *Historja*, p. 454.

16. Such memoranda were submitted to the Supreme Council of the government *pro tem* in 1814 by the Prefect of the Department of Warsaw, as well as to the Ministry of the Interior by the Central Committee (A.G.A.D., K.R.S.W., 6708).

17. Askenazy, "Ze Spraw," p. 14.

18. A.G.A.D., K.R.S.W., 6634, pp. 10–11, 16.

19. See Rutkowski, *Historja*, p. 454.

20. *Rzut oka na stan Izraelitow w Polsce, czyli wykrycie bjednego z nimi postępowania* (Warsaw, 1831), p. 38.

21. From the report of the Committee for Internal Affairs of November 15, 1822, to the viceroy, A.G.A.D., K.R.S.W., 6629, pp. 112–19; A.G.A.D., K.R. Prz. i. k. 1849, p. 85 (Tabelle Starozakonnych rodziny trudniących się zarobkami propinacyinemi od. r. 1814 do 1830 r.).

22. J. Kirsztrot, *Prawa Żydów w Królestwie Polskim* (Warsaw, 1917) pp. 110–16.

23. B. Weinryb, *Neueste Wirtschaftsgeschichte der Juden in Russland und Polen* (Breslau, 1934), pp. 154–55.

24. A.G.A.D., K.R.S.W., 6744.

25. See R. Mahler, *Divrei Yemei Yisrael be-Dorot ha-Aharonim* (Merhaviah, 1954) 1:3:87.

26. Ludwig Łętowski, *O Żydach w Polsce* (Warsaw, 1816), pp. 24–25, 28.

27. R. Rembielinski, *O miastach* (Warsaw, 1816), pp. 180–81; F. Friedman, *Dzieje Żydów w Łodzi* (Łódź, 1935), p. 48.

28. Stanisław Staszic, *O przyczynach szkodliwości Żydów* (Warsaw, 1816; Lwów, 1857) (Zgubne Zasady Talmudyzmu. Dodatek), pp. 94–113.

29. Rembielinski agreed to concessions in this matter regarding the Jews of Łódź in 1822; see Friedman, *Dzieje Żydów*, pp. 48, 349.

30. A.G.A.D., K.R.S.W., 6634, p. 176; Kirsztrot, *Prawa Żydów*, p. 101.

31. According to J. Shatzky, "Yidn in Czenstochowa," in R. Mahler, ed., *Czenstochower Yidn* (New York, 1947), p. 14, a Jewish *revir* existed in this city in 1818; however, J. Hessen fixed the year of the decree of a *revir* in Czenstochowa as 1829 (see *The Russo-Jewish Encyclopedia* 15:848).

32. Friedman (*Dzieje Żydów*, pp. 95–96) justifiably concluded from this that a total of thirty-one *revirs* in the entire kingdom, as maintained by L. Wolski, is less

than the actuality. According to Wolski, there were throughout the country ninety cities having the “privilege not to tolerate Jews,” and the Jews dwelt there illegally.

33. Wasiutyński, *Ludność żydowska*, p. 55.

34. *Rzut oka*, pp. 4–5.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 50; Kirsztrot, *Prawa Żydów*, p. 226; I. Warszawski, “Yidn in Kongres-Poyln,” in *Historishe Shriftn-Yivo* 2:326.

36. Warszawski, “Yidn in Kongres-Poyln,” p. 328, and at some length in his article “Yidn in di nay-oysgeboyte shtet in Kongres-Poyln,” *Yivo Bleter* 3:30–32.

37. A.G.A.D., K.R.S.W., 6634, p. 218.

38. Kirsztrot, *Prawa Żydów*, pp. 104–7.

39. A. J. Ostrowski, *Pomysły o potrzebie Reformy Towarzyskiej przez Założyciela miasta Tomaszowa Mazowieckiego* (Paris, 1834), p. 45.

40. A.G.A.D., K.R.S.W., 6634, p. 170.

41. *Ibid.*, 6629, pp. 101–19.

42. *Ibid.*, 6634, pp. 101–2.

43. *Rzut oka*, p. 29.

44. *Djarjusz Sejmu z roku 1830–31* wyd. M. Rostworowski (Cracow, 1910) 4:20.

45. Ostrowski, *Pomysły o potrzebie*, p. 47.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 47, n.

48. *Roczniki Gospodartswa Krajowego* 1 (1842): xxxiii; Kołodziejczyk, *Kształtowanie*, pp. 98–99.

49. *O Reformie Żydów, Projekt podany w r. 1841* (Poznan, 1854). The anonymous author has been indentified as the statesman and philosopher Józef Gołuchowski; cf. N. M. Gelber, *Tokhnivot shel Medinah Yehudit* (Knesset, 1939), p. 20.

50. A. N. Frenk was the first to cite an excerpt from this highly valuable pamphlet in his study “Tsu der geshikhte fun der yidisher kolonizatsye in Kongres Poyln,” *Bleter far Yidisher Demografye, Statistik un Ekonomye* (Berlin, 1925) 5:17–18; also see 3:192 for the statement of opinion of Matthias Rosen to the government in 1845, in which poverty is defined as a general phenomenon of the Jews in Poland.

51. Aleksander Kraushar, *Kupiectwo Warszawskie* (Warsaw, 1929), p. 100.

52. Ostrowski, *Pomysły o potrzebie*, p. 45.

53. Weinryb, *Neueste Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, p. 9.

54. R. Markgraf, *Zur Geschichte der Juden auf den Messen in Leipzig, von 1664–1839* (Bischofswerden, 1894), pp. 24–35.

55. Ostrowski, *Pomysły o potrzebie*, p. 165.

56. Kołodziejczyk, *Kształtowanie*, p. 83.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 80–83, 143–44; Friedman, *Dzieje Żydów*, pp. 214–15.

58. Kołodziejczyk, pp. 17, 23, 34, 36–37, 105, 130–44, 212; Friedman, *Dzieje Żydów*, pp. 225–56; Schiper, *Dzieje handlu*, pp. 385–86, 400–409; A. N. Frenk, p. 187. B. Weinryb, “Tsu der geshikhte fun yidishn onteyl in der poylisher indus-trye,” *Ekonomishe Shriftn* (Vilna: YIVO, 1932) 2:36–39.

59. Adolf Peretz, *Żydzi w bankowości polskiej, Żydzi w Polsce Odrodzonej* (Warsaw, 1933) 2:432–41; I. Schiper, *Dzieje handlu*, pp. 400–404; R. Kołodziejczyk, *Kształtowanie*, pp. 122–23.

60. A.G.A.D., K.R.S.W., 6603 (passim); Peretz, *Żydzi w bankowości*, pp. 432–41; Schiper, *Dzieje handlu*, pp. 367–69; Kołodziejczyk, *Kształtowanie*, pp. 88–89, 97–98, 144–59; Mieczysław Ajzen, *Polityka gospodarcza Łubeckiego* (Warsaw, 1932), pp. 34–40, 57, 68, 168, 230; Friedman, *Dzieje Żydów*, pp. 71–77.

61. A.G.A.D., K.R.S.W., 6910, 6911; I. Schiper, *Żydzi Królestwa Polskiego w dobie powstania listopadowego* (Warsaw, 1932), pp. 38–39, 43, 100–101; Kołodziejczyk, *Kształtowanie*, p. 92.