

Book Review

Dariusz Stola, *Nadzieja i Zagłada: Ignacy Schwarzbart – żydowski przedstawiciel w Radzie Narodowej RP (1940-1945)* (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 1995).

Many a scholar strives to expound his thoughts in harmony with modern concerns. Thus, Dariusz Stola depicts an important Jewish nationalist leader and Polish politician as a precursor of the modern-day multiculturalist. Although this approach is perhaps quite valid, the author has fortunately limited such theorizing largely to the conclusion of *Hope and Holocaust: Ignacy Schwarzbart – a Jewish Representative in the National Council of the Commonwealth of Poland (1940-1945)*. Stola deals instead with the early émigré phase of the politician's activities before and after the onset of the Holocaust.

During the Second World War, “according to the Poles, Jewish politics gravitated toward the Soviets. The old-fashioned conviction about the inherently anti-Polish inclinations of the Jews was reinforced with new evidence as was the conviction about the chronic anti-Semitism of the Poles” advanced by the Jewish side (p. 150). This was the legacy that Schwarzbart vainly attempted to struggle against. A General Zionist from Galicia, between 1939 and 1945 he served in the country's “parliament-in-exile” first in France and then in England. Schwarzbart wanted to use his post to achieve equal rights and cultural autonomy for the Jewish minority in Poland. Ultimately, he was overwhelmed by the unfolding Holocaust which rendered his long-term plans for Jewish-Polish coexistence irrelevant and his short-term rescue activities insufficient. Finally, according to Stola, despite his trademark willingness to compromise with his Christian counterparts, Schwarzbart's persistent efforts to effect a radical change in the attitudes of Polish émigré politicians toward the Jewish minority met with failure.

Dariusz Stola based his study on eight major archives in Warsaw and London. Significantly, he omitted the Yad Vashem Archive in Israel, the Hoover Institution Archive in California, and the collection of the Study of Underground Poland in London. However, these depositories have already been thoroughly researched by Yisrael Gutman, Shmuel Krakowski, and David Engel, who wrote on Jewish-Polish relations in exile. Alas neither Stola nor his predecessors have researched in the post-Soviet archives which very likely contain documents shedding light on the most contentious aspects of Polish-Jewish relations. These include the involvement of Soviet Russia's special services and misinformation agents in the anti-Polish propaganda blitz in the West as well as Stalin's policy toward the Jews in General Anders' army during its sojourn in the USSR. Nonetheless, Stola's monograph is a valuable contribution to Jewish-Polish affairs as seen through the prism of the activities of Ignacy Schwarzbart, an eminent Zionist politician.

Schwarzbart earned his political spurs in the multi-ethnic Habsburg Empire, a point regrettably underplayed in this work. He successfully combined his ideological Zionism with loyalty for the Austro-Hungarian state which, after its collapse, he shifted to independent Poland, where Schwarzbart eventually became a Senator. From his Habsburg experience the Galician Zionist learned the art of compromise. He applied it many times in his dealings with Poland's Piłsudskite regime to the benefit of his Jewish constituency.

As a good nationalist, Schwarzbart was convinced that he represented all Jews, and not just the centrist Zionists with a liberal slant from Cracow. As a good Galician Zionist, he was

exasperated with his radical nationalist and socialist Jewish brethren from central and eastern Poland. Their adversarial experience with the Czarist regime predisposed them to a contumacious stance vis-à-vis any partner, whether Jewish or Gentile. Finally, as a political realist, Schwarzbart paid only lip service to the dream of a Jewish homeland in Palestine and concentrated on defending Jewish interests at home in Poland.

In September 1939 he fled from the invading Nazi and Soviet armies to the West. He immediately became involved with Polish and Jewish émigré politics. Centrist and leftist Polish Zionists who based themselves in Palestine delegated Schwarzbart to represent their interests when he was coopted by Poland's National Council in France and England. Throughout his tenure he was guided by loyalty to Polish Jews, the international Jewish community, and the government of Poland. Although these were often conflicting loyalties, the Cracow politician applied the art of compromise to reconcile them.

Schwarzbart based his activities on a cohesive set of beliefs. First, he attempted to live up to his promise of September 1939: "my colleagues and I, as the official representatives of Polish Jewry, in congruence with the declaration of the Zionist Congress in Geneva, shall work for the benefit of Poland. Namely, we shall mobilize the Jews of Palestine, France, England, and America to work for the interest of Polish Jewry and to create in those countries Jewish Committees for Poland. We shall strengthen mutual trust between Poles and Jews in future Poland" (p. 34). Second, the Galician Zionist also firmly believed that "the fundamental question of our existence lies in Europe. I do not think that after the victory [over Germany] Zionism will have achieved the political means to effect a great, constructive emigration to Palestine.... [The Jewish community in] Europe without Eretz Israel will mean vegetation. Eretz Israel without Europe is an illusion of the Jewish fascists of the Revisionist camp, the Don Quixotes of Jewish nationalism" (pp. 63-64). Although Stola fails to elucidate this, it is obvious that, from Schwarzbart's point of view, Israel and Zionism stood no chance without the assistance of the Polish Jews. Yet, without a compromise with the Poles, there could be no strong Jewish diaspora in Poland. Hence, Zionism and compromise worked hand in glove in Schwarzbart's calculations. He hoped for "the victory of Great Britain and, therefore, the creation of the Polish State in whatever shape. Consequently, my politics must hinge on the fact that Jews will live in the future Poland and [therefore] my politics should be conducted in such a way as to facilitate coexistence [of the Poles] with the Jews in the future Poland" (p. 65). For the Galician Zionist, "the key to Jewish-Polish rapprochement was *commonality of fate (wspólnota losu)*." [emphasis in the original] (p. 66).

Convinced that Poland would remain an important area of Jewish settlement after the war, Schwarzbart initially concentrated on preparing a hospitable political framework of civic equality for Jews. He envisioned it in two forms. On the national plain, the Jews would enjoy equal rights with the Poles. On the community level, they would enjoy national autonomy mostly through the vehicle of ethnically and culturally separated Jewish schools to prevent assimilation. "He considered assimilation a kind of treason [odstepstwo] and he could not stand the assimilationists" (p. 289). In essence, the Zionist politician demanded that the Poles, the dominant group, abandon their peculiar and separate national, ethnic, religious, traditional, and cultural prerogatives to allow other ethnic groups, Jews in particular, access to Polish institutions and life. On the other hand, rather incongruously, Schwarzbart demanded that the Jews be allowed to retain an autonomous sphere for their own national, ethnic, religious, traditional, and cultural development. Unfortunately, neither Schwarzbart nor his biographer have addressed this curious contradiction.

Eventually, Schwarzbart's post-war designs were first challenged and then completely negated by the Holocaust. By 1943 the politician had shifted from long-term planning to short-term rescue and assistance efforts. Both his long and short-term undertakings were frustrated, according to Stola, by the Holocaust in general. In particular, Schwarzbart's failures were brought about by a number of overlapping factors underscored by a combination of anti-Semitic sentiments of various stripes and by incredulity about the extermination of the Jews.

First, the Galician Zionist faced what appeared to be the indifference of the Western Allies to the fate of the Polish Jews under Nazi occupation. Second, he grappled with the reluctance of the Polish émigré leaders to involve themselves too much with Jewish issues. Third, he dealt with the persistence of anti-Jewish attitudes in the Polish army and among some Polish political leaders. Fourth, he was hampered by the propensity of the Polish-Jewish leaders-in-exile to feud, rather than cooperate, with the Polish government-in-exile. Fifth, he was crippled by his inability to collaborate for ideological reasons with the other Jewish member of the National Council. Sixth, he was infuriated by the tendency of foreign Jews to meddle belligerently in Polish-Jewish affairs. Seventh, Schwarzbart was undermined by the activities of the Communist and pro-Soviet agents of influence, who used the instances of Jewish-Polish antagonism as propaganda weapons against Poland's exiled regime.

Dariusz Stola is at his best when patiently analyzing each of these factors. At times it almost seems as if Schwarzbart was an excuse to delve into the most controversial aspects of Jewish affairs. Often the politician recedes into the background while his biographer explores the context and discusses other important players.

Stola bemoans the fact that both Jewish representatives on the National Council were unable to unite because of ideological and personal differences. Szymul Zygielbojm of the Bund was a radical Marxist firebrand and Jewish autonomist who sensed early on that the Nazi actions were not simply a series of brutal pogroms but a concerted exterminationist drive against Polish Jewry which culminated in the Holocaust. Also, the Bundist claimed that his nationalist counterpart "belonged to the most reactionary Zionist wing" of the Jewish "bourgeoisie" (p. 53). "Class analogy" led the Bundist to charge that the Zionist collaborated with Poland's National Democrats and Piłsudskites. On the other hand, Schwarzbart recoiled from Zygielbojm's "brown-nosed attitude to the 'fraternal' socialist parties." He equated the Bundists with the Endeks "for their hatred of Palestine, Zionism, [Jewish] religion, the Hebrew language, national community, [and] our common struggle for our rights in the diaspora" (p. 55). Thus, both Zygielbojm's style and perception of the situation clashed with Schwarzbart's evolutionary approach based on compromise that remained constant even after the General Zionist realized incrementally, by 1943, that the Holocaust was under way. According to Stola, consequently, "in June 1942 Schwarzbart rejected a proposal for joint action concerning the crimes in Poland; later, Zygielbojm twice refused to cooperate with Schwarzbart" (p. 56).

Ironically, both Jewish politicians faced almost identical obstacles in mobilizing Western opinion to assist Polish Jews. When Schwarzbart supplied pictures from the Warsaw ghetto to an English paper, the editors rejected them as "disgusting" (p. 159). Nonetheless, on December 10, 1942, the persistence of Schwarzbart and Zygielbojm paid off in an important way. General Sikorski's government issued a special pro-Jewish proclamation. "For the first time one of the allied governments officially spoke out in defense of the Jewish victims of Hitler, their citizenship notwithstanding." (p. 174).

Nonetheless, Schwarzbart suspected that the Polish authorities purposely prevented knowledge about the Holocaust from spreading too fast. The information coming out of Poland

was too fragmentary and too haphazard to allow anyone immediately to grasp the truth about the Holocaust. The terrible truth revealed itself very slowly. After the initial period of disbelief the Polish authorities vigorously began clamoring for help. According to Stola, “the propaganda and diplomatic efforts of the Polish government-in-exile were of key importance in spreading information about the extermination of the Jews. The Polish government did more than any other government but it also had a special duty to do so because it represented Polish citizens – Jews” (p. 175). Thus, there was no Polish “conspiracy of silence” in the struggle to preserve the primacy of Christian martyrdom (p. 179). As one Polish Nationalist put it, “no one here has approached this issue in such a way.... The suffering of the Polish and Jewish nations are both equally known and both are a matter of equal indifference for world opinion” (p. 186). Even though the Jewish catastrophe was not considered an absolute priority, the government-in-exile tried to do all it could for the Jews.

Perhaps this is why, almost to the end, the Jewish representatives in the National Council agreed on maintaining anti-Communist and anti-Soviet attitudes in harmony with Poland’s interests and its government’s recommendations. “Schwarzbart was an opponent of Communism as a liberal democrat and as a Jewish nationalist leader” (p. 65). The anti-Sovietism and anti-Communism of both Jewish representatives were repeatedly put to the test by the unfolding events. Only on May 1, 1945, did the Bundist representative break with the government-in-exile after the Poles objected to the Bund’s radio broadcast about the “liberation of Poland by the Soviet army.” The Polish suggestion of talking about “the capture of Polish lands by the Russians” as “the end of the German genocide and the salvation of the Jewish remnant,” but not as “the liberation of Poland,” was rejected (p. 60).

However, even in 1945, despite the overtures of most Polish Zionists toward the Communists, Schwarzbart remained consistently loyal to the Polish government-in-exile. From 1939, the Galician politician considered that Poland had two enemies. Both were dangerous for the Jews. The Nazis wanted to destroy Jews as Jews. The Soviets aimed at destroying the Jewish religion, traditional elite, and ethnic particularism to create a *homo sovieticus* totally devoid of his roots. Consequently, in June 1941, Schwarzbart “commented with some relief” on the war between Nazi Germany and the USSR: “Hitler and Stalin together – that meant certain extermination [*to pewna zag³ada*]” for the Jews (p. 65). At the same time, he warned other Jewish leaders that “it is certain that if our course of action is anti-Polish, an anti-Semitic course [in response] will certainly result as well. We shall lose even our friends” (p. 68). It is little wonder that when other Jewish leaders attacked Schwarzbart, he was defended by General W³adys³aw Sikorski himself (p. 48).

Although Dariusz Stola does not avoid controversial topics in Jewish-Polish relations, the historian sees them as a combination of many factors rather than in the monotonous light of “Polish anti-Semitism” or “Jewish anti-Polonism.” Hence, Stola writes that Schwarzbart and, later, another Jewish politician were coopted to Poland’s National Council “to create the appropriate image of the [Polish] government for the Western public” in general and “the so-called world Jewry” in particular (p. 29-30). But it was also a significant gesture to rally the Jewish minority to Poland’s cause. Other minorities were excluded from the “parliament-in-exile.” Faced with Hitler, the Poles and Jews had more in common than, say, Poles and Ukrainians. Nonetheless, “for the government-in-exile the most important issue and its *raison d’être* was the struggle to regain Poland intact, free, and independent” (p. 47). Everything else was secondary, including the Jews.

There were also other factors retarding assistance to Jews in Poland. First, the government-in-exile deferred to the authorities of the Polish Underground State before making any statements concerning the Jewish minority under the Nazi occupation. For example, because the clandestine authorities feared a premature insurrection in Poland, they delayed greatly appeals to render assistance to the Jews lest German reprisals against Polish helpers spark a hopeless Polish rebellion. Second, fearful for its credibility, Poland's government in London strove to verify the reports of anti-Jewish atrocities before acting on them. Third, subjected to the barrage of accusations of anti-Semitism, the exiled Polish politicians were reluctant to give into Jewish pressures for pro-Jewish actions because they considered the method a vile blackmail. Fourth, all members of the National Council could cooperate harmoniously "but only when faced with the greatest danger and complete hopelessness" (p. 195). Fifth, some Polish politicians, the National Democrats in particular, refused to treat the Jewish tragedy separately from the Polish predicament. Sixth, finally, even "Schwarzbart found it hard to demand for the Jews both complete equality and special treatment in the assistance action" (p. 123).

Stola considers one by one various flashpoints in Polish-Jewish relations and places them in the appropriate context. For example resource allocation rather than racial prejudice informed the attitude of Polish officials toward Jews. Polish diplomats tended to reduce their assistance to the individuals who also drew aid from other sources. Polish Jews complained and Schwarzbart considered that to be discrimination. Polish diplomats denied the charge explaining that, whereas their Jewish charges received handouts from a number of international Jewish charities, Polish Christians had only the limited resources of Polish diplomatic outposts to rely on. In another case, shocked that in France "allegedly 80 percent of [Polish] Jews shirked their military duty," Schwarzbart, on the one hand, admonished his co-religionists to serve Poland and, on the other, intervened with the government-in-exile to curb anti-Jewish discrimination and attitudes in the armed forces. He also opposed forming separate Jewish military units because that would have interfered with the idea of equality of Polish Jews as citizens. So, as Dariusz Stola argues convincingly, mutual relations were exacerbated not only by anti-Jewish attitudes of the Polish majority, but also by anti-draft action of the Jews.

The depth of Stola's research allowed the scholar to qualify some of the charges concerning the allegations of anti-Semitism in the Polish military. Where Schwarzbart complained about pro-Hitler remarks by an entire army unit, a subsequent investigation revealed that four soldiers had made callous anti-Jewish remarks (pp. 132-33). Nonetheless, both the Zionist leader and the Polish brass essentially agreed that anti-Semitic attitudes (*nastroje antysemityczne*) persisted among the rank-and-file. For the most part they consisted of stupid pranks and rude remarks. Polish officers dismissed them as insignificant and Jewish dignity suffered a double blow. Not only were the Jews disparaged, but their maltreatment failed to elicit sympathy from the superiors. For this reason, for example, it was possible for David Engel to depict one Jakub Rosenberg as a victim of racial persecution. However, Polish military documents unearthed by Stola show that "Rosenberg was simply an unruly soldier sentenced for obvious transgressions." Rosenberg openly remarked, "Fuck Poland. I'm not going to fight for Poland, [*ja pierdolę Polskę, ja nie chcę walczyć za Polskę*]" and then deserted (p. 324 n. 109).

Likewise, Stola rejects as simplistic the notion that "Polish anti-Semitism" alone was responsible for the Polish-Jewish crisis in the USSR. After all, Jewish animosities were also real. Many, if not most, Jewish recruits eventually deserted in Palestine. The scholar suggests that Stalin's orders and the intrigues of the NKVD were primary factors exacerbating the conflict (pp. 137-39). As for Schwarzbart, "he agreed with the Poles that the main reason so few Jews

participated in the evacuation [from the USSR] was Soviet restrictions but he did not doubt that the information about discrimination of [the Jews] by some of the Polish officers and bureaucrats was true” (p. 148). Restoring the context of the events is the most important contribution of Stola to the Polish-Jewish discourse.

Nonetheless, although relatively few, the historian’s liberal prejudices can be a bit irksome. More care should have been shown in assessing the Zionist Revisionists. Stola’s analysis of Schwarzbart’s struggle against the Revisionist calls for mass evacuation (*ewakuacjonizm*) and against the program of emigration (*emigracjonizm*) of the Jews from Poland, which was supported by most of Poland’s Gentile political parties, save the Socialists, is essentially correct. However, the scholar’s contention that the Zionist Revisionists in pre-war Poland “acted dynamically but were devoid of broad support” needs to be qualified. Preliminary research by Piotr Gontarczyk shows that the New Zionist Organization counted at least 40,000 activists on the eve of the war. Since radical nationalism was in vogue, the support for Vladimir Zeev Zhabotinsky may have been much greater than the official electoral results suggest. Yet, except for Lawrence Weinbaum’s introductory work, we still lack a comprehensive monograph on the Betar in Poland. Although directly related to Israel’s powerful Likud party, its militarism, cult of the leader, and Roman salute must render it rather daunting for most scholars to tackle the history of this movement in a dispassionate manner. Stola is no exception.

Similarly, Dariusz Stola’s dislike of the National Democrats should have not prevented him from seeing that when the Endek representative in the National Council supported the declaration for a Jewish homeland in general but refused specifically to endorse Palestine as its site, it was not simply because of prejudice on the part of the Polish Nationalists toward the Jews (p. 106). As the Endek Zofia Zaleska candidly admitted, the word “Palestine” was left out because the National Democrats did not want to antagonize the British. Stola himself admits that the British were indeed averse to Jewish designs in Palestine and the Foreign Office routinely objected to Polish support for the Zionist endeavor. Nonetheless, quite naturally, the Endeks supported Jewish emigration and a Jewish homeland in Palestine (as well as anywhere else, except for Poland). Ironically, that is where the Zionist interests in general, and the Revisionist objectives in particular, colluded with the Endek political aims: to reduce the number of Jews in Poland.

Although swift to proclaim that many Polish émigré politicians treated Jews instrumentally to show that Poland was a democratic nation respectful of its minorities, Stola is quite reluctant to put some of Schwarzbart’s statements through a similarly critical litmus test. Was the Galician Zionist a Polish loyalist, or did he use loyalism as a tool to further a specific Jewish agenda? His attitude toward the Communists shows that the former was true. However, he was no stranger to political obfuscation. For example, aware that most members of the National Council harbored ill-will toward the pre-war Piłsudskite regime and toward Hitler, Schwarzbart phrased his opposition to anti-Semitism in anti-Piłsudskite and anti-Hitlerite terms. The maneuver was not lost on Poland’s National Democrats. “Polish anti-Semitism should not be tied to Hitlerism because the former is a native phenomenon. First, it is older than the Hitlerite movement, and, second, it is based on economic factors as well as the conduct of the Jews themselves and not on racism,” retorted Tadeusz Bielecki, the chairman of the National Party. A member of the radical nationalist movement, Stanisław Józwiak, argued even that “the Sanacja was not anti-Jewish at all” (p. 72).

Nonetheless, as Stola has amply demonstrated, Schwarzbart was not a knee-jerk anti-Endek. Not only did he work with them in the National Council, he also socialized with Polish

Nationalists and even National Radicals on occasion. The Galician Zionist privately greeted the soon-to-be controversial journal *Jestem Polakiem* (“I am a Pole”) in a rather moderate way: “The first issue is passable [*pierwszy numer jeszcze ujdzie*]” (p. 81). He fumed when, in 1940, the Jewish, Communist, leftist, and liberal media launched a merciless attack on the journal and its contributors, including the eminently moderate Nationalist Minister Marian Seyda, who was inexplicably dubbed “the Polish Julius Streicher” after the Nazi editor of *Der Stürmer*, the pornographically anti-Semitic newspaper of the SA (p. 81). According to Stola, “Schwarzbart not only did not join the pressure campaign of the English Jews but also stubbornly opposed such methods to force the Poles to reveal their position on the Jewish question.” The Zionist politician warned that “anti-Semitism must be fought but one must always remember not to touch Poland. Criticism must be amicable” (p. 82). He also resented the interference of foreign Jews in Polish-Jewish affairs. “Everything inside me rebels against such a state of affairs.... English Jews.... would like to conduct policy instead of Polish Jews but.... they have not done anything” to help Polish Jews (p. 82).

Schwarzbart rejected the charges that the Polish government-in-exile was anti-Semitic. He was upset when, in 1940, a leftist member of the British Parliament stated that “the feelings of the Poles toward the Jews can only be compared to the feelings of the Germans toward the Jews” (p. 131). Likewise, he was livid when, in the wake of mass Jewish desertions from the Polish armed forces in 1944, the Jewish and pro-Soviet pundits opined that “the Polish army seems not less anti-Semitic than an SS division” and that “the Jews in the Polish army were subject to treatment similar to that meted out to them in Nazi concentration camps” (p. 260). (Curiously, these hyperbolically slanderous invectives persist until this very day.) The Galician Zionist criticized the deserters but asked the Polish authorities for clemency. That was the course of action that the government eventually followed.

Schwarzbart also understood that Polish support for the Jews would be forthcoming if the “international Jewry” defend publicly Poland’s eastern borders from Stalin. The Jewish leaders balked at committing themselves to back the Polish government-in-exile in its quest for territorial integrity of the country. Hence, the Poles were less than forthcoming in their verbal concessions toward the Jews. Also, whenever faced by a concerted attack, ethnic Polish members of the government and the National Council would close ranks in solidarity, their ideological differences notwithstanding. And the Galician Zionist was caught in the middle, trying to mediate between the parties involved. “Defending the interests of the Jews among the Poles and the interests of Poland among the Jews, Schwarzbart felt alone among both groups” (p. 91). As he himself put, “In my thorny work I do not have the backing of even the Zionists.... Perhaps soon my strength to continue fighting against both the anti-Semites and the Jews will run out” (p. 91).

Nonetheless, Schwarzbart continued to work with the émigré politicians. Increasingly, he neglected the future Poland and concentrated on the immediate Jewish concerns. He became acutely depressed: “two million Jews have disappeared from Poland.... What are we Jews going to return to? To graveyards, ashes, and the ONR?.... This is the end of Polish Jewry.... God!... There is truly nothing to live for” (p. 238). Ultimately, in utter desperation, the Galician Zionist concluded that the Polish government-in-exile did nothing for the Jews save for spreading “propaganda” (p. 242). As Dariusz Stola amply documented, that was not a fair assessment.